

Yes, I do believe my number is finally up. Long overdue if you ask me.

Finding my last and, surprisingly, most enduring saving grace took me almost 50 years of sturm und drang. Mixed with a few years here and there of supposed happiness during which I did my utmost to wreak havoc on all those around me. Actually, guess I'm guilty of that pretty much all the time. It's why there's really no one left but David. The other David. The David that saved my life, in an instant. Twice, actually. And without me around, he will-as mother used to say-shit or get off the pot.

So, I make shockingly simple-yet impossible to copy-deceptively hypnotic, endlessly repeatable yet always unique, needlepoint samples which I turn into divine little jewelry/stash travel bags. What with their swirly bursts of Pucci-esque color, they make you smile and make me very comfortable. They sell to both women and men for absurd yet appropriate amounts, considering the amount of work that goes into them. Rather the perfect art form for me. I am able to get completely lost in them, yet they couldn't be simpler-follow the line. The twisted line, to be exact. Purely abstract, almost Pollack-like, they're what look like just random stripes upon random stripes. But, rather, well plotted out color combinations not unlike math

problems. On a good day it becomes a meditational exercise. Simple, concise, yet unknown to anyone but me. Follow the line. And the money has become something to depend on, even though it is mostly in cash and undeclared. Of course this is a good thing, but it keeps me marginalized. I'm not covered by any sort of unemployment or governmental benefits.

I'd like to say I lucked out with these, and well, yes, I did. I found the source of my good luck almost on a whim, taking a few pieces to the design building on 59th and 3rd, about 5 years ago, hoping to meet someone who might know someone. And, well, I did. The law of supply and demand is illustrated perfectly here, as I can only make them just so fast. Christmas is agony on my hands and I go almost blind seeing trails of color. Well worth it though. Have a supply of uber-wealthy clients who eat up my pieces like bon-bons, and think I'm some transcendental Indian who prays over each one. Which in a way, I do. I also have a couple of sources for sales at SoHo galleries- been doing the modern needlepoint art thing for years now, I even did male nudes, but never with the success of these now though. They're my small way of bringing some sort of beauty into this big bungled world.

I gave up what was, I think, a promising beginning to an

acting career almost 10 years ago because I was cracking up. On all fronts. Mother was planning her own suicide and was happy as a lark. I couldn't talk her out of it and thought I was having a heart attack. Every day, I'd wake up and feel my left arm go numb. Turned out to be nothing, then. But eventually I had to quit. I'd find myself on set, unable to stop crying, and unable to hit my marks. I was on some Matt Damon movie, and it was a clunker, you could just tell by the energy on the set. We were filming in the NY Public Library grand reading room, and it was a tight set. No extra room to run and hide. So we weren't allowed to bring anything extra to set-newspapers, books, phones, tablets. Nothing that could actually take my mind away from my horrors between takes. Dangerous. And I was sat at a table with nothing to do, worse, but look through a "book" that perversely had only blank pages within. I lost it, 3 times breaking down in tears, before I was released and asked to go home. And that was just background work. When I did principal work, on student or no-budget, I went literally insane. Screwed my reputation to the rafters. Had to get out.

My then drug habit was started by my doctor, Ricky Shue, who prescribed ultimately the max dosage of Adderall and clonopin without my seeing a psychologist. Even without his seeing me,

actually. Having his attending nurse write the scrips. At first, my Adderall intake was like seeing God. It allowed me to compartmentalize the horrors of my life long enough to get something done. But my ruin was inevitable, without anyone watching out for me and no one stepping up to at least try to straighten me out. Not a soul even tried. All they did was mock me, deride me, tell me I wasn't worth it. My tolerance for drugs is so high that eventually I was over-cycling on Addy. Days ran into each other. I avoided sleep like the plague, because of the deafeningly terrifying nightmares. Of course, crystal meth added to the mix made me first feel like a super power. Then like a super freak. And it was all downhill, uphill from there.

Now, about 10 years later, I was finally ready to rejoin the forces. I was going to do it the right way too. Go back to class with Mr A., whom I deify and haven't seen in, 20? years. He first came barreling into my life when I was 15, a sophomore at Performing Arts-the "Fame" school-and he was the one you wanted to impress. And somehow, I did. Took a few years, I was out of high school actually, but I remember when I had him. When he told me. I was working on a scene from *The Rose Tattoo* and out of my comfort zone, playing straight sex appeal. He got me there though, and at the crescendo of the scene he turned to the rest

of the class and said, pointing to me, "Yes! Yes! He's damn usable, ain't he?" The ultimate compliment from him. And I happened to run into him for the first time ever a month or so before I was all set to go back to class. And he managed to tell me again, in his twisted way. Said, "Whatever will we do about your obscene lack of talent?" as he twinkled at me. I felt I still had It. Or could fake It, at least, which was half the battle. I felt like I belonged, somewhere, for the first time in a decade.

The week before I was to go back to class, I had a massive stroke. Getting out of the shower. Trying to shave, I fell, almost knocking myself out. Realized I couldn't speak, move or feel my entire left side, head to toe. I moaned out for David but he had heard me crash. This would be the second time he saved my life. Thank God he was home. I would be a vegetable now if he hadn't been there to call 911. They dragged me out of the bathroom, naked, on a sheet. Living in a NYC, midtown one-bedroom, we're a bit space challenged. Getting me out of the bathroom without being able to get up was quite the challenge. Especially as the EMS workers were on the rotund side. There's a sharp turn out of the bathroom into our narrow hallway. His butt persistently banged on the even more narrow sideboard, upsetting

but not quite knocking over David's precious pottery. They finally got me out, tied me to a mechanized chair of sorts to carry me down 6 flights to the ambulance. Which in itself was a feat, as the stairs are particularly steep and narrow. Again, naked but for a sheet and oxygen mask. And definitely attracting a crowd. Ah, an audience! Felt like ages before they were able to get me in the ambulance, and their crew kept growing. And I was in the center of it all, clueless to what was going on and unable to ask, to talk. Completely paralyzed on my left side and without speech. I sort of blacked out before I even got to the hospital out of sheer survival. Again, thank God David was home to give them my identification. Next thing I knew, I woke up in ICU. Miraculously, they saved me and gave me back my speech and movement. Interestingly, they let me go home after only 2 days-in ICU-of recovery, barely able to walk again. Perversely, it turned out they had caused kidney damage when they went to tackle the blood clot. Shat my pj's a couple of nights that week and had odd ephemeral mind bends.

But..and only I notice this-or no one notices anything about me period, is honestly more like it-the stroke took my last capabilities as an actor. Took my ability to read a script cold, which had been a gift. Now I sputter my way through it, getting

half the words wrong. Gave me the gift of slurring, and stuttering. Of grabbing for words, clutching at what I know is right there but is still a thousand miles away, like never before. Going into class was just so painful, like I was a complete newbie. I used to be considered eloquent for Christs' sake. So far out of my comic realm. Hilarious, really. Not. I'm just too old to be inhumane enough to see the humor, and too young to just not give a shit anymore. Given the natural course of things, I've got far too long to last like...this.

And I can not take it any longer. Or without at least having that "Maybe", something will come along and open it all up. Just having that Hope alone kept me alive. Now I feel like the walking dead. Just knowing that this is it, and that I could even lose it all if he dies, all of this nothing, is hell.

This world is a new and terrifying place. People like me, people who are afraid of their own shadow, have no business here. I've managed to beat to death every last possible tie to goodness and family, with the notable exception of David, so badly I truly don't have a clue anymore what's good and what's bad. A very dangerous place for a 53 year-old almost on his own.

On a sunday, over a dozen years ago, I got a call from Rita. In charmer mode, which of course meant either something was wrong

or she wanted something. Hit both.

Turned out she was in the hospital with a fever of 102. And she could barely walk. Which was only relatively new, as she had had symptoms of other diseases, particularly Meunierres, for over a decade. All of which affected her legs, her carriage, her balance. Again, I say Symptoms. Because no actual disease was ever found. Doesn't mean it wasn't there, doesn't mean it was, especially Meunierres. The point is, it gave her something to do, when her career died off and I migrated to L.A. She needed that foil, to fight. And she won, basically, for years. Gave her a brilliant role to play too. Fading actress, demurely yet stoically fighting the unknown, every once in a while becoming faint and smelling the vapors. Unfortunately, and hilariously, it was thought by some that she was just drunk.

All very cinematic, until it got real and dramatic. This was the time. I rushed back to the city, to the hospital on a Sunday. To find her berating the skeleton crew that there was no one who could do her hair. When she saw me, she became the demure mum again, and played helpless queen in need. She was determined to be allowed to go home, and she never took no as an acceptable answer. Her doctor, actually one of NY's leading HIV specialists, finally threw up his arms and said, in not so many words but it

was definitely heard, "Fine, Madame, go the fuck home!" To me he said, in so many words, "Best of luck to you, son."

I was the only one who she would trust with taking care of her, only not so much as to trust me to tell her to get back to the fucking hospital. Heavens no. So, I managed to put her to bed, and cried myself to sleep on the sofa. Only to be awoken a couple of hours later by "Darling...oh, darling!.."coming from the bedroom. What do I find but her sprawled on the floor next to the bed, naked-couldn't you even wear a nightgown when I'm here, Rita? She couldn't even get to the bathroom herself. But sure, come home. And I'll go to work in 3 hours, leave you all to yourself, you'll be just peachy.

She ended up with meningitis, was in the hospital for two weeks and another two upstate in rehab. All because she couldn't be bothered to stay in the first place, as no one could do her hair. And this was the time that things just sorta stopped working all too well. She really needed regular help, not quite to physically help her but just to do what needed to be done, around the house and whatnot. To keep her in the style to which she had become accustomed. And, luckily, I was getting fired from my job-because the rotund queen I worked for realized he could get an intern to do my job for free-and having one of my semi-

yearly breakdowns. Unluckily, for me and our common reputation, she had sold the apartment I grew up in on 83/Lex and traded it in for a one bedroom on 67/CPW. Definitely raised the eyebrows of the upper crusts we saw daily, making us feel like the black sheep of the family, or the help.

But, hey, I had a Central Park West address, and we were embarking on repairing our damaged relationship through mutual need. Another uphill battle. I talked her into getting a put-put scooter-you know, one that the infirm race all over the sidewalks and in the stores-so she could feel some autonomy, and it became the center of attention. Having never been a driver in her life, barely even a bike rider, she was clueless about the rules of the road. She was a terror on that thing. It was difficult keeping up with her most of the time and not in a good way-she often lost control of it and would turn too slowly or too fast, often crashing into garbage bins or on occasion, people. Once, she was determined to help a blind man cross the street..took ten minutes of her banging into him and him walking into her. They never even made it to the other side. She was truly shocked when he called her "Cunt!" Not understanding the subtleties of a motorized vehicle or how to finesse it, she went through four in the first year, always coming up with something wrong with each one.

Nothing was wrong with any of them. Going down the street with her on one was bad enough, but get her into a store or on a bus—oh my. The truck driver in her really came out then, and it was always someone else's fault.

I concentrated, at first, solely on student and low- or no-budget films with roles that were good and interesting for me, to build up my demo reel. I was in my element. I jumped from project to project, only doing the ones I wanted to see myself in. While I'm trained in all aspects of acting—stage, screen—I most want to do film and television. I'm just fascinated by the medium. How it's all about exactly what the camera sees, and nothing else. How it can all be about the flicker of an eyebrow in closeup. And I'm also a victim of stage fright, major, which gets worse with each play I've done. Feels like you're jumping off the cliff into the mist, every night, not knowing what's down there. Not worth it to me. And unless you're a name, the money isn't worth it either.

Then I rejoined SAG and AFTRA and started doing background work. Which actually was fun for me at that point, again because I didn't really have to work, didn't really need the money. But, boy, can it suck your soul out of your nostrils. Watching the "career" backgrounders, scrounging Craft Services for food scraps

to take home, wasting time to get half hour overtimes here and there, fighting for work just so they can make the union minimum for coverage. Just seeing how proud they are of achieving something considered next to nothing in any other industry, actually something in this industry, but bored to tears. Really sad. And oh so noble at exactly the same time. And this is what I want, now? This is where I want to end up? This is it?

And of course, there are stories to tell. Stories like working on *Some Things Got to....*, the Meryl/Alec comic opus. Talk about over-inflated. Must have cost a near mint. So many extras, so much time. Literally. We shot 2 short scenes for 8 solid days at Del Posto, the giant and cavernous restaurant in Chelsea. Completely shut down for the shoot, we the little people were relegated to the basement, with no craft services or air or restrooms. Those lucky enough to have something to do were selected one by one and brought upstairs. The rest of us had to kill time without even a signal to play on our phones. At least we were getting paid, and paid well due to all the overtime. And the overtime was thanks mostly to Ms Streep, who made it a rule that if she were walking up or down the stairs, no one else could at the same time. And she didn't want anyone in her eye-line when shooting her closeup, so we weren't allowed to watch her work. I

mean, my gosh..ok, Sophies Choice, I got ya. But this? You didn't even have an accent in this one. Is your concentration that poor? Are you that afraid of giving away some secret to your work? Oh please, girl. Get over it. But, made quite a bit for doing next to nothing.

This went on for a couple of years, while my credit slowly ran out. Now, as my earning was not happening as fast as I would have liked-not yet getting principal work in normal budget projects, the credit cards were running out. The interest was beginning to outshine the principal, so we decided the only thing to do would be to declare bankruptcy.

I didn't really have a problem with bankruptcy, especially now, as I just knew my career was inches away from beginning to take off. I had just booked my first actual role in a feature-length, *Mold!*, and it was a fun one. Technically still a student/no-budget film, it was directed by a powerhouse kid, Neil Maraschino, and he was determined to film a full length, release-ready horror film as his final project. Which he did. It was a take-off of cheesy eighties horrors, filmed with the same stop motion and low-rent techniques. He filmed the entire thing in a warehouse in bumfuck New Jersey. A pivotal scene, though, and half the reason I said yes, was to be shot in Arizona-my death. I

played the evil head scientist who experiments on a bunch of lower plebes. It was great-for most of the movie, I show up on video screen, a talking head filmed separately, hatching and plotting, while they all go through the mess of the "mold". Then in the third reel I show up in person, kill the antagonist, and get shot up myself. The Robert Mitchum role as they used to say-show up a few times in the first 2 reels, have the other characters talk about you endlessly, then show up for the big climax death scenes. Bravura.

Things were going pretty well. I should've known a shoe was going to drop.

One night Rita went to the theatre, at Lincoln Center. Forgotten what it was she saw, but it was something about death and regrets and lives well or not well spent. About purgatory. She took the scooter, came home. I was in the living room getting ready for bed and suddenly I heard her crying.

So, Rita told me, she was done. She couldn't live with her disappointment any longer, disappointment in herself she almost convinced me of. I knew that it was me she was living in shame of, if only because she indeed was also ashamed of herself. She had lived her life through being hopeful about me, and she didn't believe I was going to turn things around in time. If at all. She

believed, she told me she believed, that I needed the money from the inevitable sale of the apartment to survive. That there was only limited amounts in cash left, and social security only brought in so much. She would have been able to survive, we would have, just fine, if she had allowed the sale BEFORE her death, and we had invested and rented.

She had planned to do it when I was in Arizona shooting. First wrench, Arizona was cancelled. Then, I was talking to my lawyer that was handling my bankruptcy. Told him Rita wasn't well, she might not be around too much longer. So he said we needed to hurry up with this then, because if one declares and comes into money within a year, and the court finds out, it goes retroactive. Upon hearing this, Rita sighed deeply, stoically, and said she would give me 4 extra months to get some distance. Not long enough to be here for one last thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, or her eightieth birthday on January 16. Or mine on the 31. No. That would have just been too painful for her. Never mind my pain, the pain of going through all those holidays alone. Completely alone, as it turned out that everyone we considered family walked out on me. They either thought I had something to do with her death, or were shocked and dismayed by the train wreck I fast became. Became a drug addict for the first time in

my life.

As much as I tried getting her to open up to me completely, like one adult to another before she went, proved impossible. It was as if she felt I couldn't know her deepest secrets as her scion. She was very into the role playing. Allowing me to role play the responsible one only when it helped her, otherwise I was always firmly in the passenger seat. She just couldn't lose control with her son. Was this because he so often lost it?

I asked her to go on a trip with me, somewhere, anywhere she wanted, because we hadn't traveled together since, gosh, I was in high school. I thought maybe traveling together would get her to open up some more. She decided she wanted to go to London, to see Dolly Frankel, one of her 2 greatest and longest friendships. Yes, perfect! Dolly was insane. A drinker and a smoker, her entire house was filled with dolls, and her husband Jerrols' inventions. Maybe she would help me open Rita up. A true broad in the greatest sense of the word, she lived in true old-school Agatha Christie fashion, on the winding streets of Nottingham, in an old cottage on the top of a hill. It even gets foggy.

Traveling together proved, well, not the watershed moment I had hoped for. Honestly, it was much more about death than I had expected. At least they were in fabulous moods the whole time.

Turns out they were planning on doing it together, in Austria, where it's legal. They were going to make a grand time of it, 2 old broads, addicted to Drama, checking in-and then checking OUT-at some posh Austrian hotel. Well, things didn't turn out quite that way...Dolly actually listened to her family, her larger family, when they forbade her from doing it for a year. In fact she may even still be alive today. I know she was alive 8 years ago, still in Nottingham. I was there, I saw her. Couldn't bring myself to confront her. I was afraid I'd kill her myself. After Rita had done it, Dolly disappeared like all the rest. I could slap myself for not finding out from her, what the fuck? Did she want to kill me as well? And a couple of weeks after we got back, I came home one day to find Rita despondent on her recliner. Seems they were wrong, it wasn't legal for just ANYone to commit suicide in Austria. Only for those that are terminal. So she was going to have to break the law to happily die.

Anyway, back in London, the last night we were there, I actually hooked-up with a guy I had met online, in a chatroom, while I had been in NY. Looking for guys in London, just in case. I knew this was anathema to Rita, and I was probably trying to get a rise out of her. I spent the whole night out, away from the hotel, having a gay old time getting high, going to the

bathroom, and getting it on with a parade of naughty English guys. And I was crushed, when I got back the next morning. I expected her to be up in arms-how could I do that? Was I crazy? What if something had happened? Did I want to get HIV? But nothing, just "Did you have fun?" That's when I really knew how little she thought of me. How I was a lost cause, best to just let me bleed to death by the side of the road.

That's when I lost it. Nearly on the plane, no less. I wheeled her from the taxi to the gate, practically screaming at her all the way and looking like the only horrible child berating his helpless mother. She was brilliant that way, in public. Playing the victim. The martyr. And making me out to be the monster. Well, I guess in this case...I was the monster? I didn't even know anymore. Trying to keep my mother alive which only made her more miserable. Dolly had actually said to me, "Can't you see how much pain she's in? Can't you see she's obsessed with you? How could you ask her to live like that?" Does that mean that only pain is in her future? That that's all I'm destined to bring her? Or that's all she's able to accept from me? Or from the universe? No matter what I did, how I did it, it would ultimately prove unfruitful. According to her. If my own mother doesn't believe I have anything in me, how in the world was I supposed to

believe in myself?

It was just a hop, skip, and a jump to her Big Day after that. I stopped begging, basically, and Rita basically stopped lying. She saw me spending money, and said I was hopeless. That I was going to spend it all in a year(hah! What did she know). I grew increasingly frantic, inwardly, and began my drug and sex addictions. I think I was determined to show Rita what she was doing to me, the road I was headed to go down without her around. Clearly she had her blinders on, for all I got was more "Did you have fun?" when I would get home the next day. Afternoon.

I was really scared, especially in a crystal meth haze, that the police would have questions for me about how much I knew or didn't know about her suicide, and what I could have done to prevent it. Legally, you're breaking the law if someone you know is planning on committing suicide, you know about it, and you don't call the police. I was terrified they were going to know I knew, or even God forbid helped her, and lock me up. I decided to go away for the weekend, to Fire Island, to at least get some distance from it all. And when Dolly found out I wasn't going to be by Rita's side, she flew all the way to New York-she hated flying and hadn't been on a plane in, like, 20+ years-to make sure all went smoothly.

At first it was all like a modern Noel Coward movie or

something. You know Noel was a cokehead, don't you? Rita, Dolly, me, sipping martinis, Dolly and Rita in floral caftans. Me, slipping off to the bathroom for sniff-sniff. All of us smoking, Dolly actually with an extended cigarette holder. All just so civilized. They wanted me to stay, to go with Rita to the Hotel Edison-where she planned to do it-for a final night together. How gruesome. No, thank you. As I was leaving, Rita came to say goodbye to me for the last time. "Do me one last favor, would you my love? Call me mommy?" I lost it, and grabbed her and called her mommy. "Mommy I love you so much..so much. I wish you wouldn't do this." Didn't faze her. Only made her ask, "Would it have been better if I hadn't told you?" I didn't know how to answer that one. Honestly, I'm still not sure which option is worse.

Instead I went to Fire Island, and had so much sex and did so many drugs I probably broke my own record. I was ravenous, only to keep it going, keep it going so I didn't have to remember what I was waiting for. The call. That call, that call from the police. Not knowing exactly when it would come, though, proved exceptionally difficult. I couldn't just stop and wait for it, that would have been torture. So, instead, I just kept up my mojo and did every last guy I could find, whether it was in my hotel

room or the dunes. That's my favorite part about Fire Island—you can literally have sex anywhere, and be protected. Utter safety no matter where you are. At one point I was with a friend in broad daylight on a boardwalk nicknamed The Meat Rack, fucking and getting fucked by a plethora of other horndogs. Turns out the cops were actually watching us, doing nothing, until we decided to go snooping around a long-deserted house. That, they didn't like, and finally came after us. Did nothing but check our id's.

And then the call came, while I was, um, in flagrante. I took the cock out of my mouth and answered. She was dead. Dead. She actually did it. And my world was never to be the same.