

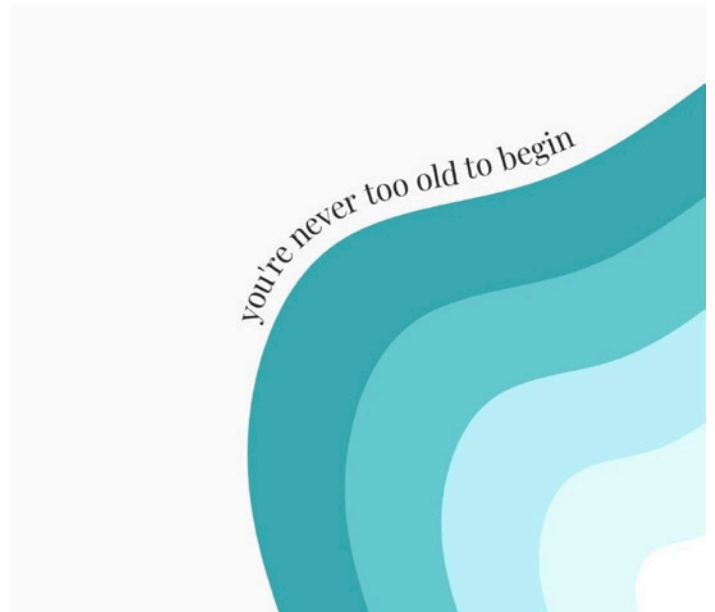
Second Act Actors

by Chelsea Pegues

In March of 2020, no one on this planet had any idea what the future would hold. Thankfully, it's been almost three-and-a-half years since then. Now, many people look back with fond memories of baking and at-home workouts, living room obstacle courses, and, certainly, the full-body exhaustion and dread synonymous with homeschooling. A lot of us also developed some interesting side-hustles and hobbies during this dark period of forced downtime and social distancing. Toronto-based Dr. Janet McMordie, however, plunged into something incredibly new and intense for her - and hasn't looked back! This fellowship-trained sports medicine physician, working full-time, decided to also be an actress. And a voice actor. And a stuntwoman- oh, and podcast host! If all of this sounds remarkable, it's because it truly is. And so is Janet. Read on to find out about the Marvelous Dr. McMordie and how she not only survived a global pandemic - but is thriving in its wake.

Janet started the *Second Act Actors* podcast a little over a year ago, in 2022. During the height of Covid chaos, she began joining in on Zoom sessions featuring *The Second City* improv group, based in Chicago. "I tuned into one, and I was watching all these hilarious [performers] doing Zoom improv. And I thought to myself, I want to learn how to do that. That looks like so much fun. And of course, the one blessing of this pandemic was everything going online. And you didn't have to travel anywhere so you could take online classes in anything." She continues, "...I made the assumption that everyone else in my improv class was going to be an aspiring improviser or an aspiring actor or comedian or something like that. Right. And I don't think, yeah, I don't think there was a single one in my class. Everyone was somebody like me who was wanting to do something creative because they were missing that part in their life. And they were all kind of my vintage...they were lawyers and nurses and teachers and cops and accountants who were just desperate to do some more creative stuff." Virtual improv turned into actual acting classes for Janet, where she started having conversations with her peers about their respective backgrounds. The burnout people were experiencing from very demanding day jobs was extinguishing their sense of normalcy and fun. These individuals were realizing that they needed an outlet, fast; one that could allow them to step outside of their comfort zones and become someone else, even if just for a few hours. Says Janet, "I was having so much fun, and I was meeting more people who were like, I want to do more acting [away from] my job as a, I don't know, dental office assistant. And I said, well I'm not the only one.

Clearly. The thing I love about podcasts is that there's this realization of, oh, my problems are not unique. Other people experience this. The podcast world has shown us that... and this is how we find community. So, I said I love chatting with people- let's chat with people like this. And that's how I started *Second Act Actors*. [It celebrates] people like myself - who changed



careers into acting.” It bears repeating that Janet still practices medicine simultaneously and has had to do a tremendous amount of work to figure out the right balance between these two endeavors. “My parents were very creative people - very musical, very artistic. They had stable careers. Right. But they always had creativity going on, I think...I always need to remind myself that I genuinely love medicine. Yeah, I love the sciences. I did a physics and a human kinetics degree. I was so passionate about it. But I think because [it’s necessary] to have tunnel vision if you want to be a doctor, there was no time to explore anything else. I think now the medical world is starting to realize as we healthcare workers are burning out ...that, that it’s not healthy to say you need to focus on medicine and medicine only.” Janet graduated medical school ten years ago this year, and chuckles as she reflects on her need to branch out as the “seven-year itch.”

When asked if there were people in her life who cautioned her against taking on too many projects, she replies, “Yeah, definitely. From both ends of the spectrum, yeah. And I think for the most part, even the people who were the more negative came from a place of, I think, good intention. Trying to protect me.” She continues, “...I’m a people-pleaser. I don’t do well with criticism. And traditionally I have not done well with criticism. Acting has really helped with that... you know, the first negative thing somebody says might just destroy you. But then on the flip side, I definitely had people being like, ‘fabulous!’, and they usually weren’t people in medicine. Usually, people in medicine are [more like] ‘well, why aren’t you working harder?’” And so, it would seem that Janet has been primed to take on challenges her whole adult life. And she isn’t afraid to say that this kind of personal freedom, and the courage to explore new opportunities, is also something that has come with age and experience. Janet claims that one of the saving graces of aging (especially as a woman) is the shedding of the notion that people’s opinion of you is of any importance. “I don’t care anymore about society’s perceptions of me. I think that is a small



blessing of aging as a woman in this world, is that the world just slowly starts to ignore you. And that [can be] very freeing when everyone’s like, ‘nobody cares about you anymore’, you’re like, great. I can do whatever I want. Perfect!” She chuckles. Janet reiterates, however, that she is extremely privileged to be secure in her day job and have this stability as a foundation for chasing her dreams. After all, it is part of the human condition to want to pursue what brings us joy, especially in the present day, now that we all better understand the fragility of life itself, and how short this journey really is.

Janet pivots and begins to explain more of the creative process behind her show, which includes masterful use of musical cues and a very mixed-down, high quality audio. “I had outlined everything; I did a ton of research about which microphone should I get, which aggregating platform should I use, and talked to other people who had podcasts, especially creative podcasts, acting podcasts, and stuff like that. My first, I’d say probably 10, 15 guests were all the people I’d met in classes.

People who were, you know, very new to acting and also new to being interviewed. So that was really interesting as well- we were kind of like learning together.” Janet also records her shows in batches, and already has episodes logged through the end of 2023. It’s always helpful, if possible, to make a few episodes at a time on a dedicated day. This way, when life inevitably gets in the way (especially for those new to podcasting and creating an upload schedule), you’ll never have to worry about having enough content ready to present. A lot of podcasters experience burnout and stop creating in their first season, simply because the recording/editing/upload schedule becomes overwhelming. Another valuable tip Janet offers is deciding where you want to focus your energy as a creator- and outsourcing the rest as much as possible. If you can focus on what you love about the medium, you are much more likely to stick with it and expand. “I was like...what do I want to learn for fun? And what do I enjoy? I don’t enjoy writing; I don’t enjoy making websites. I like chatting with people. So, it’s like, I’m going to outsource. I have somebody who writes my show notes for me. I have someone who makes my website. I do all my own editing and stuff, because I actually really enjoy that part.” This is truly admirable, and Janet’s honesty is refreshing and so appreciated. She isn’t afraid to protect her time and efforts in order to focus on what her strengths are. She is fearless about asking for help when needed, and that’s a huge asset for any indie podcaster. Lean on your community. Get your friends and family involved or use freelancing websites to recruit other skilled creatives to your team for small tasks that may bog you down. This frees your mind to focus on the fun - the interview!



When it comes down to speaking with her guests, Janet maintains the laid-back attitude that makes her truly irresistible and easy to talk to. Asked how she manages lulls in conversation, or an especially loquacious speaker, Janet says she takes it all in stride and sometimes this gives her unexpected gems. “I think I’ve honed the ‘polite interrupt’ when, you know, you try and catch the tail end of a story, or you think they’ve kind of concluded their story. And my last question is always, ‘do you have any final words of wisdom or advice?’ So, they know that this is the last question and it’s their final and they have a chance to say their piece. I learned that because there were a couple people when, you know, I’d say, oh, this is a great natural place to stop recording, they go, ‘oh, but we never got to talk about X, Y, Z’. Okay, now I’m going to add in this question, ‘do you have any final words? What would you like to speak about?’ and then usually that kind of re-centers people and they go, yes, okay, here is my bumper sticker piece of advice. And then they stop, and I go, ‘great.’ So, there’s zero pressure for people who are nervous and are worried that they’re going to clam up or they won’t get to say everything. But to be honest, I’m a bit of a, a pushover. I’ll just let people talk.” She laughs heartily at that. Another interesting bit of cross-training she’s able to use to her advantage is not only her background in improv, but her skills as a medical professional. Particularly, documenting patient histories and making people feel comfortable enough to relay sensitive information- a skill worth its weight in gold in this community. Says Janet, “Seeing patients, new patients, I have to make a really good first impression. To make patients trust me with very vulnerable, intimate details about their lives. 30, 40 times a day, bing- bang- boom. Right? And I mean, it’s not like I’m

acting. I've always been a really outgoing, energetic, pleasant human being. That's thanks to my beautiful family. I think that's a huge part of it, right? I have experience being in front of people and having to convince them that they can trust me. That I'm not going to trick them or that I'm not trying to scam them. I'm not some used car salesman. I'm your doctor. And I think [that shows] in my podcast hosting. Again, the whole approach where you're not shutting down what people have said, you're building off what they're saying. And so, when guests are telling a story, I'm really trying to cue into different things they talk about to not just be like, 'great, thank you for telling me about this very vulnerable time.'"



A wonderful episode that comes to mind when considering Janet's words here is her recent sit-down with actor, coach, and activist Jennifer Wigmore on episode 70 of *Second Act Actors*. This brilliant episode became a beautiful conversation about protecting actors in myriad ways on shoots and throughout the creative process, as Jennifer's training as a coach has enabled her to teach actors how to advocate for themselves and better protect their dignity in the industry. Says Jennifer, "If I'm trying to communicate anything to acting teachers, it's that, recognize your power and start to learn that you do have power, and so you have to learn how to use it...and how to be mindful of the fact that you can traumatize people if you don't know how to wield that power properly." Their talk focused a lot on the relationships between student and teacher, actor and director, actor, and executive but overall, was a lesson which can translate into so many facets of life even for those not in the entertainment industry. Thus, this is a golden example of why *Second Act Actors* is worth a listen for everyone, especially open-minded individuals who love to absorb different perspectives. It's a shining example of what the human spirit is capable of - emotionally, professionally, physically, and creatively.

The biggest takeaway from Dr. Janet McMordie must be that if you're not having fun, if you don't have a passion for what you're doing - you need to find what does intrigue you and focus your time and energy there. It's okay to explore all facets of your creative being, if you are fostering what truly feeds your soul. And this doesn't mean giving up on your original dream at all. It's like the old saying, "you have to put your oxygen mask on first before you can help others." For Janet, podcasting has become her deepest inhale yet. We can't wait to see where her vision takes her next!



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