

Act Three

Create the Life You Want

After Your First Career
and Full Time Motherhood



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Introduction

A pile of rocks ceases to be a rock when somebody contemplates it

with the idea of a cathedral in mind.

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

In 1957, 4.3 million babies were born in the United States, the most babies born in any year before, and a record that wasn't broken again until 2007. And those babies and the other baby boomer women born around that time, (estimated to be around 40 million) will be empty-nesting soon or already have. Research shows that this major life transition can be profoundly challenging for boomer women. Many will struggle to define their next stage of life. And this struggle is even more profound for those women who took time off to stay home to raise their children. If you are one of these women, you are probably asking yourself, "Who am I now, and what can I do next?" Answering this question will ultimately lead to a more compelling and fulfilling next stage of life. And that is the purpose of this book: guiding you along the path to the fullest life possible in your Act Three—the stage that follows your first career (Act One) and full-time motherhood (Act Two).

But before we begin talking about your Act Three, I want to start by asking a question



What does this picture look like to you? Does it look like a big rock? Maybe you're more observant and think it looks like a block of marble. Let me show you what it looked like Michelangelo.



Michelangelo worked under the premise that the image of David was already fully formed in the block of marble. What this block of marble would become, in effect its potential, was always there. His creativity merely recognized it and his energy merely released it. You may be wondering what Michelangelo and this block of marble have to do with you.

Pretend that you are eighty years old and you are looking back at your life—at the last thirty-five, forty, or forty-five years. And in all these intervening years since you were say forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, sixty—whatever age you are now—you continued doing all the things you are actually doing

right now and doing them in the same way. Take a minute to really think about this. Would the eighty-year-old you say that this was the life you wanted, that this life has been fulfilling, that you achieved to your potential, that you made the impact, or left the legacy that you intended and desired? If you are like many women according to my research, you would likely say “No”—and not just a quiet “No”, but a resounding one. Like David, concealed in the block of marble, these women feel like they failed to release the potential within.

This feeling of “I want more out of life” is artfully described by one woman:

I often worry about this. I have done some incredible things in my life. I have my family and many wonderful and caring friends, some outstanding experiences. But I know I am going to look back on my life and be sad that I cared too much about what people thought and didn't take enough risks to do something that I really wanted to do.

Even women that outwardly may appear successful and totally confident have these questioning feelings. Jane Fonda describes this so beautifully in her book *Prime Time*:

I realized then that it was not so much the idea of death itself that frightened me as it was being faced with regrets, the “what if’s and the “if only’s when there is no time left to do anything about them. I didn’t want to arrive at the end of the Third Act and discover too late all that I had not done.

And this takes us back to Michelangelo and his block of marble. You know, just like Michelangelo did, that there is great potential in you struggling to get out but you haven't been able to define it or release it. For whatever reason, that hidden potential, that burning desire, is still buried beneath layers of rock. For some of you, the challenge is to imagine how your life could be different. You see other women doing all kinds of interesting things but you just can't imagine what you might do.

Here is how one woman summed it up.

I'm approaching my thirtieth high school reunion next year. If I fall into the mindset of comparing myself to other women I graduated from HS with, I in no way, shape or form "measure up" to a majority of them. Demons are hard to shake off, and letting go of the past is equally difficult. Learning to look forward and not back is the biggest challenge I face as I figure out what it is I'm supposed to be doing next."

Maybe you imagine so many different things that you simply can't pick one. For some reason stuff keeps getting in the way. Or maybe something, you're not sure what, is holding you back. One day you imagine going back to school and becoming a social worker and the next day you imagine getting your Pilates certification to teach at a health club. You end up doing neither. You haven't been able to chip away at the marble and reveal its necessary and important parts—its essence.

But for others of you, you can easily imagine exactly what you want to be doing, but for some reason you've just been talking and talking about it and never actually doing anything different. Imagining without the doing is just plain daydreaming. I'm sure you know someone like this: she always has a new idea and maybe even gets started with it occasionally. But then the next time you talk to her, she's onto something else.

Whether you've yet to discover what you want out of Act Three or have discovered it but aren't acting on it, either way you're treading water. You're not moving forward, not moving backwards. For some people, I suppose, a life of treading water, of status quo, is fine. But my guess is that you wouldn't be reading this book if treading water was enough for you.

The key then, is to both imagine and then, just as importantly, do it. This book will help you do both, as you move from dreaming big dreams about your future to taking the first small steps toward making them reality.

My Story

When I was a little girl, I remember playing dress up. My grandmother would dress me in her clothes, hats and gloves, and put makeup on me and for some reason she called me Mrs. Octopus (or at least that's what it sounded like to my four- year- old ears).



childhood photo of author

If I really think back, what I was doing was imagining; imagining a future where I really would be wearing fancy clothes and imagining a whole made-up life that went along with the clothes. I had a made-up husband, made-up job and even made-up kids. In effect, as a child, I had a vision of the future I wanted.

In college, I had an even clearer vision for my future. I was going to be a professional ballet dancer. When I was young I spent most of my waking hours in ballet class. I lived and breathed ballet. I walked like a dancer, (back held straight, head up, feet turned out), wore my hair like a dancer, (pulled up in a bun). I even watched TV like a dancer (sitting in the splits for hours, basically ripping out my ham strings to be flexible). As a ballet major in college, I worked really hard toward the goal of being a

professional dancer. But then at age twenty, in what I can only describe as one of the worst decisions of my life, I quit ballet cold turkey to follow a guy to Colorado.



(author at age 13)

So of course my life hasn't turned out even remotely close to the vision I had imagined in college (picture Natalie Portman in *Black Swan*, without all the psychological nuttiness) but that's not the point. The point isn't whether the vision ended up being right. The point is that I had a vision, that I did imagine.

But once I got older, as my kids were leaving the nest, I really struggled to imagine a different future. I felt lost. Here's what happened to me.

The guy I had followed to Colorado, the one I left my ballet dreams for, turned out to be not that great of a guy. But the good news is that I went to law school in Colorado and briefly dated a really great guy. And then I moved to New York City to practice law and re-met that really great guy I had met in Colorado. That guy became my husband. As they say in Yiddish, it was *besheret*—meant to be.

Right after we got married, I got pregnant. My husband and I were Midwesterners, and we struggled to picture raising this baby in our tiny apartment in New York City. So I quit my law job

when I was nine months pregnant and we moved to Cincinnati. I went back to work when my son was six months old and was lucky enough to find a part-time legal position (part time was pretty much unheard of in the mid-eighties). And then I got pregnant again, and then I got pregnant again, and then I got pregnant again. We ended up with four sons in five and a half years. I actually became a partner in my law firm while working part time in between sons number three and four (I remember trying to keep my pregnancy with son number four a secret until the day after the partnership vote, sucking in my stomach as much as a pregnant stomach could be sucked in on a fourth pregnancy). I went to work full time when my youngest was six months old. Even though this period of time was hectic— four small boys in various stages of diapers, preschool, and elementary school and working full time—it actually was manageable, with lots of help.

But then my four sons became teenagers (one with significant learning issues) and it wasn't so easy any longer to juggle all the demands. And the reality was that I just wasn't loving my job anymore. But could I really just walk away? I had invested a huge amount of time and money to get to where I was. I earned a very good living. And I have to admit, I liked the recognition that came with saying that I was a partner at a large law firm. (This was a time when a woman partner at a large law firm was still pretty rare). If I left my partnership, it would be next to impossible to ever go back. So if I left, it was for good.



(Julie and Family 2010)

But I just knew that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life practicing law, and with that realization, I walked away. I loved this time at home (if you exclude the time my oldest son was suspended from high school or my youngest son broke his kneecap in a baseball game in Florida and I was the only mother that hadn't traveled from Ohio to Florida with the team, etc.). And I really enjoyed the time it afforded me to get more involved in the community. I even had time to work out and to return to my first love, ballet.

Then, my oldest son went off to college and I started asking the nagging question: What was I going to do next with my life? I knew that I didn't want to and couldn't go back to law. So with one possibility ruled out, I still had thousands of other possibilities to consider and no real idea of how to figure it out. Who could help a well-educated former professional who had been home raising children and now needed help figuring out what she wanted to do—and could do—next.

So with no real plan, no real understanding of my talents and no real guidance, I jumped around trying lots of different things to see if one would stick. First, I started a consulting company to work with family-owned businesses. I discovered that I was good at sales (getting clients) but that I didn't

enjoy dealing with what often seemed to me irrational behavior. I learned that being in business with your family can turn even the most rational person temporarily insane.

I closed that business and began a consulting company to work with nonprofit organizations. This, I conjectured at the time, would mean working with people and causes I really liked. These were great people and great projects, but I hadn't considered how few nonprofits could actually afford to hire me. At the same time, I got certified to teach the New York City Ballet Exercise Workout and taught that at various fitness clubs around town. This was fun and I was using my dance background, but it clearly wasn't a long-term or profitable solution.

At one point I even approached my husband about working in his chemical business. Not because I really wanted to either work in a chemical business or even work with him (see above about becoming insane when working with family), but just because I didn't know what I wanted. Having him give me a job seemed like the easy way out. Thankfully, he graciously declined.

Through all this, I came to discover that I wasn't the only woman struggling with these issues. It seemed as if all my friends were wrestling with the same issues. These talented women were clearly struggling.

Take Janet for example. She graduated from college with a degree in business and started selling office equipment. She was one of the top salespeople for her company for several years in a row. During this time, her husband's career was also taking off. When she had a son, they were able to make it work, even if it was a struggle. But then baby number two, a daughter, came along and at the same time, her husband was promoted, causing him to travel significantly more. Most of the childcare and all the household duties fell to Janet. As she tells it,

Something had to give. Once when I went to drop off at daycare and realized that my child had no shoes on (and this was in the middle of winter), I knew that I was trying to do too much. And the reality was that we could afford to live on my husband's salary, so

why was I putting our family through so much stress, just so I could have a job that I really didn't love? I took what I thought was going to be a short-term hiatus from work. I figured I would go back when my daughter was in kindergarten. Here I am fifteen years later, and I am not happy where I am. I feel like there is a lot more that I could, or even should be doing, but I just don't know what to do. I don't even know if I want to go back to work. Giving up my flexibility when we don't really need the money would be really hard. And if I did go back to work, what would I be qualified to do? I obviously can't go back to what I did before. They don't even make those kind of copiers anymore. I feel like this is so hard to figure out that I just keep complaining but doing nothing.

My friend Janet was just one example. It seemed as if most of my time with friends—walks, lunches, book club meetings—all dissolved into the discussion of “What are we going to do next?” But other than talk to each other about this, none of us really knew how to get help. Who could help women like Janet, who had been home with children for ten, fifteen, even twenty years and now needed help figuring out what was next.

I decided that I could be the one to help. Through much research and by conducting several focus groups, I discovered that my friends and I are part of a very large demographic. This is the first time in history that large numbers of highly educated women (the baby boomers), who had interesting careers before they chose to stay home to raise their children, are empty-nesting. According to my research, some of these women do want to go back to work or start businesses (about 35 percent). But about 65 percent don't; they just want to make sure that their next stage of life, their Act Three, will be interesting and productive.

Through the research I did, I also uncovered many of the challenges that these women face, and I've continued to uncover them in a recent survey I conducted with hundreds of women across the

country. Some of these challenges are obvious. Well over half of the women I heard from were struggling to figure out what they wanted to do. And for those women who wanted to return to work, it was also challenging for them to figure out what they were qualified to do with such a long gap in work their history.

After this research and listening to so many women share their thoughts and concerns, I started to formulate a concept for what I personally wanted to do next. I would create a company that would help women just like me figure out what they wanted to do next. I would get my coaching certification so I could coach the women. And then I would write a book so that all the women my company couldn't personally touch could also get help. My Act Three would be helping women achieve their own Act Threes.

I branded the company Act Three because I think it accurately reflects the place these women want to be. Act One was their first career. Act Two was raising their children, an important and fulfilling part of their lives that should never be discounted. But now many want an interesting and challenging Act Three, statistically the longest of their three acts. (Women who are forty-five today should live healthy lives well into their eighties).

So here we are today. We've helped hundreds of women through our seminars, workshops and individual coaching to discover their Act Three—whether that means starting a business, going back to work, or focusing on a cause they care about. Now, with this book, we can help you too.

This book follows the systematic process we use to help our clients, and each chapter is one step in that process.

I'll take you from imagining the possibilities for your Act Three to identifying your passions, gifts, and motivations. Once we've narrowed those down and looked at some options that might work for you, I'll share the techniques and suggestions that have changed the lives of so many of my clients.

I'll show you how to prepare for change, how to take small steps, how to identify the things that might be holding you back, and how to persevere through the inevitable setbacks you'll face.

Dreaming Big → Discovering Your Gifted Passions → Understanding Your Motivations →
Combining Passions and Motivations → Getting in “Change Shape” → Visualizing the Future →
Learning to Keep Moving → Identifying What's Holding You Back → Taking Small Steps →
Persevering Through Setbacks → Arrival

In each chapter, I will also profile a remarkable woman who exemplifies the principle outlined in the chapter. Most of these women are just like you; they're not celebrities. I wanted to interview women you could relate to. I know you will enjoy meeting and getting to know all of them. Award-winning documentarians, nationally syndicated radio hosts, fitness gurus, and volunteers changing the lives of thousands—these women are all living Act Three to its fullest. They inspired me, and I know they'll inspire you, too.



(Julie speaking at Imagine...Then Do It women's conference)

At the end of each chapter, I'll also hand over exercises and tools that will help you apply what you've learned to your own life, right away.

Let's get started with the first step: having big dreams for your future and opening up the possibilities for your Act Three.

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