

October 11, 2001

Hi all,

GREETING:

Sorry it has been so long between Insiders - many of you have emailed wondering how I am, where I am and if I am still having at the acting thing. I guess I'm zeroing in on just under a month between issues as a reasonable interval - after that people begin to worry it seems. This one is a bit on the long side so you may want to print it out and read it on the subway home.....or on the toilet (guys, you know what I'm talking about).

CAREER MILESTONES:

Well, I'm still in the business. There have been a lot of firsts since the last issue - booked my first commercial print job, went on my first TV commercial audition and had my first audition for an excellent acting coach, which I got.

ACTING:

I tend to put a tremendous amount of pressure on myself to achieve success quickly. I dunno, maybe it's my advanced age (for a starting actor), maybe it's my poor debt coverage ratio, or maybe just my usual impatience. I figured the only reason that actors (by the way, the industry uses 'actor' as gender neutral now) take so long to get a break (if ever!) is that they are not as ambitious as they could/should be or are too caught up in their 'day jobs' trying to make rent to focus properly on their acting.

However, I am realizing now that there are legitimate reasons why an actor might not choose to jump right into the audition frenzy. I am realizing that acting is not all about natural talent. Just like anything else (occupation, sports) there is a tremendous amount that one can learn to improve one's craft and even one's auditioning skills. Just as someone with a natural aptitude for math and figures still needs training or business school before he or she is ready to take on high finance. Of course there are exceptions in finance, as there are in acting, but I know now that just putting my shining personality in front of a camera is not going to be enough. That is not to say that I am not going to audition, I am still jumping right into the fray, but it means that I am going to focus on my training for now and be more selective about what auditions I send myself on.

Speaking of auditions, I saw a casting notice in Backstage magazine asking for improv actors for a series of events. No further details. Well, I love improv so I responded to the ad and got an audition. They told me that they were hiring actors to play a variety of characters for the new flagship Toys-R-Us megastore in Times Square set to open in November. Basically actors dress up in costumes and walk around the store, kick-off parties and a parade in Time Square, talking to children and being happy. My first thought was "how humiliating - what if my friends see me?" But the more I thought about it, the more comfortable I became with doing it, for three reasons. First, a true actor loves dressing up and acting as another character, and so do I really. It is just the investment banker in me saying otherwise.

Second, I think of it like paying my dues. Sure, it may not be exactly the type of acting I was hoping for (that would be blockbuster films), but just as an analyst or associate in an investment bank has to make copies, put together ridiculous pitch books and perform other grunt work before they can move on to the prestigious, cool stuff, so too does the actor. Its part of the job and this is my grunt work. I'm just starting out. These things build character. Lastly, I want to have a cool story for when I become famous. "Arol, is it true that your first acting job required you to dress up as Little Bo Peep?" So I will go on the audition, we'll see if I get it. So if you are in Times Square in November and someone in a Barney costume comes up and slaps your ass, that's probably me.

Training: As I mentioned in the last HWI I began studying with Penny Templeton. Those classes continue to go well. Every week we prepare a scene from either a soap opera, a TV drama, sit-com or film and we perform it with a scene partner in front of the camera. This seemingly simple task is made all the more difficult with some complex "blocking" (stage directions - for example "come downstage to the left of the couch, cross over when you say this line, turn, go to the bar, take a drink then say this line and then cross from down left to center for your final line. Got it?" I know all my smart-ass I-banking friends are saying "That's not that hard. I could do that." yeah? try it.). Then we watch ourselves on a large movie screen while Penny critiques our work. While it is a little unnerving to see yourself so big, it is a great tool to pick up on any unwanted ticks, habits or facial expressions. For example, my habits seem to be raising my eyebrows too much and inexplicably glancing to the side before I deliver key lines. By the way, it's true that you do look ten pounds heavier on camera - at least. Good thing I shed all my excess I-banking weight, else I'd look like the Stay Puff Marshmallow Man up there.

In addition to Penny Templeton's classes, I was hoping to shore up my acting resume by auditioning for Austin Pendleton's class at HB Studio. Austin is a very well respected actor as well as being one of the most (if not THE most) prestigious teacher at HB Studio. Austin has been more successful in theater (he was the first actor to play Motil Kamzoil in "Fiddler on the Roof"), but y'all may know some of his more famous movies better. They include: 'The Thief Who Came to Dinner' (1973), 'Starting Over' (1979), 'Short Circuit'(1986), 'The Mirror Has Two Faces' (1996) and 'Amistad' (1997). Rumor has it that over 300 students auditioned for about 40 spots in his fall scene study class. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of these figures, but I was pretty darn excited to get in. For those who are curious, my audition monologue was Act I, Scene I of Bernard Slade's "Same Time, Next Year". Classes are going well so far, my scene study partner and I are currently working on a scene from Arthur Miller's "After The Fall." (Yes, that's that "Death of a Salesman" guy).

Agent: As I mentioned in the last HWI, my agent was nice enough to sign me "on spec" (meaning that she has no idea if I can act, but is willing to take a chance on me). This is what we in the industry call "a good thing". So I spent a few hours in Anne Steele's office reading through contracts for SAG, AFTRA and EQUITY (I thank Goldman for my M&A training in legalese!). I won't bore you with the contract details, but suffice it to say that the acting unions are fairly strong and the actors are well taken care of. The initial contract is for one year,

but the actor can basically get out of it anytime he/she wants. In return Anne gets to \$share\$ in 10% of my successes. But she also has to share 100% of my failure, so I consider that to be a good deal for me.

Commercials: Never one to let her cash sit under her mattress, Anne sent her latest investment (me) out on his first commercial audition. It was for a product called "Backup Beeper" - a device that you attach to the rear bumper of your car and it makes that annoying delivery truck beeping noise when you put your car in reverse. I was to play a cop talking about how much this product contributes to auto safety. Okay, me, playing a cop? A bit miscast perhaps, but heck, I had spent enough time in high school trying to dodge the Millburn, NJ police to prevent confiscation of my six pack of premium beer, that I figured I could pull it off. Just to be sure, I went out into the streets and observed all of NY's Finest that I could to pick up some of their habits. I noticed that they usually rest their hand on either their gun or their two-way radios when they are standing around so I thought I would use that for authenticity. Then I put on dark blue suit pants and a blue button down shirt and headed for the audition. I was completely nervous, although I was trying to exude the confidence of a seasoned professional. When I arrived, I was given the "sides" (the audition script for a commercial or a TV scene) and sat in the waiting room to memorize them. As I looked around the cramped waiting area filled with old, graffiti-riddled wooden benches and tacky paper covering the walls I thought, gone the quarter million dollar art, plush carpets and heavy mahogany conference room tables of my investment banking days. The side went basically like this:

"I can't tell you how many accidents I have seen caused by people who thought they were backing up safely".

"Backup Beeper is a great safety solution"

"Backup Beeper also gives vision-impaired drivers an extra margin of error and peace of mind".

Finally it was my turn. In the audition room there was the casting director, the cameraman and someone else who I couldn't quite figure out. I stood on my "mark" (a piece of electrical tape on the floor to show you where to stand) and "slated" (giving my name and the part I was playing). Okay, I was ready, I had memorized my lines, I had done my mental preparation and I had the hand-on-the-holster-cop thing going. I WAS that policeman dammit! Then in a matter of moments, my world got rocked. The cameraman interjected that it was a tight shot (meaning only chest up) so I could just leave my hands by my side (ie. no authentic holster thing). Then the casting director told me to forget about the script and just ad-lib stuff about safety. What?! I've got the lines down, can't I just do them? NO. So I got nervous and I held an imaginary beeper up to the side of my face (in proud mock display of the Backup Beeper) and I rattled off some drivel about walkin' my neighborhood beat and seeing idiot after idiot backing their cars into signposts, pedestrians, you name it. When I was finished, which was basically a mumbled few words at the end of an already lame product endorsement, the casting director said "OK. good. But this is a

car beeper that attaches to the underside of a car's bumper, so you wouldn't be holding it up like a bar of ivory soap. Do it again, please." <Dumb look on my face> "Oh shit, I knew that!" Needless to say, I don't think I got the part, but I got my first commercial audition under my belt. Boo-yah!

COMMERCIAL PRINT:

I was extremely excited when I booked my first commercial print job. Commercial print modeling is basically every magazine, billboard, catalog or internet ad that doesn't involve fashion. So, that Businessweek ad with the old man sitting in a rocking chair smiling to himself with a bottle of Viagra by the side table, is a commercial print ad.

I was damn excited. It was for the glossy intro pages to a 10-K report for Blythe, Inc., the largest candle company in the world (or maybe it was the US, I forget). I had heard about the casting call from my HB Studio scene study partner Dena and stopped off at Rockefeller Plaza on my way home one day to drop off my headshot. I couldn't believe it. My first submission for print work and I booked it! So much for paying my dues - I have arrived! The shoot was on a Monday at a huge house in The Hamptons. For roughly a two hour shoot they would pay us \$500 + transportation. \$250/hour - not bad even for an investment banker. There were four other models involved in the shoot and I volunteered to drive the group out to Long Island in return for expenses reimbursement. I picked them all up in front of NBC's Rainbow Room in midtown. There was Michelle, a beautiful, young woman obsessed with her cell phone and her boyfriend; Liz, a crass, sex-crazed actress with a contagious laugh; Kutcha, a handsome, well-built, soft-spoken, African American male; and Tracey, a beautiful, light-skinned African American model who was all legs.

We arrived at 11am, but because it was a candle shot, we had to wait until dusk, five hours later! While there could be worse places to hang out talking to 'the beautiful people' than pool-side at a huge house in West Hampton with an open buffet on a gorgeous sunny day, there were also others things I could have been doing back in the city (can't think of any right now). Finally, they were ready for us to shoot. Regina had already applied make-up - I'm serious, even to Kutcha and me! This had to be the lowest point of my fledgling career. I mean, I am in touch with my feminine side as much as the next guy (perhaps more?), but there I was with more make up on than most girls I know.....

The actual shoot turned out to be quite comical for Liz and I. While Michelle, Kutcha and Tracey were positioned around a set of patio furniture sipping wine and eating finger sandwiches in an apparent mock Hamptons cocktail party, Liz and I were relegated to the path, way in the background - ostensibly to draw the reader's eye to a set of footlight candles lining the garden path. Well, I'm not photographer, but I'm pretty sure it is an impossibility for a camera lens to focus on both the foreground and the background simultaneously so I'm fairly certain that my first commercial print shot will be a blurred image of me, holding a wine glass staring at those damn footlight candles!

WRITING:

The writing continues to go well. I have written a few short stories and have just begun to concentrate on my novel again. I also have been reading quite a bit (catching up on classics that I was supposed to have read in high school).

MUSIC:

ZUZU is playing down in Philly (Grape Street Pub) this Saturday. I will not be attending that one, but I am still hard at work trying to get us a gig in NYC - many of the venues fell behind in their new music listening due to the Sept. 11th tragedy, but hopefully they will listen soon and be amazed.

JOB SEARCH:

As I mentioned in HWI#2 I have begun to think about getting a side job just until my career gets up and running. I want to do something industry related so I checked out the Actors' Work Program - a government funded training and job placement service run by The Actor's Fund. The only requirement is that you be a union member, which I am. So I went for the orientation meeting at their Times Square office and what I saw really opened my eyes to the unpredictable and unmerciful nature of the actor's world.

The twenty seat conference table filled up immediately and left several people sitting or standing in the background. Our host, Patch, encouraged us go around the room introducing ourselves and telling why we were there. You have never heard so many hard-luck stories in your life. It literally almost brought me to tears. Many of these actors had found some success, but it became clear to me that while there may be a lot of work out there, there is not much pay involved.

There was Charlie, a man of about 55 who, in tears, told the group about how he was had been trying to make it as an actor, but had recently broken his hip so now he could not even do his "survival job" of carpentry work to make ends meet. He was desperate. Then there was Mary, a 40 something who said that the only thing she ever wanted to do was perform, but the poor economy had reduced the level of available work (both in commercials and theater) that she had to look for another job. She had been temping at a financial services firm in Wall Street, but they cut her job after the Sept. 11th disaster. Still another woman spoke through tears about how she had been making money as a massage therapist to finance her acting, but had recently been hit by a bus so she could no longer do that and was looking for something else. She said "This is the lowest point in my entire life. I'm lost. I don't know where I'm going to live, what I'm going to do." For others, like Jim, a 35 year old husband and father, it was normal life changes that brought him to the AWP. He had been a successful actor with several touring productions of famous Broadway musicals (this is good paying stuff gang), but with the birth of his daughter, he could no longer go on tour with the troupe and was now looking to hang up his acting masks and try to make a living doing something else. Problem was he had always been an actor and so he had no transferable skills. In truth the effects of the WTC disaster has been devastating to this group as well - it has affected the jobs that struggling actors typically take - waiters, word-processors for investment banks, advertising business, tourism, etc.

Patch did her best to buoy the spirits of our ragtag group by chanting Stuart Smalley-like affirmations - "Remember gang, you're good enough, you're smart enough, and gosh darnit, people like you!" I walked out of there severely depressed, but more determined than ever not to end up like that.

REFLECTIONS:

As I sit and reflect on my current situation and take stock of what I have accomplished so far and all that I still have left to accomplish, I also consider the tremendous mountain of debt that I still have left over from business school, my left brain says "What are you doing? Be more responsible with your life. Pay off your debts, meet your obligations." I get confused. Then something like the World Trade Center tragedy befalls us and puts things into perspective. It makes me believe even more strongly how important it is to follow a dream and really enjoy what you are doing. Thousands of dreams got snuffed out in an instant on September 11th. I feel extremely fortunate to still have a loving family and supportive group of friends along side me through my journey. My heart goes out to the families and friends who lost their particular reason to cheer someone's dream.

STUFF I'VE DONE:

Filmography:

"Last Goodbye" - Independent short film - Bob Marcus

"Sweet Memories" - Independent feature film - "wedding guest"

Theater:

"Spontaneous Combustion" - improv troupe performance

RUBBING ELBOWS WITH THE RICH & FAMOUS:

Gweneth Paltrow, Matt Damon, Keri Russell, Toby McGuire, Kristin Dunst and Ashley Judd. Okay, I didn't actually rub elbows with these people, but I did get to view their early audition tapes - before they became famous. It was encouraging to see that they made the same mistakes that my classmates and I are making, they had some bad habits, nervous ticks, and certainly some bad auditions. There is hope for us yet!

From Past Issues:

MARY STUART MASTERSON

JOAN JETT

THIS ISSUE'S STATISTICS:

Days since becoming an "actor": 130

Number of Films: 2

Number of TV shows: 0

Number of Theater shows: 1

Number of Subscribers to the Insider: 119

Website Hits: 0 (www.aroljahns.com is shabby, but just about ready to put up. I just need to get a host. It should be viewable online by the next issue. To be honest though there are other aspects of my career to prioritize before a cyber shrine to myself).

Mood Meter: Despite the depressing stories of the struggling, out-of-work actor and the realization that this acting thing is not all looks

and personality, my mood remains very positive. I love what I am doing and there are so many avenues to express my creativity that I am just having fun exploring them all at the moment.

LAST ISSUE'S STATISTICS:

Days since becoming an "actor": 102

Number of Films: 2

Number of TV shows: 0

Number of Theater shows: 1

Number of Subscribers to the Insider: 106

Website Hits: 0 (www.aroljahns.com is still in the development stage. Hey, I bought Microsoft's "Front Page". Baby steps, man. cut me some slack!)

Mood Meter: Very High. Although I am beginning to realize that this is going to take a lot of work, I am still very encouraged by people in the industry that matter. I have my agent all signed up and should be going for those paid jobs now. The financial situation is beginning to sneak up on my shoulder and I know I will have to get some kind of day job soon. Don't want to wait tables or bartend. If anyone has any suggestions, I am listening.