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# REALWOMAN

FALL 2016

## MAKE THE SEASON BRIGHT

EXPERT ADVICE  
ON BEING A  
HAPPY HOST

Inside  
CANCER  
IN THE  
CROSSHAIRS

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*"Trenton  
Circus Squad  
is a place  
where kids  
won't be  
judged."*

← ZOE BROOKES

# Child's Play

ENGAGING THE  
NEXT GENERATION  
THROUGH THE MAGIC  
OF CIRCUS ARTS

# REALWOMAN



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your life

# REINVENT

## Drama QUEEN

Pennington's Julie Chapin spent three decades as a corporate attorney, ignoring the voice inside her head that had compelled her to act since she was a child. But, after retirement, she rediscovered her dream and, ultimately, her talent.

By Jessica Downey

As a young girl growing up in Cheltenham, Pa., Julie Chapin often arranged neighborhood productions of plays like *Hansel and Gretel*, directing and starring in the shows (and making sure to give her brother the worst possible parts). Despite being raised in a family of attorneys who encouraged her to pursue that path and get a "real job," Chapin loved performing.

So she went to Vassar College, a liberal arts school in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., with her heart and mind set on becoming an actress. But during her freshman year, legendary actress and acting coach Jean Arthur encouraged her to watch another, more senior Vassar student perform, to give Chapin a measuring stick for her own talent and dedication to the craft. "I remember this student came out on the stage and performed Joan of Arc's soliloquy from George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, and she completely blew me away," Chapin recalls. "I started doubting my own abilities at that point. I had Jean Arthur's

voice in my head, saying, 'You've got to be just like this other girl.'"

That other girl was an aspiring actress named Meryl Streep.

### LEGAL EASE

Chapin switched gears, transferring to the University of Pennsylvania to pursue sociology and education. But after graduating, she still felt unsure about what kind of career she wanted. She took her LSATs to get accepted into law school, and she ended up pursuing that field. "When I graduated from law school in the 1970s, my class was about 5 percent women, and I was the first woman to clerk for the chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court," Chapin recalls. "Now I think the University of Pennsylvania Law School has more women enrolled than men, which blows my mind."

Chapin, who has lived most of her adult life in Pennington,





I've played a therapist, and I've been a murderer. I've been killed, and I've been a little bit crazy. I've even been a ghost. Acting is like being a kid again.

N.J., says she discovered through those early experiences in the legal profession that so many outcomes are decided less by guilt or innocence than by procedure. For example, even in murder cases, she says, the determining factor that decided the outcome was often tainted evidence. "It wasn't whether the person was guilty or innocent, and that really turned me off," Chapin recalls. "I don't have an alternative to our justice system, and there are still so many problems with it."

She found a home in corporate law, and for 6 years she worked on Wall Street, despite the fact that it was dominated by men. But after she had the first of her four children, the pace of corporate Wall Street became too rigorous. Chapin

went to work for Celanese Corporation, an international, publicly traded chemical and specialty-materials company where she stayed for nearly a quarter century, continuing to move up the ladder until she eventually became deputy general counsel and chief compliance officer. Her career as an attorney—even now—is a great source of pride. "I practiced as Celanese's chief finance and securities lawyer and made my way up. I had a very good run as a lawyer," Chapin says.

During her three decades as an attorney, Chapin let herself indulge for just the briefest of moments in the passion she had boxed up and put away in her late teens.



Ornstein has taught actors like Sam Rockwell (*Moon*, *Iron Man 2*) and Helen Slater (*Supergirl*, *The Legend of Billie Jean*).

In Ornstein's workshop, Chapin found the freedom to stretch her wings as an actress in a way she'd never been able to before—either because the pressure to succeed had been suffocating or the competition had been overwhelming. “It just felt so good—so open—it kind of loosened all the juices,” Chapin says. “It was very freeing.

It took me out of my brain and made me a



Chapin in Bruce Ornstein's 2010 acting workshop at Columbia University.



During her 3-month maternity leave with her son, Ben, she was in a local production of *Music Man* at Washington Crossing Historic Park. “That light in me that wanted to act came out that day, but otherwise I didn't give it a thought,” she says. “I had this thing in the back of my mind that was saying: *You really want to act. You really want to go back and finish what you didn't complete.*”

### COSTUME CHANGE

After what would be considered by any metric to be a successful law career, Chapin retired in 2010. But she still needed an answer to the question that had eluded her since college: Could she succeed in acting? She participated in a workshop with Bruce Ornstein, known for his appearances in *Saturday Night Fever* and *The Great Wallendas*. As an adjunct professor in Columbia University's MFA Film Program,

more reactive person—it opened up emotions.”

But even after finding her voice, Chapin still had doubts about her ability to make it as an actress.

“I told [Ornstein] I didn't think I could do it. I couldn't remember the lines. I didn't know if I could be as loose as I had to be. But he wouldn't hear of it,” Chapin recalls. “He immediately wanted me to get headshots and write a résumé. So I did, and I tried out for student films, and I started getting parts right away.”

And with that, Chapin launched herself full speed into a second career as a working actress. Within 3 years, Chapin has performed in more than 60 productions on stage (*The Vagina Monologues*), in film (*The Touchstone*), on TV (*Celebrity Ghost Stories*, *Monsters Inside Me*), and in commercials (HP,

Kodak, Walmart), and she became a working actress. To date, Chapin has almost 80 credits under her belt.

In September, Chapin filmed several Web series, playing a Jewish mother from Brooklyn in one and a Midwestern mom in another. “I’ve played a therapist, and I’ve been a murderer. I’ve been killed, and I’ve been a little crazy. I’ve even been a ghost,” Chapin says. “Acting is like being a kid again.”

Acting has also been a good influence on Chapin as a person, she says. The freer she becomes in her acting life, the less she cares about what other people think—and that’s a



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#### ROLE PLAY

From left, in various roles, Chapin has played a therapist, a judge, an East Side society lady (bottom), and, most recently, Alexandra Levy in *Sangre Negra*, a telenovela-style series set in Los Angeles.

liberating feeling. “I think I’m much more open to humanity in general,” she says. “I think as a lawyer, maybe I didn’t listen so well. Acting has helped me become more open-minded, and a better listener.”

While she’s loving the chance to test her limits as an actress, she never could have predicted she’d be here at this point in her life. “I did something at the Broadway Comedy Club, and I ended up sitting on Francis Ford Coppola’s lap. He was in the audience, and he invited me over. If I had a crystal ball, I wouldn’t have believed what I was seeing. At this point it’s nice, because everything is unexpected,” Chapin says. “There’s a lot to learn, but I like this ride, and I’m going to keep at it.”

## MIND THE GAP



Hollywood is well known for its gender-based wage discrepancy, but are we finally headed in the right direction?

In 2015, Oscar-winning actresses like Jennifer Lawrence fought publicly to be on equal financial footing with their male counterparts. It was a reaction to the clear pay discrepancy—just 4 actresses made more than \$20 million, while 21 actors surpassed that mark.

“Jeremy Renner, Christian Bale, and Bradley Cooper all fought and succeeded in negotiating powerful deals for themselves,” said Lawrence. “If anything, I’m sure they were commended for being fierce and tactical, while I was busy worrying about coming across as a brat and not getting my fair share.”

However, at first glance, it would seem like the situation is starting to improve, especially on television. *Forbes* reported in September that *Modern Family*’s Sofia Vergara is the highest-paid TV actress for the fifth year in a row, having raked in \$43 million from June 2015 to June 2016. That’s more than any other TV actor made, which seems like a giant step. However, most of her earnings are for endorsement deals, including Head &

Shoulders shampoo and a furniture line. According to *Forbes*, “The 15 highest-paid female stars of the small screen made a combined \$208.5 million between June 2015 and June 2016—\$43.5 more than last year’s combined total of \$165 million.” But they attribute that jump to some lucrative new endorsement deals (like Vergara’s with the Ninja Coffee Bar and Julia Louis-Dreyfus’s with Old Navy).

Chapin says as an attorney and an actress, she’s aware that the pay discrepancy exists. She does her best to take on projects that are written and directed by women, she says. “I do encourage women to write their own pieces and direct, and I’m getting more women directors, which is good,” Chapin says, pointing to a film she’s working on this fall called *Hedda Needs Help*, which is written by and stars Swedish actress Malin Barr and is directed by comedic actress Lisa Baron, and was partially funded via Kickstarter. “I was impressed by the way they went after it, and I like the fact that they have this feminist attitude,” says Chapin.