

Ars Longa, Vita Brevis

Ars Longa, Vita Brevis. If I remember my three years of Latin, it means "Hire the tall bum, life is short." Words to live by.

Work, for most of us on this planet, involves trading time for money. When we are young, we have lots of time and not so much money. When we grow older, we may not have significantly more money, but we have significantly less time. The practical result of this for actors and stage managers is that as we grow older, we become a little pickier about the jobs we put ourselves up for or accept.

As I have written before ("The Five C's"), it is not solely the money that we trade our time for. There are many reasons besides money to take a job -- or not to take a job. (I knew an actor who auditioned for and then turned down three different LORT jobs in the space of a year to stay in town and work on a romantic relationship with a significant other.)

If you want to be near a loved one -- whether potential spouse, aging parent or ailing relative -- investigate the theatres in that area and their seasons. Are there any roles/job possibilities that fit you like a glove? How about job possibilities that might fit with a little dieting and a pair of Spanx?

Even if you are not changing locales to follow your heart, I encourage you to become, if not pickier, at least more proactive about potential work. I just read a quote of Stephen Spielberg saying "This [the USC Shoah Foundation, interviewing 52,000 survivors of the Holocaust and genocides in Nanjing and Rwanda] is something I was put on this earth to do." I encourage you to ask yourself, "What was I put on this earth to do?" The answer may well be "To entertain," "To act," "To stage-manage," "To tell a story."

I encourage you to go further. Be specific. What story do you want to tell? What are your dream roles? Your dream directors? Your dream theaters? Set yourself in motion towards those goals: see what your dream theater is doing; see what your dream director is directing; see where your dream role/play is being done. As Thoreau advocated, advance confidently in the direction of your dreams.

A corollary to this falls under the rubric of "Ars Brevis, Vita Longa." Acting onstage, no matter how successful we are, will take up only a small percentage of our lives -- and that's okay (see my "Mosaic" column.) The challenge is to fill that non-acting, non-stage-managing time in ways that fill our heart and soul as well as our pocketbook. What else are you put on this earth to do?

Maybe it's writing, maybe it's directing. Maybe it is painting or pottery or jewelry or some other sort of artcraft. Maybe it is volunteer work or charity work. (I am always blown away by the time and effort that people put into BC/EFA fundraising.) For me, being your AEA President is part of that answer. I take great pride and pleasure in serving you the members, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so. (If you appreciate what I have done with that opportunity, please drop a line of thanks to my wife at equityfirstlady@gmail.com, since my Equity service inevitably comes out of the time we might spend together.)

I hope that the Art in your Life is both very fulfilling and very long; and I hope, whether your Ars is Brevis or Longa, that your Vita is Longa. But since none of us knows how long we have, I encourage you to find work -- onstage or off -- that you love. And no matter how long you live, take comfort in the fact that the Equity-League Pension Fund -- which is currently funded at a phenomenal 119% -- will be there for you.