



## **Don't give up your night job. A foreword by Megan Spencer**

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*"Art takes whatever life is and makes it better" - a punk artist in 'DIY Or DIE'.*

I need to make art - one way or another. It's how I breathe, make sense of the world, feel vital within it. Having a conversation with an audience – however big or small – through art, is awesome and sacred and true.

But when it gets close to the wire and the arse is hanging out of my pants for the umpteenth time – oh and it does! - it's not unusual for me to have *that* conversation with myself (again). That little annoying Peter Cook-devil from *Bedazzled* taps me on the shoulder and starts:

*"So, here you are again. Broke. Not sure where your next red cent is coming from let alone how you're going to pay the rent. You don't have enough money to ring your Mum back on your mobile 'cos you're out of credit. You can't work in an office. Can't do the full-time job thing. You're not happy unless you're doing something you love. You're so freakin' difficult. You're so freakin' different to everyone else. It's all about you, you, you! What's the problem? Seriously - what's wrong with you?!"*

And sitting in serious contemplation for a moment which could last either forever or a nanosecond (depending on whether I've remembered the Buddhist tenet, 'self doubt is the height of arrogance'), the answer is always the same: *nothing*. There's nothing wrong with me, actually. This is just the way it is for *me*.

It's a great place to be and get to: to accept and acknowledge that you are one of these people, - and there are many - who are just wired a little differently. (Not that I'm conceited enough to define myself away from the mainstream, mind. There are plenty of people with lives just like mine who dwell within the centre of our culture.) In the end it's just a question of priorities.

Mostly us 'creative types' possess a deep sense of awareness and/or a belief system that holds dear 'doing what you love' - that doing 'what you love' is fundamental to being happy. And by hook or by crook we'll find a way to do it. Would we ask an elite footballer why he plays football? Why he's spent years eschewing late night fun and and imbibing for early morning training sessions and all that comes with sacrifice? No we wouldn't - we'd just 'get it', wouldn't we Peter Cook he-devil?! It's no different for people who make stuff; we make sacrifices others don't because we love what we do and it gives our life meaning. Art is a discipline too.

Making art can be an endurance test. It can turn people into monsters as well - individuals who are 'difficult' to be around. Those who "put everything they have into making their work and have nothing left for relationships," as someone once so succinctly put it to me. Those arduous single-minded individuals with a whopping sense of entitlement. (They tend to moan a lot.) It *can* be easy to lose perspective, especially watching others around you rapidly 'climb the ladder to success' while you're still pining for your first 'big break'. (Oh please.)

Not everyone's experience of being an artist is the same but you will hear familiar stories across the oval, be it in filmmaking, painting, writing, music, photography, sculpture, jewellery-making, theatre... Whatever the endeavour, struggle does seem to go hand-in-hand with the pursuit of art as an occupation. The trick is:

a) To not let it kill you; b) To not let it make you so bitter and twisted that you become impossible to be around (or fail to notice a mental illness manifesting), and c) To not become so ruthless that you'd tread on the head of your best friend with steel caps to get to that hallowed moment in the sun.

Balance, surrender, the occasional epiphany - that'll keep you on track. And the realisation that the journey *is* the destination. The joy was in the process all along - surprise!

Once I made a documentary that took 12 years. It was the biggest endurance test of my life. I'm still recovering from it: warming down tired, sore muscles and bones, hoping the numbness from that sustained agony will completely disappear soon...

When the film finally came out I was managing to make a pretty good living from being a full-time broadcaster (in part why it took so long to finish: my paid work - ie 'day job' - kept getting in the way of my 'unpaid' work, my 'night job'.) I was lucky enough to have a fair bit of media interest in the film but it still took a loss at the box office.



After the mandatory first question - *'Why did it take so long to make?'* - without fail the follow up would be, *'How did you keep going for so long?'*

The second question was the most interesting and one that took a bit of contemplation before answering. Because being poor is not fun. Being rejected by one funding body/distributor/producer/commissioning editor/critic/investor after another - such as it is in the welfare state of Australian film - that's not much fun either. And patience sometimes isn't the great virtue it's cracked up to be.

It hit me in the middle of the first interview, the answer to "how": making art was my 'night job'. Not a "hobby" - my NIGHT JOB. Still is. It's the job that I choose to do that gives the rest of my life some kind of connection to everything else. It gives me pleasure. It's how I can communicate with my culture. And it's fun - well, eventually it is! All that important stuff...

*"Art takes whatever life is and makes it better."* Yep.

Point is, you do it - make - because that's what you *do*. It's part of your identity. There is no alternative. That's just what you *do* - and if you can't 'do what you love' then you try and 'love what you do' - so long as it keeps you doing *what you love!*

Some people make babies, others make money, houses, bathrooms, patios, stuff in their sheds... Some people channel their energy/focus/attention into playing sport, gaming, drinking, driving fast cars, clubbing.. And some people make art. Or craft. Point is, they 'make'. (None of this is mutually exclusive either).

Anyway I got it, finally, after struggling for a long time. Everything made perfect sense from that moment forward.

[Lari Gadza](#) 'gets it': she's made an entire book about the culture and lives of 'night jobbers' - people whose priority it is to keep making art, always, sometimes at a cost that isn't always easy or comfortable.

She's drawn to - and inspired by - people who 'make'. People who pursue a passion or a creative path without being promised instant remuneration nor a career in return. She found this 'night job' community all over the world and right here in our back yard. Write it on the back of a toilet door in fat text: *'Night jobbers' are everywhere!* It's a comforting thought.

Lari might also be one of them herself. A good thing. Anyone who tells you great photography must be 'objective' - whatever that means - is mistaken. That could be why her photographs are so insightful, poetic and understanding. An insider looking further inwards. 'Compassion' and 'seeing things clearly'; the two elements necessary for authentic documentation. She has both.

She's also a photographer who understands the grace of observation. Thankfully you won't find Lari telling you how to think about what you see within the pages of this book. Her images allow the viewer space to observe the people in her pictures in the same way she did - in that moment, for the first time and with wonder at what their lives might be like under such circumstances. With 'fresh eyes' or 'beginners mind' as the Buddhists might have it.

She also gives us permission to ask a few questions and maybe to even try and answer them for ourselves, if we look hard enough.

*Some Come From The Sea* is a poetic inquiry into what such a life might be like for those who have chosen this particular path and live among us. They are not 'freaks', 'dissidents', 'slackers', 'bludgers' or very different to anyone else in our community. (Though they may be circus folk, and who doesn't love the circus?)

They work, live in houses, have families, drive cars and have dreams, same as everyone else. Lari has documented all of this in the pages of this book: the struggle, the joy, the environment, the passion and the quiet moments in and from which their music and art is created.

They have also become a community by virtue of being in this photo essay. The musicians and poets you'll meet in *Some Come From The Sea* may not know each other or be close geographically, yet they are 'like minded', sharing experiences, ideologies, philosophies and contexts across the miles and seas between them.

It's *good* for us to see others 'as they truly are'. It's *good* for us to hold others' lives up to the light. It's *good* for us to empathise with, learn from, listen to and feel 'the lives of others'.

Understanding who makes art in our culture is a way of understanding why art is important to *any* culture.

Because without it, we're nothing.

- Megan Spencer, 2010



Photo: 'Kira Kira, Vogar, Iceland' by [Lari Gadza](#)