

GIRL AT PLAY

SHE'S BUSINESS. SHE'S CREATIVE. SHE'S BONAFIDE!

**Interview for: All Things Girl Magazine
Fall 2006**

We know you're one busy girl. Tell us a little bit about the projects you currently have going on.

In the Spring of 2006, I decided that I wasn't entirely satisfied with where I was creatively or professionally. It was then I decided to stop taking on new projects and instead, have a quiet summer to figure out what my next move would be.

But reality stepped in and I've been busier in the past couple of months of "not working" than I have been in the past year. That's because I'm in the midst of restructuring my company. I'm decided what it means to actually have your own business, what mine is going to be about, what my mission statement is, who I need to hire to make it work and what projects I will do.

I am also networking a lot right now which is very new for me and something I always thought was "dirty." But I realized that I love connecting with people and there's a way to do that in a genuine fashion and it doesn't always have to be business related. Opening up to new friends I've discovered how to be more financially viable. Talking with my hair dresser I learned more about advertising. Talking with a man on the plane I had two new ideas for sites and so forth. I'm seeking answers to questions I didn't know I had because I'm taking the time to listen now and that's been one of the most valuable things. I love having coffee every day with new people – keeps me busy and working!

In August I'm driving across Canada for three weeks for the last of my travel assignments this year. That's taken up a lot of time in preparation and obviously, will take up a lot of time in August. Because of this, I've not been able to jump into ideas as quickly as I'd like but I'm learning that this is a good thing. For the first time I'm letting things brew and mix in my brain without feeling like I must do something. Being held back is actually helping me move forward.

So, without being able (or wanting to) take on any new projects, I'm working on smaller things that I can do in-between. Things such as Girls Guide to City Life (<http://girlsguidetocitylife.com>) which I just redid and am now focusing on advertising. I'm also working on launching a new lifestyle site Hygge House (<http://hyggehouse.com>) in the fall, so I've slowly been working on that. I've also been working on my own company's site GirlatPlay.com and a few other little things here and there like incorporating, financials, hiring etc.

I'm also taking a lot of time to enjoy life right now, which perhaps sounds cliché, but it's needed. I became so busy – too busy to call people, to go to the beach, to walk down a street, to sit and have a coffee. Too busy for my own brain to ever rest. So now I take weekends off, I still go to Premieres and screenings, I'm connecting way more with people and I'm sitting at the beach a lot more often with an iced latte in hand. I believe that by working hard during the week, I can take guilt-free time off on the weekends. It's needed. Without a break I'd burn out.

If you put a lot of effort into being overweight, you will be overweight. If you put a lot of effort into complaining about your current life, you will remain in your current life. However, if you put a lot of effort into moving forward and taking care of things you can take care of right now, you will move forward - even if it's little steps done by even smaller movements.

If you want to have a different life but can't jump into it completely right now, do something - even if it's as simple as changing an old belief or picking up a pen to right down your company name. It's the act of believing in your dreams and then acting on them that will manifest more and more. Just thinking about it, dreaming about it, wishing for it, won't make anything happen. You must do something and keep doing something.

In order to grasp opportunity, one has to be prepared. So each day I do little by little - even if I don't fully understand why.

Tell us more about the Girls Guide and how have you achieved success with it?

Like most great things, Girls Guide was born out of selfish necessity. As a recent transplant to Los Angeles, I was looking for information on what to do, where to eat, and where to shop. I didn't have a favourite cafe or a place to get shampoo so I searched the Internet for the info. However, all I could find was sites that seemed like they were written by marketing pro's or by companies. Most travel sites seemed really impersonal and I couldn't tell if they really liked a place or wrote something nice because they got a free dinner.

I decided that there had to be other people who wanted the same info delivered in the same manner as I did. This led me to create Girls Guide to Los Angeles to feel that need. And oh, there was a need!

The site became instantly popular, so much so that I began to receive hundreds of emails a day saying how "such and such" a city needed this kind of site. The entrepreneur in me seized the moment and created Girls Guide to City Life to cover the globe. The hardest part was hiring the travel writers. There were thousands of applicants to choose from but I knew that in order for the site to be successful, I had to have quality people who were like me - interested in their

cities, passionate about writing and life, and had a certain sense of authority so that others would listen to what they had to say. I hired the best, which is why the site works so well - the women on it make it great.

Because of the great writing, the great style and the right information, the site easily became popular. We receive over 200,000 hits each day, which is great. So we're successful with attention from readers to media but where we haven't had success is on the financial front. I didn't create the site with the idea to make money from it - it was just another fun project. But after awhile I realised we work hard and can't keep working for free. So that made me rethink the financial card to it and have plans to have it become a revenue site in Fall 2006.

What I love about this site is that it shows that just because something's already been done, you can still achieve success by finding what's missing from what's already out there and by putting your own spin on it.

You're probably best known on the net for <http://another.girlatplay.com/> . What's going on with that site, and how do you feel it contributed to the creative industry?

Actually, that's probably the site I'm least known for. The only part I've played in it was in the introduction – the stars of the site are the artists that are profiled on the site. People mostly know me through my personal and business site. Another Girl at Play seems to be it's own entity and it's been thriving on it's own since 2002.

The site is actually in the process of a major transformation that will be finished in the fall of 2006. Most profiles currently focus on creative women – which is great – but I believe we need more examples of different kinds of business to be represented. I believe women need to be creative and smart businesswomen and that the two can co-exist peacefully. However, seldom do you hear artists talk about money or businesswomen talk about paint. But there are those of us out there who do both such as small shop owners, more entrepreneurs and so forth.

Great point. There are a lot of creatives out there that are hard-core businesswomen.

Also, there will be a new advertising network designed specifically for small women-owned businesses and small artists. The goal of the site has never been to make money but to help encourage women to make money. However, the site does require money to run and I had to get creative about how to do that without alienating the readers and the spirit of the site.

Because the site is about artists supporting artists, I came up with the idea to offer very low, affordable advertising to small artists and businesswomen – the

kind who read and love the site. I think that as businesswomen, we must do things to make us feel "businessy" or "real." This is especially important for women who want to take it to the next level. It's one thing to design on your off time in your own home but to take a step which says "I'm now ready for others to come and buy!" is huge! By offering a way for these women to design their own small ad and place it on a high-profile, high-traffic site is a bold statement. Especially since Another Girl at Play attracts people looking for artists and small products. I believe offering advertising in this way is not only an excellent way to keep the site up to keep helping other women make their businesses a success. Advertising in this way keeps the spirit of "artists helping artists" alive which is why I'm so excited about launching it this fall.

What else is going on with the site?

There's been other changes that have happened and more changes that will come. The site is always evolving based on feedback or things I've learned. But even though I created the site, make the changes and keep it going I don't feel like it's my site. I believe it belongs to everyone – the artists on it and those who come to read it. The success that it has isn't because of me but because of those who have shared their story and because of those who did something with those stories.

It's extremely satisfying when I can come up with idea that hasn't just made someone feel good, but actually changes their life – which is what Another Girl at Play has done for thousands of people around the world. I literally receive hundreds of emails a day from women who have started their own business and that's really encouraging to me – especially since I've never given out steps to run a business or offered advice on what to do. Everything is very generic so that someone can go to the site and take something from it – whatever that is. Removing myself from it as much as possible makes other people feel more possible and that is why the site and those who read it are a success.

With Another Girl at Play, I feel like I was just the catalyst by putting together the idea. It's successful because women supporting women, women running business, and women encouraging growth is just successful all on it's own.

You left your career to write. Are you still doing that or are you more fascinated by other endeavours?

In the past year, I've done very little freelance writing and, when asked what it is I am, I haven't been saying 'Writer.' Initially, I thought I left my career to write but what I really did was leave it to become myself, be creative and run my own company. Writing was what initiated it all for me - it was safe, easy, and understandable.

But after a couple of years it just simply wasn't enough or even 100% enjoyable. I'm not a query writing type girl. I don't enjoy spending hours in front of a computer with Word open. And coming up with ideas about writing all the time became less and less fun. I also felt isolated and lonely – something I didn't think would happen when I was stuck in a cubicle surrounded by a hundred people in an office. At first it was really hard for me to admit that writing full-time wasn't making me happy anymore since this is what I'd become known for. It's hard to leave success. But I realized that if I remained unhappy as a creative person because I was afraid to change and move forward than I was no better than when I remained an unhappy corporate girl for the same reason. So once again I had to motivate myself to change, move forward and try new things.

My first challenge outside of writing was volunteering as a Docent at a prominent art gallery. When I applied for the position the only art background I had was two failed art classes in high school. But I was passionate about art and helping others get excited that I got the job. After passing the Docent Training program I had more confidence to try things I once assumed I'd fail at and kept looking for other avenues I might want to walk down.

Eventually I began to do more work with others - mostly in Hollywood. I became a New Media consultant to several agencies, worked for a top producer in development and worked on scripts and acquisitions for a few more. I also became a stand in on several movie sets which was so much fun and had nothing to with writing – just a lot of standing! My photography really took off and I landed some plum assignments as well as two European Gallery showings. The only writing I've done in the past year has been travel related for magazines, newspapers and my own travel site, Girls Guide to City Life (<http://girlsguidetocitylife.com>).

Because I am a creative person, I find myself drawn to so many things and I often have to stop myself from trying them all. I think that although it's natural to start out somewhere and end up somewhere different, it's not really accepted. A lot of people think that if you say you're going to do X that you must do X for the rest of your life or you've failed. I think if I had to do X for the rest of my life I'd have failed, especially when there's more I wanted to do.

I believe for personal and professional success you must push your own boundaries, even if it's uncomfortable, scary or seemingly impossible. Life isn't a test that you just study for, pass and then revel in that for the rest of your life. It's about learning and changing constantly – sometimes it's a good change and sometimes it doesn't work out. But you always end up better having tried something.

What advice do you have for women who want to venture to the creative side?

I'm always very careful about advice because I generally don't believe in it. I think advice is what we seek when we already know the answer and just want confirmation. We want someone to tell us what to do, that our hearts are right and our ideas aren't crazy. We want validation for our dreams.

Often people who are beginning a creative career want to be able to cling to something that has been successful for others. It's why so many creative self-help books are sold. The Artists Way, for example, lays down the law for getting creative. It tells you what to do every day, it tells you how to think, to be. Other books tell you what markers to use or how to wear a boa properly. Better yet, other books tell you how to think each and every minute to guarantee you that success you so badly want.

So what do you think the problems with these books are?

The problem with these books and most self-help gurus is that they don't allow you to be you. They tell you how to become something that might work because it maybe did for them (I say maybe because I've met a lot of these successful self-help creative writer/artist people who have lives that aren't wonderful, authentic or even joyous. They just know how to market their work; they often don't know how to live it).

I find those kinds of books really disturbing and it quite literally breaks my heart when I see creative people trying to follow the footsteps of others. Why? Because being creative means you're creative. You do things how you do them. You think outside the box. You put random things together. You do things no one else has done. You play, you think, you dream, you work your ass off to make it real. But as a creative person you don't follow the foot steps of someone else.

Every person has a unique situation and has to decide for themselves what they can and cannot do. You can read a million self-help books but still not feel right. You can read about how to be creative from the top creative people and still not pick up a pen. I truly believe only we know how we work or what will work. What saddens me is seeing creative people try to be like others and fit others routines and 'how to's'. Creative people are creative. We create how we work and what we do. But I understand this is so very, very hard in the beginning when one doesn't have confidence in being creative.

So, any advice?

So I would offer that if you want to begin something you must first believe you can do it. I don't mean just believing it in your head, but in your heart. Where you just know that you will do something and it will be OK. It might not manifest exactly but it will be OK. This is important because what you truly believe is what you manifest. If you don't believe you can really be creative, you won't. If you really don't believe you can make money at it, you won't. You have to understand

and redefine your truths and believe them. This can often be a hard process but it's crucial because no one can hand you your dream or convince you of what you can or cannot do. That's all up to you and what you're willing to believe.

The next step is to take action to make your beliefs real. People hear the word "action" and it becomes so overwhelming that they do nothing. Creative people are great at creating obstacles and problems! I used to worry about my book tour, the travel, the people, the selling. This would overwhelm me so much. The funny part is - this was before I had even written one word! I was my very own obstacle. If I could go back in time, instead of manifesting worry, I would have picked up a pen and just written something. That's the trick - doing something. However small you must do something each and every day or all you'll have is a dream in your head.

The action can be as simple as picking up a pen, reading a book on business, going to an art show, emailing someone for advice or writing out a mission statement. Whatever it is, do something. Even if you're not sure what the point is. Everything has a point. We build on little movements so just make one.

I would offer an article I wrote on this at http://www.girlatplay.com/blog/2005/11/belief_and_action.htm. It about sums it up.