

GIRL AT PLAY

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

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Alex Beauchamp doesn't like to be pigeonholed. Therefore, rather than adopting a specific professional title, she calls herself a "creative person." She writes, paints, draws, photographs and creates websites. She's working on a book and has another waiting in the wings. Through her sites she's become a bit of a web celebrity with her straightforward, honest, and elegant writing. Even with these successes, she remains humble and doesn't see what she does as unique or extraordinary.

She should. Her personal site generates 77,000 unique hits a day - and that's just one of her sites. She also runs girlatplay.com, gallery.girlatplay.com, and anywhereeverywhere.com. Her most well-known site, anothergirlatplay.com, which showcases the talents of more than 20 amazing female artists, was recently nominated for a Grrrl award at the South by Southwest Media Festival. However, she'll tell you that her success didn't blossom overnight, and she is well-acquainted with fear, despite her accomplishments.

"I don't think the fear will ever be gone," she said from her apartment in Seattle. "It can be a good thing."

Beauchamp is often asked to relate how she got to this point, although she generally shies away from giving advice.

"I try to offer my experience or things I've learned," she said, "but everyone's journey is so personal. I can't give them specific advice. They have to find a path for themselves."

The thing is, even if she doesn't want to give formal advice, she's so damn inspirational that her story becomes a sort of advice in and of itself.

Her transformation began two-and-a-half years ago. Beauchamp worked a corporate job where she was successful but unfulfilled--her creativity languished beneath her pantsuits and smart shoes. In April 2001, she set her muse free and bravely quit her job to write. Although she finally realized her dream of writing, she quickly saw it was going to be the hardest and scariest decision of her life.

"Working for yourself is absolutely different than working for someone else," she said. "I worked more hours than before and put more pressure on myself than anyone else ever had. I kept thinking, 'I call myself a girl at play when I should call myself a girl at crappy, irritating work.'"

On top of that, she struggled with explaining her decision. She was terrified to tell others what she wanted because it felt "silly and selfish." Images of teasing from former co-workers, disapproval from her peers and disappointment from her parents plagued her thoughts.

"When I settled into my corporate job, I could hear [my parents] say, 'finally we don't have to worry about Alex.' I was always the flighty one," she said. Yet, she decided to forge ahead with her decision, in spite of these worries.

On her first day of writing full-time, she felt lost, and realized right away that working at home is not like starting a traditional job where the boss gives a tour of the building, points out the restrooms, and everyone goes out for a welcoming lunch.

"I found myself just sitting at my desk going, 'what the hell do I do now?'"
Beauchamp said. "When we work for ourselves, we have no markers, we don't get promotions, we don't 'move up,' so it's hard to see where the steps are. We can only see them in hindsight."

She wants other creative people who follow their dreams to know that having these feelings is normal. In watching several of her friends pursue creative careers, Beauchamp has noticed that the learning curve is the same for everyone.

"A lot of people who talk about dreams see it as easy," she said. "Then they feel badly when they struggle. But everyone struggles."

She doesn't want to see anyone abandon her dreams because following them feels too difficult. The difficulty is half the fun, she said, and it doesn't end once the "getting started" hurdle is cleared.

The next block Beauchamp faced was feeling as though she had to do everything at once. Many creative people struggle with an overwhelming urge to experience everything and accomplish everything immediately, she said, but this is just not possible.

"I learned to not be in such a rush, and chill out," she said. "When I rushed so much, I let a lot of enjoyment pass me by."

Relaxing with a good book, drinking a pot of tea, lying in the bath, going for a walk or even escaping on vacation are activities Beauchamp recommends every creative soul engage in to maintain sanity. Finding a role model can help, too. Beauchamp finds her inspiration in following the careers of the *Another Girl at Play* artists, and in talking with artist Keri Smith, whom she admires greatly.

"Keri draws people in because everything she does and says is what she believes," says Beauchamp, who became especially enamored with Smith when she learned that Smith did little to promote her first book, *Living Out Loud*. "She made a conscious decision not to get more publicity and money because she just wanted to create. From that I learned you can be authentic and real and successful."

Beauchamp strives to live an authentic life herself, and so far has been successful. Next up on her "to-do list"--getting her book published and moving to France, all the while keeping in mind that dedication to living the life of a creative person presents both challenges and amazing rewards.