

On weathering the highs and th

lows



Actor Jewel Staite discusses keeping sane during busy and quiet times, staying creative, and embracing comfort.

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As told to Kailey and Sam Spear, 3316 words.

Tags: [Film](#), [Success](#), [Family](#), [Focus](#), [Collaboration](#), [Mental health](#), [Identity](#).

Was there something that you remember, from when you were young, that made you want to be an actor?

I don't know if I had a specific *something* that happened. I was so young. I was five when I was first approached, and it was a by-accident-thing in a mall with my mom. So, it was a weird thing that found me. Suddenly, we were launched into this lifestyle that we didn't know very much about.

Then, I just kept booking work. I really did fall into it. The years went on, and I grew up, and I kept booking work, which was great! When I was going through puberty, I booked roles of girls who were also going through puberty. I was lucky enough that the roles found me in whatever stage I was in. So yeah, now I'm 42, still doing it, you guys. [*laughs*]

Was there a time when you thought, "This is actually something that I want to do," rather than just, "This is just something that I do"?

Yeah. I had points where I thought I didn't want to do it. You go through stages, of course, in your life as you're growing up and trying to figure out who you are, what you want to be, and all of that.

I would go through points where I would say, "I don't think this is for me. Maybe I want to do something else." And then, when I made that decision, and started to branch away from it, I realized how much I wanted to do it. I would turn around and go right back to it.

It's a thing I was meant to do, for whatever reason. And a thing I feel very comfortable doing. I always say, "I'm more comfortable on a set than I am anywhere else." I think it's because it's always been a part of my life, and it feels like home to me.

Looking back, do you think there were any pivotal moments in your career that shaped your journey as an actor?

Oh, yeah. I definitely had some jobs that were bigger than others, that shifted the trajectory a little bit, or propelled me forward a lot faster.

The first one was a show I did when I was 12. It was my first series lead, and it was for Nickelodeon. That was my first foray into *Teen Beat Magazine* and *Tiger Beat* and all of that. That was a weird overnight thing that happened, where my parents were like, "Whoa. This is different." I became one of those teen girls in the magazines next to whoever-at-the-time, [Devon Sawa](#) or whatever. Our parents were friends. So we were both going

through this weird journey. A bunch of us kids, at that time, we were all on this similar journey.

After that, it was another Disney show I did, when I was 14, called Flash Forward. That propelled me a little bit further. I would get recognized on the street. Which, as a 14-year-old, is a strange thing. But I remember that being a very clear moment of going, "Whoa. This is odd. Something has happened here." And then, when I was 19, I booked Firefly and things got even bigger.

That became the point where I didn't have to audition as much. I started getting offers for things, which was lovely. I was able to relax into a different phase of my career where I didn't have to chase things as hard.

So yeah, there've definitely been little hits along the way that have furthered my success, I guess. It's like, a cyclical thing. Every few years, something else comes along, and it's a new path into something else.

What makes an ideal working environment for you?

Well, to have the perfect recipe, you need to have really great writing, really great creatives behind the project, people who are kind and collaborative and are excited and share your enthusiasm, and also give you a little bit of freedom in the role.

And working with other actors who have a similar mentality to you. People who don't take themselves too seriously. But, at the same time, people who have a really strong work ethic and are focused on things like, being on time, and being courteous, and respecting everybody who's a part of the crew, and understanding that it's a group effort.

If you have all of those things, and all of those people around you, it is a beautiful thing. It makes me feel like I want to get up in the morning and run to work. It's very exciting.

Lovely!

But it doesn't always happen. [laughs]

Is there something that you do specifically to try and set the tone of the kind of set that you want to work on?

Yeah. I mean, I go in with a lot of positivity. I make it known that I enjoy having a relaxed environment. I approach it with a sense of fun. I mean, I'm always prepared, but I want to have a good time. That starts to trickle down a little bit, I've found.

And also just gratitude, feeling really grateful for the job that you have.

I've said, "I've had a lot of hits, but I've had a lot of misses too [laughs]." So I know what it feels like to lose the job. I know what it feels like to have a show prematurely canceled and feeling really low again. And feeling like you have to work hard at finding the next thing again.

So I appreciate the moments I have. I appreciate the little successes and really soak it in. I'm probably very annoying, all the times I say on set, "Isn't this the best, you guys? Wow. Aren't we so lucky?"

Everyone's exhausted and I'm like, "Luck is going to come to an end. It has an end. You have to enjoy it while you have it because, trust me, it won't last forever."

It's so important to take that time to appreciate and celebrate.

It is! It is! I've seen a few actors, usually young actors, who maybe are in the middle of a big success, and they haven't had that fall yet, that's coming...

I don't care who you are. It's happening to you! It will happen. This business is so feast-or-famine. One day you're the hot thing, and the next day, someone else is the hot thing and they're not considering you anymore. You need to get used to these rises and falls. I see some of these kids who haven't hit the fall yet, and I'm like, "Oof. That's going to hurt so bad. Man, I feel so bad for you. It's going to sting. You're going to the Met Ball this year, but you're not going next year, I promise."

You recently wrapped on season four of *Family Law*. In that series you were the "number one," the lead. Did you find any different responsibility being in that role on that show?

Definitely! This was the first big job I took after having my kid, who's eight now. When I started doing *Family [Law]*, he was four.

Before that, I was really reluctant to spend any time away from him. I knew going away to do a job was not the thing. It had to be something local. So I was very annoying with my team and basically said, "Whatever it is, it has to be [in Vancouver], and the hours have to be good."

My list, my criteria, was really long. And I had to feel okay about that because being a mom, and being present for him, was more important than anything else. Especially when he was that little.

Now [he's older], he doesn't really care very much. As long as he has his Minecraft, he is like, "Whatever, Mom. You do what you need to do." [laughs]

So I finally got [the ideal project], and then it became this lesson in balancing and trying to figure out how to be this person on set who is a leader, who is always on, who is giving 110 percent, and then come home and also give 110 percent at home. It's not sustainable, by the way. [laughs] It's impossible to do.

So... season one [of *Family Law*] was all about that...Then season two, I was like, "Well. Maybe I can be really, really good at my job and then just not give enough at home. Or I can give my all at home, and then my job will suffer, but that's okay... Maybe I can just figure it out and trade off as we go..." Then also, that was not the answer.

Then [in] season three, I started to give myself more grace and more space. And listen to what I needed energy-wise and be unapologetic about it.

That became a lesson in saying no to things that I didn't have the energy for. Whether it was things at home, like the play-date or whatever the heck it was, like Playland on the weekend, I'm like, "I simply am too tired. I cannot do that."

Or it became things at work where I was like, "Guys, I need more time off. I can't be in all day, every day. I need a couple of days a month where I have a lighter day, or even a day off," which really was unheard of at the beginning. I just didn't get days off.

So I learned to ask for what I needed. That made season four great! It made it really easy. It took me four years, but I found it! I found the balance.

All of that happened, but the part on set that became a role I didn't really expect to have, was just the exchange of energy. When you're there a lot-I'm there most of the day, all day, every day-you get guest stars coming and going. A guest star will come in, and they'll spend a couple hours there, do a scene or two, and then they'll leave. And then another guest star will come in, they'll do a couple scenes, and leave. Every time someone comes in, you have to be the one to welcome them. It's you.

Luckily, I have a cast who has the same opinion and they are also very welcoming and wonderful. So they help in that department for sure. But I've been a guest star. It's hard. To be honest, it sucks! I don't love doing guest stars. You're the new kid on the block. You don't know a soul, you don't know where the bathroom is, you don't

know where craft service is, you don't know anything. And then they're like, "Okay. Go. Action," and you're supposed to deliver. Essentially, deliver well, and all eyes are on you.

It's very, very nerve wracking. So it was always really important to me, from the beginning of starting *Family Law*, to be welcoming to the guest stars.

In order to do that, it takes a lot of energy. So the exhaustion at the end was real for sure. I felt it in my absolute bones. I learned to prioritize rest and sleep whenever I could get it. And once I figured that out, it was fine. But being a leader on a show is no joke. It's a grind.

A lot of people come to you with their problems. They want you to be their voice, which is totally fine. I'm happy to do that! But there's a lot of, "Hey. I have an issue with the schedule. If you say something, they might do something about it." And you go, "Okay. I'll put that on my list." And then so-and-so's upset because someone from this department is doing this and...So you get involved in these things because people involve you in the hopes that you will help them out because part of your job is to maintain a harmonious set, to help.

So you do that on top of the acting thing, and working 12 to 14 hours a day. And then you come home and you read your kid a story. And then your husband's like, "Hey, let me tell you all about my day..." And you're like, "Oh, my God! I have nothing left in my tank!" [laughs]

It's tough, but you figure it out. And then it's over. That's the other thing... Then it's over! Then it's sad because it's over.

So it's just a mindfuck, isn't it, really? [laughs]

There are more things in the actor toolkit than people realize, right?

Right! But you can be an actor who doesn't do those things. Sure, you can be one of those actors who's super introverted. I've seen those ones too, where they want their chair away from everyone else on set. They want their own green room. They need their own space. If that's how you need to be, I totally get it. Completely understand.

I don't want to be that person, because that's not my style. I like to be social and make people have a good time. To host, to host a party. But yeah, everybody has their own process.

It's tough. So I respect those actors that are like, "Nope. Nope. Nope. I'm not taking anything else on."

What do you think are the most important things in your personal actor's toolbox?

Oh, preparation. I find if I know the lines, if I know the dialogue really, really well, then I can actually make a choice. Or two or three.

You can't do that if you're not prepared. Number one, is learning the lines. I am crazy about that! I have my sides, my scenes, with me at all times in my bag. I use paper. I find I learn better if I'm holding paper. So I'm like an old lady with a giant Mary Poppins bag on set. Everybody makes fun of me because of my "bag of wares" I call it. And a lot of it is papers.

It's very satisfying when I actually film the scene I've been learning and I can throw away the papers. I'm like, "Whoop. Done!" And the bag gets a little lighter. Until we start the next episode, of course. [laughs]

Preparation is number one. Sleep is another one. I've learned the hard way, you need sleep. You need it! Your brain needs it in order to deliver. If you have those two things in the bag, you're a few steps ahead of the game.

Being in the public eye comes with a lot of praise, but it can also come with criticism. How do you handle the

positive and the negative that comes at you?

Well, the positive's always nice, isn't it? That's a nice thing, love hearing all that stuff! The negative stuff used to bother me. I used to be triggered by it. Now I think I'm just comfortable enough in my own skin that it doesn't really faze me. I mean, most of the time people are saying negative things, they usually don't know what they're talking about, so I just laugh it off and feel sad that they're so miserable. What can you do? It's just a part of the job. You got to have a thick skin about that kind of stuff.

There are usually ebbs and flows of working as an actor. How do you deal with the slow times between projects?

I keep busy. I learned this the hard way. I used to sweat the slow times. Holy, was I so annoying to everyone around me! To my poor agent, and manager, and my poor husband, and all my friends, even! I was just annoying, because I was so concerned with what was next.

I'm a control freak, and I desperately wanted to control what was going to happen next. And you just can't. You simply can't. Especially in this business. You really do have to take it day by day because, suddenly the phone rings, and everything changes. Or it doesn't ring for a while, and you have to figure out a way to keep yourself sane during that time. For me, staying creative keeps me sane. So I needed to figure out a creative outlet.

About 15 years ago, I started a blog because I love food. I'm such a food obsessed person. I started this food blog, and I did that for a while... And then, that wasn't enough. And Charlie, my husband, was like, "You should do videos. You should film yourself cooking stuff. Because I like to watch you cook and it's funny. Why don't you just throw a camera up and do it?"

I was like, "I don't know if anyone would be interested in that." He's like, "Just give it try." So I did. Amateur kitchen. So I do a little of that on the side.

Now I've decided to take that further, so I started a [YouTube channel](#). I'm going to do more of that because it makes me happy and food is a huge passion of mine, if not my biggest passion. I love to cook. So I'm following that path and seeing where it leads. At some point I realized I could be more than just an actor.

I was also a little bit afraid to show my personality. When you're used to playing other people for most of your life, you're a little afraid to show yourself. I'm not afraid anymore. I feel like I've gained the self-esteem where I am ready to show that. So yeah, I'm just taking these different avenues, and seeing what else is out there. And I don't sweat it anymore. I don't really sweat the quiet times, as far as acting goes, because I'm busy enough. I also know what it's like to work, work, work and how much I crave quiet moments. So, when I do have a quiet moment, I really relish it and it's a beautiful thing. I feel very at peace with it.

How would you describe success as an actor? And has that idea of success changed as you've moved through your career?

Yes. Oh, yes! Success used to mean hitting the big time for me. When I was a lot younger, success meant everybody knew your name, and you could pick and choose your projects, and you had all the money in the world, and you were famous. Being famous was it, that was the end game.

And now, it's just about living a comfortable life, for me. The "comfortable life" aspect of it has become the forefront of what I want, what I'm working towards. My idea of the "perfect projects" has changed. The perfect project for me is something that keeps me at home, keeps me sleeping in my own bed every night, and seeing my family. That, to me, feels like the perfect life.

So, the whole notion of being famous has become more of a negative to me than anything else. I would rather just be comfortable. I would rather have the means to buy my mother a house, and keep her safe and happy, and give my son an amazing education, and take beautiful trips every year, and see the world, and work enough that we can maintain that lovely lifestyle...That, to me, that's success.

Jewel Staite recommends:

Fall on Your Knees by Ann-Marie MacDonald

Singer Laci Kaye Booth

Ambitious Kitchen for fool-proof insanely delicious recipes

Ragdoll cats make your life better. It's a thing.

Limoncello spritzes also make your life better.

Name

Jewel Staite

Vocation

actor

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