FROM HAPPINESS TO HELL AND FINALLY... MAGIC!

...choosing passion over stability

A CONVERSATION WITH GABRIELLE PUNCH · BY GISELLE HUDSON · 2018

Entrepreneurship is in Gabrielle's DNA. She grew up seeing a brother in photography, a dad who worked at Caroni but also did woodwork, and a mom who was a schoolteacher and did ceramics.

Creating came naturally to Gabby, so when she received a book on handmade greeting cards as a gift from her mom, she immediately started bringing each card to life, page by page, until she had made *all* the cards in the book!

In one of life's serendipitous moments, a good friend asked her to design her wedding invitations.

There is absolutely nothing that can replace the feeling you get when someone loves your work. It's more than just the thing you've made for them; it's how you make them feel. Her friend was extremely happy!

It was 1995, and Gabby gave birth to D'punchline, where she continued to design and create cards.

SEDUCED BY LEATHER

By 2008, however, she found that making and selling cards was not sustaining her, and it was time to look for a job.

Gabrielle landed a job that used her ability to see creatively, and as a photographer she started what would turn out to be an interesting and happy journey. You see, in that time Gabrielle was introduced to, and subsequently seduced by, leather.

Leather had her full attention. Intrigued and fascinated, she set off on a self-learning curriculum, watching videos on YouTube. Trial and error was the soup served daily, yet Gabrielle viewed each error as an opportunity to learn.

FROM HAPPINESS TO HELL

In 2017, Gabby's full-time job took a turn from happiness to *hell!* She knew she had the talent and skill, and so this year she took the plunge into D'punchline

full time. She chose the happiness of doing something she loved over the "security" of her job.

It wasn't scary to give up stability. As far as Gabby was concerned, she had all the things she needed: peace of mind, confidence and the unending support of her family.

MAGIC AND GRATITUDE

If I could summarize Gabby's philosophy in two words, it would be *magic* and *gratitude*. Elizabeth Gilbert's book *Big Magic* has had a huge influence on her.

"Everything happens for a reason. My second attempt at cards was a failure. My job gave me the means to pursue my passion for leather. I would work during the day and then go home and put in additional hours, fulfilling client requests. During that time I was able to build a solid client base."

Gabby's advice to anyone wanting to pursue success on their own terms is to be true to yourself. Never ignore your truth.

In the last five years she has discovered that within adversity you find your greatest strength. She has lived through it, and it is life-changing. Patience is key, with the process and with yourself. And you will almost always grow if you look for the lesson and work towards finding a solution.

BE GENTLE. HAVE PATIENCE.

Whenever she is overwhelmed or under pressure, she reminds herself that she is human.

> *"What I'm going through is temporary. I won't wallow, be consumed or dig myself into a hole. Be gentle... have patience... this will pass."*

What an example of true self-love and appreciation, though it didn't come easily at first. Keeping a gratitude journal helped her nurture an inner voice that was more supportive than critical. When she started, Gabrielle confessed, she could only come up with three things a day. Over time she found more and more to be grateful for, sometimes reaching thirty entries in a single day.

Gabby is very optimistic about the direction in which D'punchline is growing, and has had to learn to say "no" to some customer requests.

> *"You can't please everyone, and you can't give every customer what they want."*

This is usually hard for most entrepreneurs, because we want to be the "be all and end all" for customers. Gabrielle is very clear that you cannot be something you're not!

YET CREATE YOU MUST

Our conversation didn't just focus on the serious. I asked Gabby if she had any unusual habits, or absurd things she loved.

She has a habit of collecting unusual bottles of alcohol, keeping them locked away in a hard-case combination suitcase, although she is *not* a drinker.

"I know I will never use them, but I love the bottles... I think it's my obsession with packaging."

The Secret was the first book to really begin to change Gabrielle's outlook on life. But *Big Magic* was transformative. Apart from buying copies to give away as gifts, Gabby plans to reread it as many times as necessary. I was inspired to pluck my own copy from my library and have a second go at it.

Gabby said something that made me think:

> *"Creativity is not about art or craft. It is not about being pretentious. You will go through shit."*

And I will take the liberty of completing that suspended sentence: "...yet create you must!"

Gilbert reminds us:

> *"The guardians of high culture will try to convince you that the arts belong only to a chosen few, but they are wrong and they are also annoying. We are all the chosen few. We are all makers by design."*

Don't allow fear to paralyze you, and if you really want to be afraid of something, be afraid of complacency.

Wise words from this creative wizard: Gabrielle Punch, D'punchline.

THREE TAKEAWAYS FROM GABRIELLE'S SPOTLIGHT

1. *Passion over stability.*
   Gabby chose fulfilment over a "secure" job, proving that joy and purpose matter.
2. *Creativity thrives through resilience.*
   Setbacks weren't failures but stepping stones to something greater.
3. *Authenticity is key.*
   Success comes from staying true to yourself, even when it means saying no.



Gabrielle Punch

Founder of D'punchline, the Trinidad-based design studio she started in 1995 with handmade cards and grew into handcrafted leather goods. A self-taught leather artisan, photographer and maker.

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