

Introduction: My name is Jake Krakovsky. I graduated from Emory in 2014. I was a theater studies major and I now work as a puppeteer, actor, writer, theater artist and educator.

Question 1: Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from graduation to your current role?

Response: My path from my graduation from Emory to my current role is both a very meandering one and a strangely direct one in that I started an internship about four days before I walked for graduation at the Center for Puppetry Arts here in Atlanta. And I had studied theater and worked in theater basically my entire life, but I had never even picked up a puppet. And I got this internship right before graduation and I had to take a day off of work to graduate. And what started as just sort of a, *'I'll give this a chance, it seems cool and interesting'* has, over the last six or seven years, become one of the most substantial parts of my career and of my creative life. One of the things most responsible for getting me to where I am from where I started was really just sort of the act of sticking around, by which I mean, once I finished my internship, I started looking for more opportunities to contribute. Either volunteering or little short term jobs that I could have. I started auditioning for every single puppet show that they did. I started working as a teaching artist in the education department. And over the years of working in different facets of the programming there, you know, you would meet guest artists who are touring from elsewhere in the country or elsewhere in the world and get to learn about their journeys and their particular skills and styles. Having the opportunity not just to perform in full productions, but to assist in all kinds of small ways and really develop an understanding of all the different aspects of a larger production. You know, some of the most important things that I learned and some of the most influential people that I met and encounters that I had didn't necessarily happen in an official audition room or on a big project. A lot of the time, it just happened because I was in the right place at the right time. I had been hanging out long enough that I had managed to become a part of the community that surrounded this work. And that's where a lot of the really important moments in the development of my career happened just because I stuck around, just because I kept showing up. And you kind of never know what's gonna happen when you're in the place where things are happening, I guess.

Question 2: What does creativity and living a creative life mean to you?

Response: I think the idea of living a creative life looks very, very different for different people. And I know that I have sort of tried to live what I thought was supposed to be what a creative life looked like. I've tried different ways of reaching towards that, that hasn't worked for me. You know, for a while I was paying attention to what a lot of the writers that I admired had to say. And they said, "you have to wake up every single morning, you've got to sit and you've got to write for an hour every single day. And that's the only way that your craft can improve." And I'm sure that's true for a lot of people, but I'm simply not capable of that, I can't sit down and do that every single day. Whether because I'm not organized enough, or because my interests or responsibilities go in other directions. And so I can't focus that deeply on just one thing. But I think that's actually sort of benefited me in that when you can't focus long enough to go so, so deep on one thing, you end up bouncing around. And that's not a problem. And actually I think a lot of the most meaningful connections that I've made in my work are in sort of unexpected ways

in which the different areas of creativity that I'm interested in have intersected and come together unexpectedly. For me, living a creative life is less about being the most disciplined artist in the world and elevating my craft above all else and it's more about, I guess, having like an openness to the things that I encounter, to the possibilities and the people around me, and just trying to be open to noticing where opportunities for creativity sort of offer themselves up to you or invite you in. I know for a lot of people, it can be about, you know, the hustle and the rat race of always pursuing that next opportunity, writing that next grant, getting that next audition. And that is often very necessary. And that's a real part of it. But I think a willingness to sort of let those things reveal themselves to you can be really important too.

Question 3: What were things that were unplanned/unexpected but meaningful to your growth?

Response: There's this entire major facet of my creative work that I never realized was such a rich and diverse world. You know, the art and craft of puppetry is something that a lot of people, artists and performers included, have sort of funny ideas about or, you know, stereotypes about and I had no appreciation for what a rich and ancient and diverse art form it was. Even though I considered myself somebody who had kind of a broad appreciation for the Performing Arts and all their forms. There was so much that I didn't know and I didn't realize how much room there might be for me and for my interests in this world. Another really unexpected thing: When I was an undergrad, I had done a little bit of directing and I had occasionally, you know, worked with some younger students and stuff, but I never really realized how much I would enjoy teaching in all of its forms. And so what started out as just an excuse to stick around at this cool company that was doing work that excited me turned into a major part of my career and my work now which is working as a teaching artist, which is something that is very flexible and multifaceted. And when I first started teaching workshops to groups of 40 or 50 second graders, I never would have anticipated that that would lead to serving as a coach on a professional production, working with professional actors, teaching them how to do puppetry or traveling around going to universities and companies and museums, leading workshops and teaching people from preschool all the way up to performing arts professionals many decades my senior. I never would have expected that it would be such a big and meaningful part of the work that I do, but it's become very important to me. And the most unexpected thing of all, you know, I started teaching these workshops to young kids and only began to realize how much I enjoyed teaching. And now, this semester, I'm working as a Teaching Associate assisting on a class at Emory that I've helped devise with the professor, which is really thrilling and exciting and, you know, sort of a full circle moment and also something I never would have expected six or seven years ago.

I think for good or for bad, a lot of what trying to make a career in the arts means is about being in the right place at the right time almost as much or more than this idea of knowing the right people that people talk about a lot, which there is a great deal of truth to that, of course, because the way that artistic projects come about and find footing, you know, it's just about people connecting to each other. And whether that's in the sense of a professional network, or in a sense of, you know, creative encounters, you know, the world of art is made up of people, so that's very true. When I think about being in the right place at the right time, there's a huge factor of luck involved. But there's also the factor of what have you done to make sure that you are in a place

where that sort of thing is maybe more likely to occur. So I guess one example from my career so far is: I had been putting in quite a few years working at the Center for Puppetry Arts as both a puppeteer and as a teaching artist. And as whatever small, little jobs they needed doing, you know. It was a place that a lot of great artists and great art passed through and I knew that I wanted to kind of stick around and be around for when that moment happens that being in the right place is important. And so I had been working there for a few years and it just so happened that the BBC wanted to film a new children's TV show down south of Atlanta, and it was a puppet show. And you know, Atlanta happens to have this institution of the Center for Puppetry Arts, and because I was there and because I had been putting in my years and sort of establishing myself as a reliable artist for them to work with, someone connected me to the folks who were casting this TV show and I had the incredible opportunity to spend most of 2018 filming on this BBC preschool kids TV show called *Moon and Me* and learning a whole new style of performance and learning how to work in front of the camera, which is very different from performing live. And these people never would have known who I was, they never would have found me if I hadn't been in that place and hadn't been establishing myself as someone who was, you know, not only reliable to work with, but like a relatively fun person to have in the room, you know, someone who you don't mind running into at 8am when you're starting a, you know, a long day of rehearsals. So, you know, it's about being in the right place in that business-y way of like, *oh, opportunities move like this*. But it's also about being in the right place in that putting aside this sort of networking idea and focusing more on the actual real human relationships that you build when you're working with people that don't just establish yourself as someone with skills or talents or anything like that, that you establish yourself as someone with a personality that people want to work with, whether that means you are game or flexible or generous or any of the qualities that any of us would want from a creative collaborator. But yeah, being in a place where people know you and know what you're like, it's not the only way to work and to find connections, but it has served me extremely well in my career so far. And you know, it's a really good feeling to have someone reach out to you for once instead of applying and auditioning over and over again. So that's probably one of the most valuable things about this idea of being in the right place at the right time is that once people know who you are, they'll start to ask you, which feels a lot better than having to scramble and grind all the time.

I would say many of the most valuable and unexpected encounters in my creative and professional life have been thanks to opportunities to collaborate with other artists and other creative people. And that is where I have learned the most, I would say. It is where I have managed to create a lot of the work that I'm most proud of, is in collaboration with others. Because there's inherently an unknown there, you know. And it's not just you don't know what this other person is going to say or do. There are aspects of your own creativity that you might not be able to access until you are working in collaboration with somebody else. One really big example of that is this past fall, I took a seminar at the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry, which is a great resource on campus. And I took a seminar with Dr. Miriam Udel, who had just written a book on the topic of Yiddish children's literature. She had translated a bunch of children's stories from the Yiddish language into English and she was teaching this seminar about what she learned in her research. And I found it totally exciting and fascinating. And over the following months, she and I kept up correspondence and she encouraged me to take this Yiddish language intensive at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. We did it

over Zoom, of course. But what that led to and then conversations after I began my studies, you know, there's these series of stories that she had translated that she kept saying to me, *you know, Jake, these would make such a great puppet show*. And at the time, I thought yes, that's really cool. But who on earth could we convince to produce a puppet show of left-wing Yiddish children's literature from the 1930s. You know, it was like, you and I think this is the coolest thing in the world, but it is a somewhat niche topic, right. But we kind of kept getting each other more and more pumped up about the idea. And so eventually I decided, *you know what, let's just try, let's see if we can't find an institution or a company that would want to give us a little bit of support and make this a reality*. And I spoke with Don McManus, the Artistic Director of Theater at Emory and after, you know, some months of brainstorming and going back and forth this semester, Dr. Udel and I are teaching this class and alongside it producing a filmed puppet adaptation of some of these stories. And that's a really exciting and unexpected collaboration. I think one of the lessons that I've learned from experiences like that is that collaboration doesn't necessarily always have to look like finding another artist in your fields and creating something together with them. Of course, it often can. But sometimes it might mean connecting with somebody who is working in a totally different area and finding the places where your interests and your work overlap. And there's something really valuable found in actually crossing that distance and making a connection over a longer space and finding all the exciting things that exist in between.

Question 4: What advice do you have for your younger self?

Response: For one, if I could talk to myself as an undergrad, I would remind him that there is not ever one single project that will make or break your life, your career, your creative opportunities. No matter how big or important or exciting it is. It's about the long game. And that's true in like a sort of professional career building kind of way. But it's also true in just the sense of one's creative journey. Yes, there's always going to be certain projects, certain opportunities that are more exciting, but there's never going to be one that if you don't get it, you're ruined, you know. There's always going to be more. And so if I could talk to myself from back then, I would really, really encourage him to develop a sort of sense of lightness about opportunity. Actually, I can't remember who it was, but I heard an artist I think on a podcast recently say something. I think it was about doing improv and about ideas, but they said, "hold on tightly, let go lightly" or something like that. But the idea being that like, yes, when something is important to you, like, embrace it and fight for it. And then when the time comes that it's not going to work out, release it. Because you can drive yourself crazy equating your success or your value to *did I get this one job, or did this one project succeed?* You know, maybe, maybe it's not that you didn't get the job, but that you did and you weren't happy in the end with what you made or what your performance looked like. That's essential. You have to do it bad a bunch of times before you can do it good. Or even more than that, you know, you have to learn from all of the ways that maybe you aren't totally satisfied with work that you've made. And those are maybe some of the most informative things that you can experience moving forward is failure and it's in feeling like you've missed the mark on something.

I know artists who are much older, more established, more successful. At this point in my career, there are people who I would count as friends who, when I was younger, I super looked

up to and I was like, *Whoa, I'll never be on their level.* And those are people who I still admire a great deal and I still learn from, but now that I know them more closely, I go, *Oh, this person who I looked up to as this figure of like total creative success, they're also worried about what the next project is going to be.* And they're also on a continuing journey. And like, even though I upheld them as this amazing figure, oh my gosh, what if one day I could be like them or work with them, they're also doing all the same things that I'm doing, you know. They might have a more established way of working, they might have learned a little bit more about what their path might look like, but things still change and there are still unexpected encounters and there are still failures and disappointments. I think, truly, unless you're part of, you know, the tiny minority of artists that are rich and famous, you know, for almost all of us, it's always going to be a path that has uncertainty and surprise. And I think that's something I kind of wish I knew early on is that nobody really has it figured out. Even the people who you think are total geniuses, they might have some things figured out, but they're still making it work one step at a time, just like you are.

There are some times, those moments where you go, *Wow, this is so exciting, you know, X, Y, and Z have all been leading to this.* And those moments are really important to hold on to and to savor. And it's also really important to remember that that moment will eventually be part of what leads to something else and that there is no, you know, for me at least, and I think for most of us like there is no, *'I've made it'*, you know, like there are really meaningful and exciting projects and collaborations. And maybe there are points where you feel a certain degree of stability in your career, I think more or less so depending on which aspect of the arts you're working in. But I think for most people, something that I'm still trying to do because I'm still early in my career, but I'm still trying to learn to let go of the idea of *'I've made it'* because I think if you're searching for and reaching towards that feeling, that kind of nebulous idea of *'I've made it, I'm established, I don't have to do this or that anymore'*, I think you could drive yourself a little crazy. Because I think while the nature of the hustle changes a lot, and hopefully there are times where it's comfortable and reliable even, you know, which certainly can happen, it is still a field with uncertainty. That can be really difficult and it can also be exciting. And I think a certain degree of acceptance about that is necessary not only for your mental and emotional health, but also because once you've accepted that, it allows you to be open to: *Okay, so how does one thing flow into the next?* How much do I have to reach? versus how much can I allow myself to float along the path that I have started for myself?