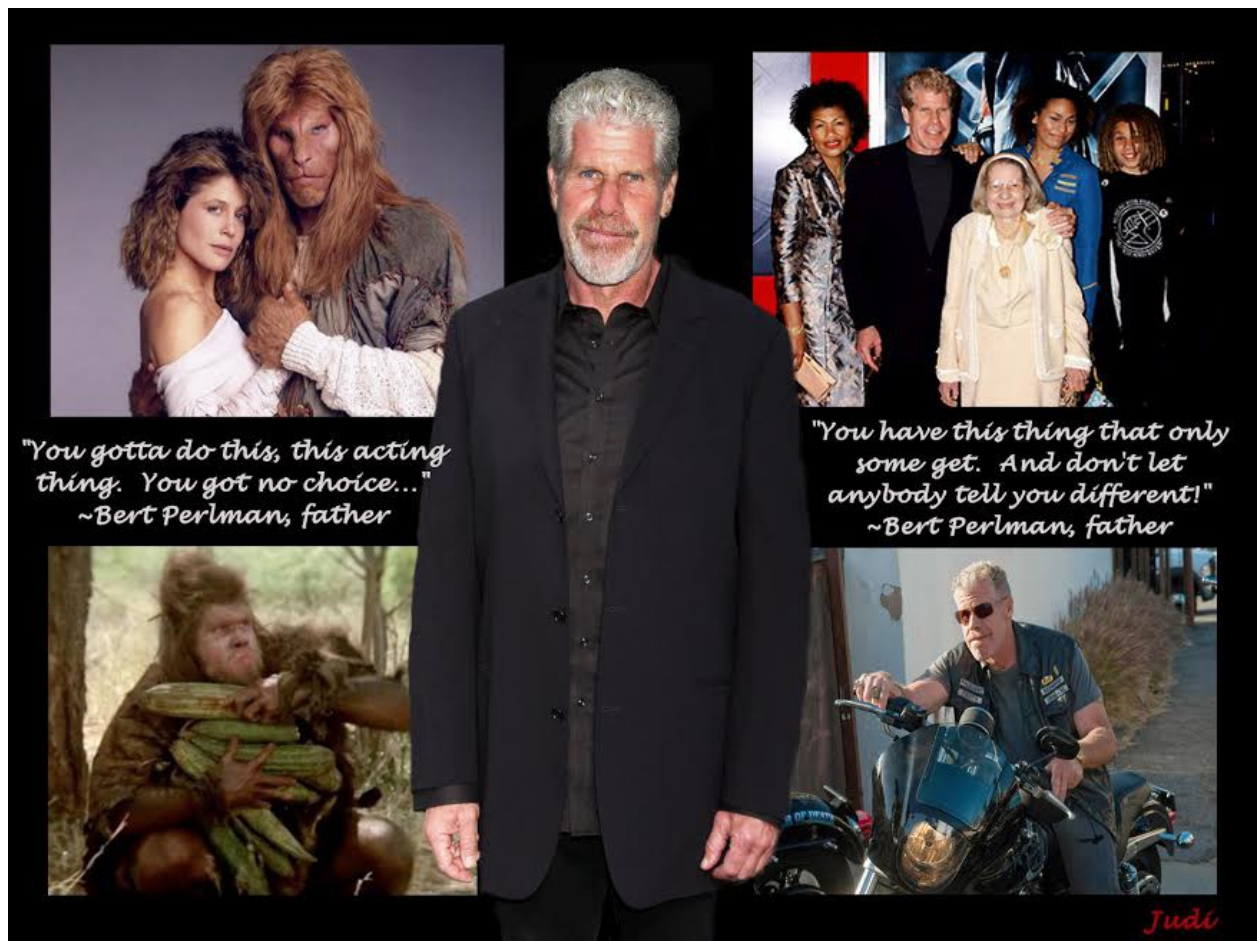


The Birthday Card

(Or: A Blessing of Small Moments)

April 13, 2015

By Cindy Rae



We all say stupid things, sometimes. Like, "What would I say to a young me, if I could?" Well, that can never fucking happen, and more's the pity. So it's stupid to say that. But you, my son, are a "young me" or at least you're the closest thing

to a “young me” there is, so this is for you. This is from the old man, a year older now that April 13th has come around.

I gotta tell you this from the heart. It’s been a wild ride. And you can ignore all of this. It might be a lie. People tell me I remember things the way I want. To that, I say “Who else would I remember it like?” Fuck.

First thing, 20 is crap. Most all of your twenties are. People who tell you it’s everything are full of shit, so don’t believe them. You’ll never feel more like the things you want are out of your reach. But you gotta reach, anyway, okay? You gotta reach.

Twenty was when I didn’t know my ass from a hole in the ground. Your mother will tell you that hasn’t changed much. But I mean, it was really bad then, like all kinds of clueless and in the dark kind of bad. But my Pop told me something like I’m telling you. He saw me in a play one night when I was in college, then came back the next night and told me: “You have to do this. This is your gift, and you must do it, no matter what happens.” Or something like that.

So there I am, clueless and young, and there’s my Pops handing me this mind-blowin’ moment. Pops tells me I have to act, that I gotta do this; this acting thing, that I got no choice. We were driving home one night and he lowered the radio. Then he said it, right there, like it mattered so much to him that he just had to let me know. He told me I’ve got this thing that only some get, “So don’t let anyone else ever tell you otherwise!” Then he turned the radio back up and I felt like I’d just been blessed. My Pops had given me his permission, and it was gonna be okay.

I’m not sure I really would have done this acting thing if he hadn’t said that. I know it’s easy to say “Of course you would,” now that I’ve done okay at it. But then?

Hell! I was too big, too shy, not handsome enough, not connected enough, green as grass, with a little talent. Well, maybe more than a little. But shit, Brandon, if every actor with a little talent made it big, they’d never have coined the phrase “starving actor,” or “starving artist,” or whatever. I mean, I knew it was all a long shot. I knew that, going in. But your grandfather and I had that moment, that

little moment, that permission moment. I've told that story before. I tell it now because you have to know, Brandon, how important that was, for me.

See, life is damn funny, and the places it takes you will change you. If you don't believe anything else I ever say to you, you believe that.

'Cause there's these moments that happen to you. They seem small, smaller than small, sometimes, and sometimes they don't even come when you need them to. But when they do...

So I followed my Pops' advice. And I was getting these roles, these little roles here and there, and then some good parts in some big films. *Quest for Fire* happens, and later *Name of the Rose*, some other stuff... Great, right? Critics loved 'em. Box office was fine, and I'm actually getting paid to do this. But I was always buried under so much makeup, that afterward, nobody really knew it was me, or really cared.

Then I'd go back to sitting at home waitin' for the damn phone to ring. When this happened again and again, after I'd worked so hard...I almost gave up, buddy. I was "this" close. You get tired of it, the hassles and the let downs. Those aren't small moments. They're bad ones. And they start to add up on you.

But I don't want you to think it was all bad. It wasn't. That's just it. There's also the once-in-a-lifetime moments, like meeting your mother, holding you in my arms for the first time, you and your sister. She's beautiful, you know, beautiful like your mother, with her own kind of strength. You be there for her, Brandon. That's your fucking job and if you ever mess it up, I will haunt you from my grave, just so we're clear. Okay?

Where was I? Oh, yeah, the small moments, the ones you don't really see coming or even know are there, because you're so busy looking for the big ones.

I kept looking for those big moments. Like somebody was going to paint "Go HERE and talk to THIS guy in big-ass flashing letters, with an arrow pointing to a time and date, just so I wouldn't screw it up. It don't work like that, kid, it just don't.

So all I can tell you, Brandon, is pretty much like something else Pops told me: "Whatever you're passionate about, you do that." Might as well, huh? But when

you do that, sometimes it's still gonna suck. Sorry, but that's just how it is. The thing is, sometimes life sucks. But it's better to have it suck when you're doing something you love than to have it suck when you're doing something you hate. And that's the stupid fucking truth.

But this is the important part: Everybody says "Listen to that voice inside of you." That's shit, sometimes! Don't do it! Don't you do it, son. If I had, I'd have missed one of the best things in my whole damn life, because my "voice inside" said, "No more heavy makeup roles."

See, I was sick of sitting in a makeup chair for four or five hours a day, tired of having good roles not parlay into more jobs or bigger parts, sick of having prosthetics glued on, having to be on set hours before everybody else, having to do retakes when something slipped or the lighting wasn't right. And the sweat! Boy, you don't know sweat until you're under four pounds of makeup and a wig, wearing a robe and high boots and the whole time, you gotta look like it's chilly outside, because it's supposed to be December in New York and you're sitting on a soundstage in LA... but I digress.

My inner voice and my outer voice thought the same thing: no more prosthetics, no more heavy makeup jobs, no more shit glued to my face with makeup over it. So I got hold of my agent. I said, "Next time that kind of role comes, you turn it down. Get me a role where they can see my face. I might be ugly, but next time they stick me in front of a camera, I want to be just like every other actor out there."

Brandon, don't you ever wish to be just like every other actor out there. Just sayin'.

See, I just didn't want to sit there in heavy makeup, again, for a couple months of shooting.

So I got to do it for years.

Because my manager decides to send me a script for a new TV Pilot that was beginning to be cast. Somethin' called *Beauty and the Beast*. So I called the bastard up and said, "This is for the role of the *Beauty*, right?"

“Close! The role does start with a B; it’s just not for Beauty,” my manager said. Wise-ass.

“Don’t send it!” I yelled.

The fucking bastard ignored me! He told me “Everything’s great and CBS has ordered a go pilot.” He let me know that I was on a very short list for one of the leads.

“The Beast, right? Don’t send it!” And I’m yelling in the phone!

But, you know, he sent the thing over. Scratch a manager, find a genius. I’d said, “No more heavy makeup!” and he’d ignored me. (‘Course he also said I wasn’t the boss, and I could damn well deal with it.) Small moments. I gotta tell you, man, small moments. If he’da listened to me... well.

So I read the thing. You know that. (Hey man, what else did I have to do that morning, right? Nada!) Twenty pages in, I couldn’t put it down. Rang the bastard back and asked, “Who I gotta kill to get the role?” It was that damn good!

See, in the script was this amazing character, this Vincent guy, and I absolutely KNEW who this was, right from when I first met him on the page. He was me, and I was him. In some part of me, I totally connected with this role. This was an outcast with brains and a heart, finding his way against all the odds. It was so “me,” and I never said it. I just said I’d take the part and do what I could with it.

The producer, the head guy, this Ron Koslow, was the most romantic sonofabitch I ever met, before or since. He wrote it. Ron Koslow had a small moment. He read an article about homeless people, living in the city tunnels, for shelter. That was it.

And the idea stayed with him and spawned the idea for this thing. Just that. Just a fucking article. Small moments, man, I gotta tell you. Small moments. He writes the pilot off this one idea. It had no business being in Hollywood, none at all. Neither did I, really, other than it’s where you act for real money rather than spare change.

But this wasn’t just about money. It was a steady pay check, yeah, but it was something else, too. And you know you’d have done the pilot for next to nothing, because it was going to change your life, forever. That’s a line from the

opening credits and it's fucking true. That moment when I held that first script in my hand was going to do just that, change my life forever. But I didn't *know* that then. Small moments, kid. I didn't know. You never do, 'til after.

But maybe part of me did know, or at least, part of me really, really wanted this to work. That much I remember, even if I was afraid that the odds against it were big and they'd never pick up the pilot for a series. It was a long shot at best.

I told everybody it wasn't going to fly; your mother, Linda Hamilton (who did the most amazing job with it), Ron Koslow, everybody. I said it's too out there, too smart, too literate, too oddball. A beast-man in New York City, living in an underground world where everybody takes care of each other, in love with a rich chick with issues? Oh, yeah, this'll work. Not. They'll never pick up the pilot and if they do, it'll never clear the first twelve episodes. It was just too good for TV, you know?

But it was like my Pop said. "You gotta do this, this acting thing." From the first moment I saw myself in that chair in costume and full makeup, I was positive I wanted this, I wanted it to work. I knew I'd have given anything to help this long shot thing get off the ground.

So I gave it all I had.

A TV series isn't like a movie, buddy. It just isn't. It's long, long hours, and crazy script changes at the last minute, and getting pre-empted thanks to a network special or a writer's strike or dodgy ratings. But it's a lot of other things, too. It's maybe more people seeing me in that pilot than everybody who ever saw me in any of my plays combined, and maybe even in my movies, and this time, they know who I am! Top billing, man! There's *nothing* like it.

And from then on, it's kind of a runaway train! Don't let anybody tell you those aren't a fucking blast! And if I'd listened to myself, "No more heavy makeup roles," I'd have missed it.

Some of the scripts were amazing and some were just okay, and CBS is a big deal of a network and Linda Hamilton is on this insane ride with me and Roy Dotrice too, who had already forgotten more about acting than I even knew back then, and boom! I'm on the cover of magazines and they're booking us for talk shows!

The critics love it and we're winning awards, and there are Emmy nominations and I get to take your mom to the Golden Globes, and I even win the damn thing!

The shooting schedule is a killer but I'm getting paid regular for what feels like the first time in forever, not needing to go out on auditions every month, and there's this incredible high, this incredible mind-blowing rush. I'm either in the makeup chair or on the set, or on a promotional gig or an interview, going for a photo shoot, picking up an award, picking up another one... It was like nothing I'd ever done, Brandon, nothing.

And I'd never have had *any* of it, son, if I hadn't listened to my old man and followed where he told me I had to go. It wouldn't have happened if I hadn't let the small moments happen, leading me to the big ones. And this was a big one, one of the biggest, because the show was so *different*, so rare, so startlingly new, a new story and an old story, all at the same time. And because I had top billing, people finally knew my name. All from those small moments adding up, Brandon.

There have been other great roles for me, sure. I am a lucky sonofabitch that way. But Vincent was an amazing thing, a stand-out thing, and that series was lightning in a bottle.

There's people out there who still talk about it like it was some kind of Holy fucking Grail, and for all I know, they're right. It was, or at least it was, for me. I still tell people that Vincent is one of the best characters I ever played. He is. He just is. He was smarter than I am, and maybe kinder. I don't know. Though I know I was smart enough to get your mom.

So? So here it is, the point of this whole damn thing. This is me giving you permission, giving you a blessing. You do what you need to do and you love who you need to love and go where you need to go and even if people tell you it's a long shot, you take it boy, you take it. You take it and you don't never look back, because regretting what you didn't take a chance on is the most useless thing on the whole goddamn planet. I'd rather have you regret 50 things you did do than five you didn't, because it's a different kind of regret, son, believe me. I want you to have your small moments. Those small moments that lead you to something magnificent.

So, it's my birthday and this is my birthday card. But it's to you, son, not to me. Because I kind of think that at 65 years old, I maybe don't need it now, and you just might.

I love you, my son,

Pop

April 13, 2015

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Many, many thanks to Linda and Judi for their invaluable tips and advice on this little birthday offering. They made it better just by being their amazing, giving selves. And special thanks to Judi for her invitation to join in on the birthday festivities, and the beautiful picture montage she created of Ron Perlman for this piece.

Being in this fandom is a bit organic, and you never know where the next lovely patch of beauty and inspiration are going to come from.

We are all a part of each other.

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To Mr. Perlman - From one April baby to another, Happy Birthday, Sir. People you've never met, (and many you have), love your work. Very much.

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No matter where all of you are in your own fairy tale, I wish you love. ~ Cindy