

ORIGIN STORY

written by
NATHAN ALAN DAVIS

directed by
MANNY BUCKLEY



BACKSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at
AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

ORIGIN STORY

by Nathan Alan Davis

Directed by Manny Buckley*

FEATURING



Brian Bradford



Grant Carriker



Minita Gandhi



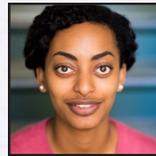
Carly Jo Geer



Joslyn Jones



Steve Key*



Sana Selemon

Margaret is working two jobs to pay down her debt. During the day, she's wading through office triviality at The Services Corporation, and by night, she's working the drive-through of The Burg, a 24/7 fast food restaurant. Overtired, ungrounded, and abandoned by her parents at birth, Margaret's existential crisis begins to turn around as connections are found in the most unsuspecting of places. Funny and heartfelt, this is a contemporary look at the quarter-life crisis and connecting in an impersonal world.

**Ensemble member of American Blues Theater*

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DIGITAL LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To create art in a new digital format, we use equipment and high-speed internet not available in many Indigenous communities. This technology, which has now become central to our daily lives, leaves a significant footprint and contributes to changing climates that disproportionately affect Indigenous people. As we make use of this digital format, it is imperative that we recognize the Indigenous Land, regardless of our geographical location. It is land once occupied and inhabited by hundreds of Native tribes. Indigenous people’s homes were unceded by European settlers. The genocide and forced removal of Indigenous people from these lands is a history that must be acknowledged, and the current struggles of Indigenous people must be brought to the forefront, so that their plight is never forgotten.

This digital land acknowledgement is inspired by the work of producer & artist Adrienne Wong. Learn more [here](#).

INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT NATHAN ALAN DAVIS

WHAT WAS YOUR INSPIRATION FOR WRITING *ORIGIN STORY*?

A friend of mine, who is a big Star Wars fan, had just seen *The Force Awakens*. I asked him for his opinion on the movie and he replied, very thoughtfully, "You know what? Every scene was delightful." That statement really struck me. Not long after, I turned it into a writing prompt. I decided to write a play in which every scene was delightful. The play ended up growing to touch on a lot of different themes/concepts/ideas like race, identity, work, debt, family, etc., but the question I would come back to was: does this delight me?

WHAT DO YOU HOPE AUDIENCES TAKE AWAY FROM THIS PLAY?

I'd prefer for the play to take the audience away, rather than the other way around.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NEXT?

I'm working with Bassett Vance Productions to create a TV miniseries about the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma and the massacre that happened there in 1921. I've also written a play about Greenwood called *The High Ground*, and am working on developing that with Arena Stage in Washington, D.C.



Nathan Alan Davis in rehearsals for the reading of *The Wind and The Breeze* at American Blues Theater in 2016.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



NATHAN ALAN DAVIS he/him (*playwright*) is an award-winning playwright. His plays include: *The High Ground* (upcoming at Arena Stage), *Nat Turner in Jerusalem* (New York Theatre Workshop; Stavis Playwright Award), *Dontrell Who Kissed the Sea* (NNPN Rolling World Premiere; Steinberg/ATCA New Play Citation), and *The Wind and the Breeze* (Cygnet Theatre; American Blues Theater Blue Ink Award, Lorraine Hansberry Award). He received a Windham-Campbell Prize in 2021. Other recent honors include: The Lark Venturous Fellow (2021-22), Steinberg Playwright Award (2020), Sundance at Ucross Fellow (2019), and Whiting Award (2018). Nathan is a Lecturer in Theater and Berlind Playwright-in-Residence at Princeton University. He is an alumnus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Indiana University Bloomington, and The Juilliard School.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



MANNY BUCKLEY he/him (*director*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is a Chicago-based director, actor, playwright and teaching artist. Blues credits include *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, *Six Corners*, *Looking Over the President's Shoulder* (Jeff Award Nomination-Best Solo Performance), and *Dutchman/TRANSit* (Black Theatre Alliance Award Nomination). Manny toured nationally as "Satchel Paige" in the original production of *The Satchel Paige Story*, and appeared in *The Father* (Helen Hayes Award Nomination) at Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C. He originated the role of "Carson" in *Hit the Wall*, which sold out extensions in Steppenwolf's Garage Rep. Select Chicago credits include *The Brothers Size, 1984*, and *Of Mice and Men* (Steppenwolf); *Dorian* (House Theater); and *Love's Labor's Lost* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre). Mr. Buckley is the recipient of a Black Theatre Alliance, and Black Excellence Award. He most recently directed *Kingdom*, an audio drama, with Broken Nose Theatre.



BRIAN BRADFORD he/him (*Dex*) is delighted to be working with American Blues Theater again, where he understudied/performed in *Five Presidents* and performed in *The Ripped Festival*. Chicago theatre credits include *Titus Andronicus* (Haven); *Hamlet* (Gift Theatre); *Fuente Ovejuna*, *The Bloodhound Law* (City Lit Theater); *Force Continuum* (Eclipse Theatre Company); *Romeo and Juliet* (Muse of Fire Theatre Company); *Estrella Cruz*, *In Love and Warcraft*, *From Every Mountainside/or does it explode*, *Emperor of the Moon* (Halcyon Theatre); *Macbeth* (Accidental Shakespeare Company); and *Today We Escape* (Tympanic Theatre Company).



GRANT CARRIKER he/him (*Bobby*) is an actor/writer from Iowa. He is a graduate of Roosevelt University with a BFA in Acting. Acting credits include: *Newsies* (Paramount Theatre), *A Chorus Line* (Porchlight Music Theatre), *Dutchman/TRANSit* (American Blues Theater), *Rock N Roll* and *The School For Lies* (The Artistic Home). Directing credits include: *Newsies*, *Cinderella*, and *The Light In The Piazza* (American Gothic Performing Arts Festival). He is appearing next month in *Creating ARthur* with Last Nerve Live at Theatre Wit.



MINITA GANDHI she/they (*Anita*) is a Los Angeles based actor/writer/director/producer who was born in Mumbai, India. Raised in the Bay Area, Minita cultivated an artistic home for herself in Chicago for over a decade before moving to LA. Minita can be seen on *Chicago Fire* and *PD* as Dr. Prospere, on *Brown Girls* as Mussarat, *The Onion News Network* as anchor Nina Shankar, and their voice can be heard on Disney's *Mickey's Mixed-up Adventures*, and a variety of audiobooks. Film credits include *Death Wish*, *Ephemeria*, and *Signature Move*. Some of her regional theatre credits include Lookingglass Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Arena Stage and Milwaukee Repertory Theatre. Her solo-show *Muthaland*, was Jeff Recommended (best new work and solo-performance) and closed a sold-out run of its World Premiere at 16th Street

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Theater in the Chicagoland area (2017). It has been featured by NBC News, *The Takeaway* with John Hockenberry on NPR, and The Atlantic in a twenty minute Emmy award winning documentary about the making of the play. Her play *The Sun and all it's Sighs* was part of the 2020 Ripped Festival at American Blues Theater in 2020. She has been a dramaturg for PCPA Theaterfest's production of *Much Ado about Nothing* and Book-It Theater's World Premiere production of *Behold the Dreamers*. They are the director/producer for a 5-episode Documentary Series: *History is Now*. Other directing/writing credits include the digital production of *Hindsight is 2020 or how Raisin Rainbows survived a pandemic* starring Tony Award nominee Cora Vanderbroek, and new work development and readings at CAATA, and Stage Left Theater. As an activist and speaker, Minita was the keynote speaker for Commit2Change in 2018, a former PBS Pledge Host, and has been a professional host and MC for many fundraisers and events. She teaches workshops on activism and does work to support survivors. Gandhi is the Founder of IGNITE, a mentorship program for BIPOC women and non-binary theater artists that connects emerging artists to national theater leaders, and the co-founder for Pathways, a new 2-year program being developed in partnership with AGE and ART in Portland. In 2021, she focused on working with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) in her work with AGE (Advance Gender Equity in the Arts), as their National Program Director. Upcoming: *Muthaland* at Renaissance Theaterworks May 13-June. Gandhi is currently working on a new libretto, and developing a new play called *Nerve*.



CARLY JO GEER she/her (*Val*) received her BA in Acting from Columbia College Chicago and since graduating, has dipped her toes in a variety of theatrical experiences. In order to fill her creative needs, Carly began writing and performing her own solo show, *I Come From Hoarders* which premiered in 2017 and was published in 2021 in "At The Intersection of Disability and Drama: A Critical Anthology of New Plays". Carly Jo can also be heard as the voice of several Revlon hair product videos on Amazon. Besides acting, she also hosts a *Degrassi* recap podcast with her cousin Jessie Mack called "A Social Disease" which is available to stream on all major podcast apps. Carly Jo would like to thank Manny Buckley for the opportunity to perform in her first virtual reading.



JOSLYN JONES she/her (*Roxanne*) *Flyin' West* (American Blues Theater) *Steel Magnolias* (Theatre at the Center); *Intimate Apparel* (Theatre Squared); *ANDROMEDA* (Theatre Squared); *The Project(s)* (American Theater Company) Jeff Nomination, Best Production; *The Delany Sisters: Having Our Say - The First Hundred Years* (Fleetwood Jourdain Theatre); *Once On This Island* (Marriott Lincolnshire Theatre); *12 Ophelias* (Trap Door Theatre); *Weekend* (TimeLine Theatre), *Bourbon At The Border* (Eclipse Theatre) BTAA Nomination, Featured Actress; *Escape* (Live Bait Theatre); *Flyin' West* and *RAISIN* (Court Theatre), *Bee-Luther-Hatchee* (The University Of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign); *Fabulation: Or, The Re-Education of Undine* (Next Theatre); *Relevant Hearsay* (MPACCT: Theater on the Lake); *Bee-Luther-Hatchee* and *Smokey Joe's Café* (Open Door Theater); *Meshuggah Nuns!* (Chicago Jewish Theatre); *The Kurt Weil Revue: Songs of Darkness and Light* (Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre) Jeff Nomination, Best Musical Production; *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Metropolis Performing Arts Centre); 2002 Class of The School at Steppenwolf. She has understudied: *Having Our Say* and *Crumbs From The Table of Joy* (Goodman Theatre); Film: *Cherry*, directed by the Russo Brothers with Tom Holland as her scene partner; Television: *South Side-Mrs. Odom* (HBO Max); *Chicago PD* (NBC). Joslyn is a proud member of Actors Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA. linktr.ee/JoslynJones

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



STEVE KEY he/him (*Gary*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater and member of Actor's Equity. He's thrilled to return, albeit virtually, to perform with this brilliant group of artists in *Origin Story*. Most recently he performed in Steppenwolf's *BUG*, and his last performance with American Blues Theater was *The Rainmaker*. In Chicago he's worked with; Steppenwolf, Goodman, A Red Orchid, Remy Bumppo, Northlight, Victory Gardens, and Shattered Globe Theatre (where he's a former Artistic Director). Beyond Chicago, Steve's performed in Broadway's *Sweat*, and it's following tour, in the Broadway tour of *August: Osage County* and he has worked at The Town Hall in Galway IRL, The Public in NY, The Ahmanson in LA and The Kennedy Center in DC. Steve has received 6 Jeff Awards and 4 nominations for Principal and Supporting Actor and Ensemble (equity and non-equity). Film: *Hayseed*, *1,000 Acres*, *At Any Price*, *Blackmail*, *Public Enemies*, *Salvaging*, *Three Days*. TV: *FBI: most Wanted*, *The Good Fight*, *Elementary*, *Chicago Fire*, *Law & Order – SVU*, *Family Practice*, *Chicago Code*, *Boss*, and *Mob Doctor*.



SANA SELEMON she/her (*Margaret*) is an actor, dialect coach, teaching artist, and arts administrator at Marriott Theatre and BoHo Theatre. She proudly hails Columbus, OH and from two loving Ethiopian parents. Sana attended Ohio University for her BFA in acting and also received a minor in Sociolinguistics which has fueled her passion for accents and the world of languages. Based in Chicago, Sana has worked with BoHo Theatre, Pegasus Theatre, American Blues Theatre, Definition Theatre, Lifeline Theatre, Pride Films and Plays, First Floor Theater, and is a proud member of SAG-AFTRA. www.sanaselemon.com



SHANDEE VAUGHAN she/her (*Stage Manager*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. After spending her winter back in theater for *It's a Wonderful Life*, Shandee is excited to be back at Blues for *Origin Story*. Blues credits: *Roan @ the Gates*, *Five Presidents*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey*, *On Clover Road*, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago (2016 & 2018 -2021)*, *Flyin' West*, *The Buddy Holly Story*, *The Columnist*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Other recent Chicago credits include: *In Every Generation (Victory Gardens)* *Time Is On Our Side (About Face Theatre)*, *Deathscribe X (WildClaw Theatre)*, *Night in Alachua County (WildClaw Theatre)*, and *The Woman in Black (WildClaw Theatre)*. Shandee is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.

WORKING MULTIPLE JOBS

A FINANCIAL NECESSITY FOR MANY

The protagonist of *Origin Story*, Margaret, works two jobs, which is an increasingly common situation for many young people today. The below article entitled “Working Multiple Jobs Is a Financial Necessity for Many Young People” was written for *Teen Vogue’s* “Work in Progress” series by Jacqui Germain. It has been edited here for length. Read the full article [here](#).

Toni Chavarria found out via Zoom that she had lost her job. As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in spring 2020, she was informed she’d been let go from her teaching position at a New York City charter school. Like millions of other people, she suddenly had to figure out what to do next to keep the lights on.

“I sat there and was just really, really frustrated, and my husband was there on the couch listening to the Zoom call,” Chavarria recalls to *Teen Vogue*. “So we were just there in silence while I cried.”

After processing the news, she knew she needed a backup plan. Recognizing that parents and students would likely need additional support during the transition to remote learning, and using her preferred teaching name, Coach Toni, Chavarria launched her LLC, Play.Math.Grow, and spread the word about her online tutoring service. While she worked on building her client list, Chavarria and her family relocated to New Jersey to save on housing costs and living expenses. She continued her job hunt as she grew her LLC, but feared she would have to leave the education field altogether if she didn’t find another full-time job soon.

“I was like, ‘Well, maybe it’s time for me to stop teaching.’ I was just on Indeed typing in math, or looking at banking jobs, or endless jobs, but my passion is teaching, you know?” Chavarria explains.

By the fall she had landed a new full-time teaching position, but it paid less than her previous position. She had to keep up her tutoring side hustle to make up the difference. The new routine meant that some days started before dawn, with a 5 a.m. commute from New Jersey to New York City for a full day of teaching, and ended at 8 or 9 p.m., after four hours of tutoring students from her car.

This kind of professional scramble is one of the narratives that the pandemic has clarified: Side hustles are generally not



WORKING MULTIPLE JOBS

A FINANCIAL NECESSITY FOR MANY

glamorous. Most people don't particularly want to work multiple jobs to get by. A lucky few have been able to turn a hobby into a career during these strange, slow months, but many more, like Chavarria, have been left wondering if they could stay in their field of choice at all, cobbling together piecemeal work or several jobs to pay their bills. According to data from the Census Bureau, the percentage of workers in the United States with multiple jobs has been increasing over the past two decades.

Carolyn Muller, 27, who works with the homeless community in Denver and uses they/them pronouns, is one of those people. After their wife made the difficult choice to leave her full-time job in June 2020, to preserve her mental health, the couple quickly realized they'd need to make a plan to keep them economically stable. "[I was] making \$16 an hour working full-time," they said. "By the end of August, I knew that I needed some side hustle because my full-time employment wasn't cutting it."

They picked up freelance writing and editing work for a Chicago-based firm on an as-needed basis. A recent study by Upwork estimates that 12% of the U.S. workforce started freelancing in March 2020, and that 75% of those new freelancers did so "to ensure financial stability during this recession." About 44% of millennials and 50% of Gen Z workers are part of the freelance workforce, according to the study; of the portion of Gen Z'ers who picked up a freelancing side hustle, more than a third said they started freelancing at the beginning of the pandemic.

In addition to contract work, Muller also took a part-time hosting job at a local sports bar a few nights a week. According to census research, roughly 16.8% of workers in the health care industry and social assistance field, like Muller, have more than one job. On their longest workdays, Muller wakes up around 6 a.m. to arrive at their day job by 8 a.m., eats a quick sandwich or drive-thru meal in the car on the way to their second job, and then might not get home until after 10 p.m.

As with many food service jobs during the pandemic, Muller has had the extra task of managing the sometimes unpredictable customer responses to updated COVID-19

protocols, restrictions, and requirements. As the host, they have the added responsibility of managing the restaurant's COVID-19 indoor capacity.

"I would easily spend 25-50% of my night explaining to angry people that, yes, I understand that their friends are sitting right there with many empty chairs at their table," they recall. "However, their friends are a number of the 50 total people that we can seat inside, [and] I cannot let them go sit down or the whole restaurant is going to get shut down."

Near the end of 2020, Muller's mother-in-law passed away. Because they were working so much, they weren't able to spend the time they wanted supporting their partner through the loss. "I wanted to be home with my grieving wife. And in order to not be homeless, I could not do that," says Muller. "In order to not get our car repossessed by the credit union, I could not do that."

Unemployment — which remains high for Black Americans, many of whom have been left behind by the recent economic recovery — takes a serious mental health toll, but having to work more than one job can too. Juggling gigs can take up a considerable portion of a person's waking hours, forcing them to endure long commutes and potentially having a negative impact on their mental health, physical health, and quality of life. Muller says that the monthly \$2,000 COVID-relief stimulus checks some lawmakers proposed last year could've mitigated much of the economic and emotional stress they went through and are still managing.

"If me and my wife had both been receiving \$2,000 checks every month, and they started issuing monthly two grand checks to every eligible adult starting in May, my car would be paid off. My credit card would be paid off," Muller says. "I wouldn't be working three jobs and we could have taken time off from my job to quarantine so that me, my wife, and my step-kids could have gone and spent time with my mother-in-law before she died in December. That really could have changed things materially, financially, and certainly emotionally in massive, massive ways."

WHY 'COLORBLINDNESS' DOESN'T WORK FOR TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS

In *Origin Story*, Margaret was adopted as a baby and doesn't know who her birth parents are or what her racial identity is. The below article, titled "Why 'Colorblindness' Doesn't Work for Transracial Adoptions — and How to Get It Right" by Susan Young, originally appeared in *People*. It has been edited here for length. Read the full article [here](#).

Melissa Guida-Richards grew up in an extended family that cherished their culture and heritage as Italian and Portuguese immigrants. So as a child, she was confused when outsiders would ask her if she was Latina or "something else." In first grade a girl told her "you're Black. You can't play with me."

"I'd tell them I was Italian," Guida-Richards, 28, says. "But I would be confused. I'd come home and ask my parents and they're like 'You're Italian. You're one of us. Just ignore people.'"

She believed her parents, who also had dark hair and eyes, that her dark skin came from some past Italian origins. Then, at 19, she found documents proving not only was she adopted, but so was her brother. They were both born in Colombia — and not biological siblings.

For years, parents who adopted children of other races might have thought the "right" thing to do was to pretend like they "didn't see color," and not acknowledge their children's differences. But disregarding their children's race could have far-reaching impact, and is the subject of her recently released book "What White Parents Should Know About Transracial Adoption."

Guida-Richards and others, like author and international speaker on transracial adoption Rhonda Roorda, assert a colorblind attitude does not serve transracial adoptees in a world where color often defines you.

"Many adopted children of color struggle with their identities and white parents who cling to this narrative [of "colorblindness"] are doing their children a disservice," Guida-Richards says. "What is important for adoptive parents to realize is that their privilege will not protect their children of color as they face discrimination and racism. They need to prepare their children for a world that does see color."

About one-third of all adoptions between 2017 and 2019 were transracial, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. White megastars from Madonna to Angelina Jolie have adopted children of color, their photos gracing the covers of magazines. And the hit NBC series "This is Us" has put the adoption of a Black child into a white family — and his subsequent struggles impacting him into adulthood — front and center in an honest portrayal of the very real issues facing people of color in America compared to their white counterparts.

Roorda, who worked as a consultant on "This Is Us" and wrote a book on transracial adoption called *In Their Voices*, was adopted by a white family when she was 2. And though she knew her family loved her, she felt a sense of loss that many transracially adopted children express.

"I had to learn the culture, the language, the rhythm of my new parents — it was a shock to the system," Roorda says. "The trip to Disney World is not going to help ease that pain. A new wardrobe, a new car — money is not going to ease the loss of leaving your homeland, your community of origin, or in my case, my mama."

Roorda was given the opportunity to connect with her heritage through her godmother Myrtle, who had been the pianist and organist at the church Roorda's parents attended. "Myrtle worked with my parents, she loved me. She cared for me. She held me and reminded me that I did have value, that I was beautiful," Roorda says. "I don't know if I could have made it in this journey without a godmother who was African-American. I look at the network that filled in where there were large gaps within my family."

At the time Roorda was adopted in the 1970s, the popular research at the time seemed to bear out that "love was

WHY 'COLORBLINDNESS' DOESN'T WORK FOR TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS

enough" — that is, if parents committed to giving their children a loving upbringing, it could overcome some of the challenges of raising children of a different race. But Roorda points out that there are limitations to what love can accomplish once you walk outside of your home.

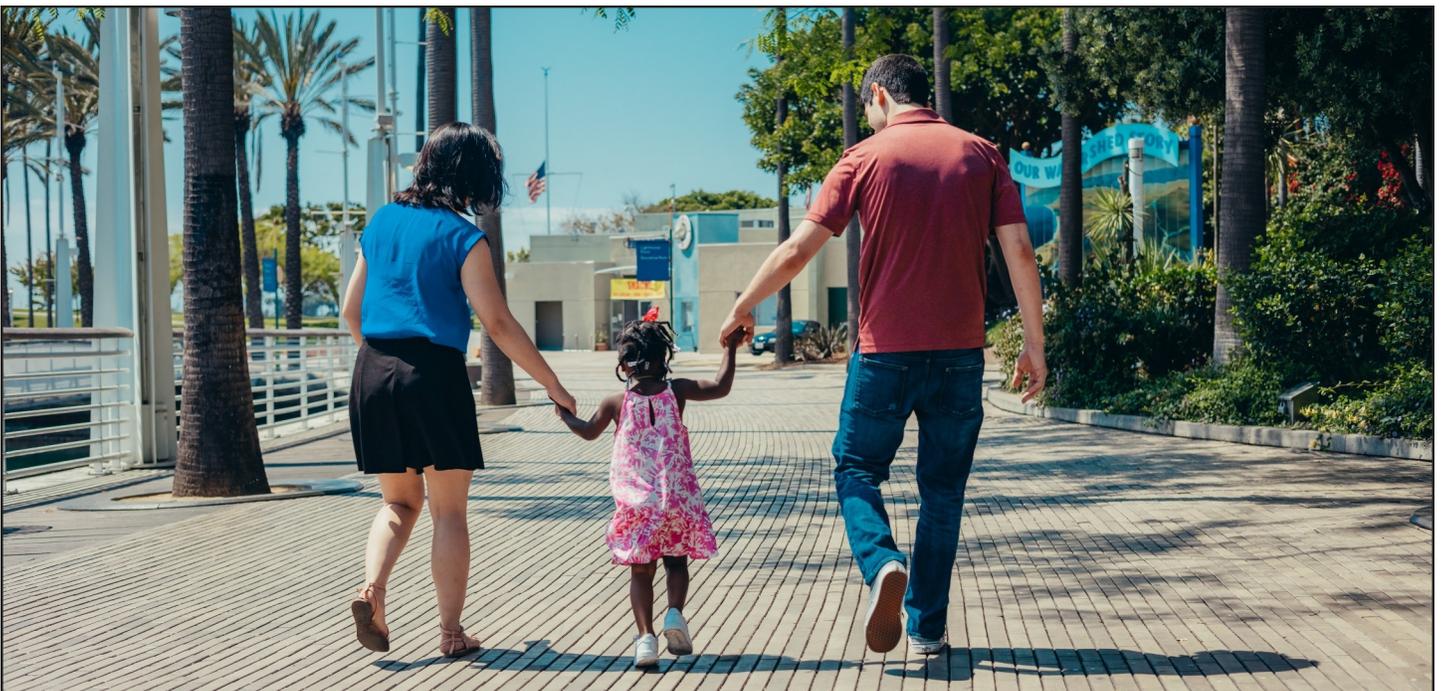
"I think that because love was married to a colorblind policy saying we don't see color. It has devastated many adoptees ... we want to be seen," she says. "I remember wanting to be white and dying to fit in, dying to please my parents, dying to understand the rules and the policies and the culture. It didn't work. ... We're not seeing all of our children, we are not seeing the richness that they bring to the table."

Guida-Richards was raised in a solidly white middle class New York suburb with limited diversity. Her father, who came to the United States from Italy at 13, told her the first Black person he ever saw was a student at his high school. "At first, they refused to even acknowledge I was Colombian, that I was a woman of color. They didn't see me as the daughter they adopted from Colombia. They saw me as their daughter," Guida-Richards says. "I understood that, but it left a big piece of my identity out."

Her family often emphasized that family and heritage matters, but they discouraged her from looking further into her own cultural background. "I sat down with them and said, we need to talk about race. We need to talk about how I'm treated and how this has affected me," Guida-Richards says. "It's been 9 years and thankfully we are in a very good place."

So how could parents embarking on a transracial adoption prepare themselves better to raise their children to feel seen, and prepared for the world?

Roorda recommends building and strengthening relationships with a diverse group of friends, to ensure your child grows up seeing that those bonds are important to you. "While you're doing that, you're reading books on transracial adoption, particularly by adoptees. You're talking about race as soon as 2, 3, 4, 5," she says. "Making sure that that child has books with images that look like her or him, toys where they can see themselves. When we see ourselves within our home, we begin to believe we are included within that family."

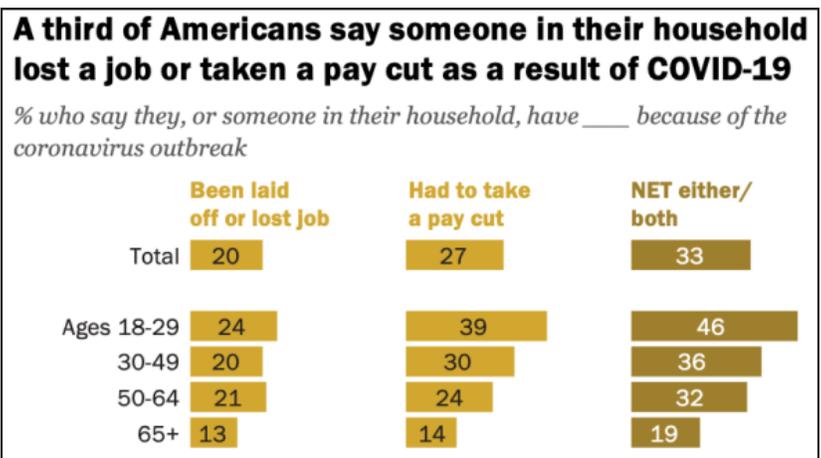


MANAGING A QUARTER LIFE CRISIS IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS

Nathan Alan Davis' play is a contemporary look at the quarter-life crisis. The below article, "Managing a Quarter Life Crisis in the Midst of a Crisis" by Tess Brigham, was written for *Forbes* and originally published on March 24, 2021. It has been edited here for length and clarity. Read the full article [here](#).

Now more than ever, young people are feeling stuck, uninspired, or uncertain in life. While this pandemic and subsequent shutdown has affected everyone, young adults are struggling more than elders with challenges around the pandemic for many reasons.

According to [Pew Research Center, 46% of Americans under the age of 30 have lost a job and/or had to take a pay cut because of the pandemic]. Millennials who graduated during the 2008 recession and struggled to develop a solid career path are experiencing job loss and career stagnation...again. Gen-Zers who were counting on entry level positions after graduation are finding themselves living at home isolated from friends wondering if this year-long gap on their resume is going to hurt them in the future.



The lack of job prospects, inability to travel and being forced to stay at home has sent many young adults into a tailspin wondering what's the point of all of their years of hard work. Many young people are experiencing a quarter-life crisis while the world is in crisis. A crisis, however, while difficult and challenging in the moment, is an opportunity to take a fresh look at life and start making more intentional decisions.

A quarter-life crisis comes about when you're faced with the reality that your life is not what you thought it was going to be. It's an emotional crisis of identity and self-confidence. You're faced with the feeling that maybe you're not being true to who you are, but you're not quite sure who you're supposed to be, either.

If you're going through a quarter-life crisis, don't panic. While it may feel stressful and overwhelming in the moment, a crisis is the perfect time to re-evaluate your life and start making better choices. At the same time, notice how the pandemic and subsequent shutdown is providing the time and space to slow down and focus on career and personal growth.

Here are the three (3) steps you should take if you want to turn this crisis into clarity:

STEP 1. BECOME A "THOUGHT AND FEELING" DETECTIVE

You can't pick a direction if you don't know where you are today. This means that in order to create any kind of forward movement in your life, you need to become more aware of your thoughts and feelings in the moment. Without a sense of "Does this make me happy?" or "Do I enjoy the day to day aspects of my job?" it's impossible to know what is truly working and not working in your present life.

Creating greater awareness requires you to slow down and become more mindful of what you're thinking and feeling in the moment. Many people have great insights into their thoughts and feelings but these thoughts can come days or even weeks later, which is helpful, but doesn't allow you to react or change your behavior in the moment. You can have insight until the cows come home, but if you don't change your behavior in real time, then nothing changes.

MANAGING A QUARTER LIFE CRISIS IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS

PUT INTO PRACTICE: AUDIT YOUR DAYS

Pick a block of time every single day to audit. Write down exactly what you did and add your thoughts about this activity and how it made you feel. You want to start thinking like a detective and get curious about the things you do each day that make you feel happy, challenged, frustrated or sad.

Do this over the course of several days or even weeks, and then look back at your notes. You'll start to see patterns of what kinds of activities at work make you feel inspired and excited and which drain you of your energy. You'll start to notice if you're not spending enough time on activities you enjoy or perhaps if you're surrounded by people who create anxiety and stress.

Once you start seeing these patterns, the next step is to make some decisions.

STEP 2. START MAKING FEARLESS DECISIONS

Making decisions when you're young is difficult. When you have your whole life in front of you the possibilities are endless, and when the possibilities are endless, the harder it is to make a decision. One of the biggest myths of decision making is that there are "right" or "wrong" decisions. Not true. There is no "right" or "wrong"; there are just the decisions you make.

All decisions are helpful because they provide us with information. If you want to better understand yourself and what you want in your life and your career, you need to start making decisions.

PUT INTO PRACTICE: SEE THE POSSIBILITIES, NOT THE FEARS

You can't make decisions from a place of fear. When you don't know the outcome, it's easy for your mind to go to a place of fear. While our world has advanced, humans are still very much cave people. This means that when we get scared, it immediately triggers us to go into survival mode and either fight, flee or freeze. This is why when you're faced with a big decision you either tend to do nothing (freeze), run away or avoid it (procrastination represents fleeing) or look for all the pitfalls (fight).

This is why you want to approach making decisions from a place of possibilities instead of fear. Think about what you want from your life and the type of career you desire and instead of thinking "I can't leave my job!," take out the fear and see the potential of the thought "Imagine how I would feel if I loved my job."

Once you've let go of the fear, it's time to trust the discomfort.

STEP 3. TRUST THE DISCOMFORT

Making decisions is hard, but what's even harder is sticking with the decision even when things start to get uncomfortable. Once you make a choice or you choose a certain path, you'll be giving up all the other options available to you, and that will feel like a loss.

That feeling of loss will make you start to doubt your choice. Anytime you have to make a choice between two (or more) things, it'll feel like a loss. This loss is not regret or an omen to change your mind; it's a natural feeling of sadness for the road not traveled.

Remember a quarter-life crisis is a crisis of self-identity. If you've spent your entire life with one vision of what adulthood would look like for you and suddenly you've realized that vision doesn't align with the person you've become, that's really difficult and incredibly uncomfortable.

PUT INTO PRACTICE: BE COMPASSIONATE

Practicing self-compassion is honoring yourself and accepting your humanness. There are certainly people in the world who knew what they wanted to do when they were a kid and have never wavered. But the majority of adults went through a lot of twists and turns while determining their unique life path.

Your discomfort with your new identity is a natural part of the process so please remember to practice self-compassion and trust you'll find the right path for you.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NAMI CHICAGO

Since 1979, NAMI Chicago has fought for families and individuals impacted by mental health conditions. We promote community wellness, break down barriers to mental health care and provide support and expertise for families, professionals and individuals in Chicago and beyond.

SAMHSA

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

CHICAGO DIVERSITY VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR

The Virtual Career Fair easily connects you – from wherever you are – with employers seeking to hire diverse candidates. It is designed to bring employers and job seekers together virtually, for jobs that can be done remote or on-site.

NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR CREDIT COUNSELING (NFCC)

The NFCC is a trusted nonprofit financial counseling organization that aims to help Americans gain control over their finances. NFCC Certified Financial Counselors are trained to address serious repayment issues involving credit card debt, home-related debt, and student loans.

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES—ADOPTION CENTER OF ILLINOIS

A comprehensive collection of resources and supportive services for prospective adoptive families and adoptive families compiled by Adoption Center of Illinois.



ABOUT THE ROOM—A READING SERIES

The Room is an online reading series that brings original work, plays in-development, and new stories to Chicago audiences. Offering in-depth discussions as well as action steps for patrons that intersect with themes of the plays. *The Room* is a virtual, accessible series on Zoom.

[Learn more about *The Room*.](#)

ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. **American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.**

We are Chicago's **second-oldest AEA Ensemble theater**. As of 2022, our theater and artists received 221 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 40 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. Our artists work throughout the nation - including Broadway and regional theaters - and loyally return to our stage.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres. Our new play development consists of a variety of programs – including world and Chicago premieres, the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Award*, commissions, *The Room* staged readings, *The Garage* concerts, and annual *Ripped Festival* of new short-plays.

We believe it is an honor and duty to serve our community. We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' commendable causes through creative collaborations. We hold food drives, distribute promotional materials, offer free post-show discussions, provide complimentary tickets, honor military personnel, hold exclusive performances for underserved communities, and raise awareness for children's surgeries. We donate proceeds from "Pediatric Previews" to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

American Blues Theater is your Chicago home for bold, exceptional, and relevant performances. **Your ticket purchases and donations help us make Chicago *the first city* in all our hearts.**

