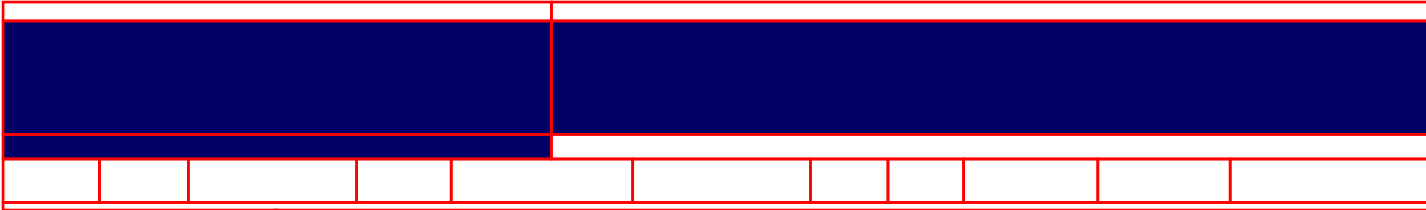


--	--	--	--	--



- [Columnists](#)
- [Connecticut](#)
- [Election 2002](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Latest News](#)
- [Lottery](#)
- [Nation/World](#)
- [Photo/Video Gallery](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Special Reports](#)
- [Towns](#)
- [Traffic](#)
- [Weather](#)

- [Arts & Theater](#)
- [Attractions](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Dining](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Movies](#)
- [Music](#)
- [TV & Radio](#)
- [TV Listings](#)

-

BUSINESS

Following Their Arts
 November 11, 2002
 By SUJATA SRINIVASAN, Special To The Courant

People whose jobs don't quite fit them often think about the road they didn't take. Although some of us arrive at the right career at a young age, others journey far and wide before discovering what they enjoy doing most.

Whatever they decide, people's lives are defined by the choices they make. Those who are happy and successful choose careers that align with their aptitude, skill and personality. How do they do it?

During the summer, The Courant asked readers to describe how they found the career that was right for them.

Among those who responded were a paralegal turned caterer, a parts manager for a car dealer who became a nurse, and a teacher of painting who switched to a career in interior design.

These are their stories.

A Passion For Food

Author and career consultant Laurence G. Boldt wrote in "Zen and the Art of Making a Living" that people should consider four parameters when they try to determine their talents: what they enjoy doing, what they enjoy thinking about, what they enjoy learning about and what they enjoy as a process.

"I never thought I was creative until I found cooking," said Anna Belcher, who runs Anna's, a catering company in New Haven, where she studied law at Yale University.

UTILITIES

- [E-mail story](#)
- [Printer-friendly version](#)

MORE HEADLINES

- [Memo: You Can Afford To Dream](#)
- [Internet Panhandling Saving Karyn](#)
- [CuraGen To Lay Off 25 Percent Of Staff](#)
- [Economy's Vital Signs Improve](#)
- [Phoenix Lists Loss; Stock Falls 21%](#)

ADVERTISERS

Lowe's

[Auto Racing](#)
[Baseball](#)
[Basketball](#)
[College Sports](#)
[Columnists](#)
[Golf](#)
[Football](#)
[High School Sports](#)
[Hockey](#)
[Husky Hardcores](#)
[Scores & Stats](#)
[Skiing](#)
[UConn Football](#)



[Columnists](#)
[Real Estate](#)
[Technology](#)
[Web 100](#)



[Books](#)
[Celebrity](#)
[Columnists](#)
[Food](#)
[New England Guide](#)
[Northeast](#)
[Style & Shopping](#)
[Travel](#)



[Columnists](#)
[Commentary](#)
[Editorials](#)
[Letters](#)
[Other Opinion](#)



Belcher lives almost across the street from her shop. Although her principal business is catering, she also has a small restaurant where patrons can dine in or take out gourmet food.

Former classmates who are now lawyers drop in for a bite and urge her to complete her law degree. Belcher, 36, is eight papers away from finishing her studies, but for now she has no plans to do so. She wouldn't trade her job for anything.

"I could win the Lotto tomorrow, and I would still do what I do," she said.

Food in all of its aspects fascinates Belcher. She once drove all the way to Montreal to buy pottery in which to serve her creations. She loves to write about food almost as much as she loves cooking it, which is why her dream job is to become a food critic.

Belcher primarily caters at buffet dinners and cocktail parties, mostly at Yale. She serves cuisines that include Mexican, Thai, Japanese, Chinese, Russian and French nouveau.

The petite Taiwanese woman's arms are smeared with burns from long hours of sauteing. On weekends during the Christmas season, she caters for as many as a thousand people.

Although she has a table staff to help her, Belcher almost single-handedly does the cooking, spreading it over a couple of days.

"I don't delegate cooking. I'm very much a control freak," she said.

She loves being her own boss. It was this streak of individuality that led her to start her business.

"I don't follow directions well from other people," she said. "I'm not great with structure and rules."

It's also one of the reasons she switched careers.

"That was part of my problem with law, not just because of law itself, but just because it does require more structure. I love the fact that I have more control over my hours," she said.

[Business Directory](#)

[Find a Person](#)

[Search By Phone #](#)

[Courant Archives](#)

[Courant Photo](#)

[Reprints](#)

[Courant Permissions](#)

[ctnow.com Media Kit](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Obituaries](#)

[Site Map](#)

Belcher's childhood memories are of sauntering through food displays in Taiwanese and European markets. She emigrated to the United States when she was 8, and she became a citizen when her American stepfather adopted her about 27 years ago.

She indulged her love for food during her sophomore year at Yale, when she worked part time with a caterer.

"I think about food all the time. If I am not thinking about what to cook, I am fantasizing about what I want to eat," she said.

But it was not until six years ago that Belcher switched careers. She graduated from Yale in political science through what she termed a process of elimination. She wasn't good at math and science.

"It was more like, what's left? So social studies," she said.

Belcher liked political science, and she thought it would lead her to a career in the law. But she loved food so much that she would skip classes to go out and eat. It was when she started working as a paralegal that she realized a law career was not for her.

"I didn't believe in the system, I didn't like the lawyers, and I had this passion for food that just would not go away," she said.

Belcher's transition to catering wasn't easy. She had put a lot of money into her education. Besides, the expectations of family and friends were tremendous.

"Everybody I knew was waiting for me to finish law school," she said. Also, "Yale-ites don't become caterers," she added wryly.

Yet Belcher was determined to follow her dream, and she does not regret her decision.

"I love food, I love cooking, and I am so lucky that I can make a living doing what I am most passionate about," she said.

At Crossroads, An Opportunity

In "Change Your Job, Change Your Life," career specialist Ron Krannich said, "A job should not

become a life sentence."

How true. But career transitions are often difficult.

Stuart A. Amdur, director of the Human Resources & Management Consulting Group at Weinstein & Anastasio P.C., a Woodbridge-based firm that offers financial and business management advice, says planning is essential during a career transition.

"Get your family to buy into your dreams," he said. "Start putting money away to carry you over a while till you can realize real income again."

He encourages people to make use of the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, or COBRA. Enacted in 1986, the federal law helps people keep group health coverage for a time after a job loss.

David Giannotta, 48, of Simsbury, worked in the automotive industry for 22 years. A parts manager and computer systems administrator for car dealers, Giannotta typically left for work at 6:30 a.m. and returned at 7:30 p.m. He worked most Saturdays, and one Sunday a month.

"I missed not being with my family. It's hard when you're away all day long. Sometimes I'd get calls at two o'clock in the morning to go to the dealership," Giannotta said.

He lost the job eight years ago when the dealership, CNS Motors in Enfield, was bought out by a New York company. Giannotta remained for nine months, helping in the transition.

When he was let go, he took it as a blessing in disguise, realizing he had an opportunity to switch careers.

"I was right in the mid-point of my working life, basically," he said. "I've been working twenty-something years in the automotive business, and I thought about do I want to work twenty-something more years in the same career. There are ways you can step up your responsibilities and money and power. But most of those require more time at work, more responsibility, and more of a commitment to the dealerships, and consequently less of a commitment at home," he said.

The medical field had long fascinated Giannotta. For years, he had been a volunteer emergency medical technician in Simsbury. His wife, Elizabeth, is a registered nurse.

Giannotta realized that he wanted to become a nurse. But the transition was difficult. He was on welfare for six months after he lost his job at CNS Motors. During this period, he took courses from Capitol Community College that are prerequisites for a nursing diploma.

Then he signed up for a three-year nursing diploma program at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center. He completed it in two years. All the while, he worked part time as a security guard and a nursing assistant.

Family support proved invaluable during the period; his wife was the primary wage earner.

"We took a hit [in income]," he said. "But it was worth it; education's the key."

During the next few years, he worked at the McLean Home in Simsbury, at New Britain General Hospital and at St. Francis, gaining experience.

Three and a half years ago, he joined Hartford Hospital, working first on the open heart step-down floor.

He now works in the hospital's emergency department, typically 36 hours of night shifts a week, and he is entitled to full-time benefits. He can increase his hours if he chooses, and that gives him the flexibility he wants.

Giannotta and his wife have three daughters, one in college and two in high school.

"I like the fact that I'm home every day when my kids come home from school. Plus, I can golf every day if I want to. My days are free," he said.

Believing it was important to keep adding to his education, he earned a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Hartford last year.

Working in the emergency room can be emotionally strenuous. Giannotta often cries as he drives home from the hospital, deeply moved by people's trauma and pain. But although he earns 30 percent less than he did

as a parts manager, Giannotta is a happy man.

"The change of careers was the best decision I have made in my life, except for marrying my wife and having children," he said.

`Painting In Third Dimension'

In "Measure for Measure," Shakespeare wrote, "Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt."

Once they start a career, people see doors open, leading to new possibilities. Not everyone opens those doors. But Irene Sorokin took a chance, and she rediscovered herself.

An interior designer who is now in her 70s, Sorokin taught painting 50 years ago.

"What I tried to do was to bring out in my students what I thought their talent was," she said.

Some of her adult students began asking Sorokin to help them beautify their homes. She picked out paint colors and wallpaper, and did furniture placements and room design. Soon she was reviewing blueprints and supervising the building and remodeling of homes and offices.

"I did this pro bono, and for the enjoyment I had doing it," she said.

Eventually, a woman who had seen one of Sorokin's remodeling jobs called on her and insisted on paying a professional fee. At that point, Sorokin realized that this was what she wanted to be doing.

One remodeling job led to another. Soon she was a full-fledged interior designer, with projects in Connecticut, New York, California, Chicago and Florida.

She runs her company, Irene Sorokin Designs, out of her home in West Hartford. However, Sorokin said she never thought of starting out as a designer.

"I was too much of a purist. I never would have thought that. Now I realize it's all part of the same art," she said. "To me, designing houses is painting in third dimension. The whole thing comes together as an art

form."

On average, Sorokin works on about 24 projects a month. The most fulfilling aspect of her job is seeing her completed design. The challenge is to create interiors that align with people's tastes and personalities. This, she said, makes each project unique.

Sorokin believes that working with a variety of people has made her world broader; when she was painting, her world was more confined. She's glad she took the opportunity when it came her way. "I am blessed," she said.

Sometimes all it takes to create a turning point and start a promising new career is a small inner spark.

Said Amdur, the human resources consultant, "It's the point when waking up each morning to the new challenge invigorates and individually motivates you to learn more, challenge more, do more - the point where you can look in the mirror and acknowledge that you make a difference."

Sujata Srinivasan is a free-lance writer who lives in Manchester.

[HOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [ENTERTAINMENT](#) | [SPORTS](#) | [BUSINESS](#)
[SHOPPING](#) | [JOBS](#) | [CARS](#) | [REAL ESTATE](#) | [CLASSIFIED](#)
[Contact Us](#) | [Advertise Online](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)

ctnow.com is Copyright © 2002 by The Hartford Courant