



CAREER CHANGE CORNER

Case study on how Grandma Moses launched her career as a serious contender in the arts

“I look back on my life like a good day’s work, it was done and I am satisfied with it”

~ Grandma Moses

The story of Grandma Moses is too rich in lessons to occasionally refer to for bits of useful trivia. It’s a complete, intriguingly-woven, engaging story of how one individual, a woman born in those Puritan New England times in America, picked up the pieces of a lost, distant dream and fashioned an enduring career as a sought-after artist.

So, how does a 76 year old who’s got next to no education but a lifetime of raising children and chickens on different farms evolve to become a renowned folk artist and painter? Sounds like the stuff of Hollywood legends, right? Well, not quite. Let’s take a brief look at how Grandma Moses launched her second act and what lessons we can draw from her story:

1. **She had a natural artistic ability:** you need to **identify your natural talents** and proclivities and zone in on what you are naturally drawn to. What draws you in like a magnet? Cast a look back into your childhood, there’s a treasure-trove of clues there...regardless of when and where you were born, your social station in life, the Universe works in its own magical ways. Your talents were allocated before you were even born; it is a fact (I will address the neurobiology of talent in other parts of this site). Conduct a natural-talent-audit; you can start this process off by engaging with your memories about your childhood: what activities did you love doing? What were you always busy with and risked getting spanked for? Your other best bet is to interview your parents and/or relatives and childhood friends and teachers. Really engage with yourself and your life’s journey; there are countless clues along the way.
2. **She reignited her interest in painting by taking it up as a hobby:** at some point, you have to put feelers out there and test the waters. Grandma Moses did try other hobbies in her dotage such as embroidery but did not enjoy them...until she rediscovered painting. You may have spent some of the best years of your life doing work that you do not enjoy; working your way towards finding your sweet spot will involve trying out new things but eventually you will find that one thing that makes your heart sing and body hum. Do not stop experimenting until you find it. You do not have to drop everything at all once, start out with simple things such as hobbies.

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3. **She leveraged her identified natural talent to carve out a niche for herself:** Grandma Moses started showcasing her paintings at country fairs along with her jams and canned fruit but barely made an artistic wave or ripple. But she did not give up. She also displayed her paintings in the pharmacy of a neighbouring town and soon they were all snapped up by an art dealer in New York and that was her big break.
4. **She worked incredibly hard to make up for lost time:** it is not “lost time” per se because everything up to the point that you decide to switch careers is as it should be, however, because you are a person of excellence you will want to make your mark in your chosen vocation and to build depth and develop expertise doing what you love. Grandma Moses had her first showing in 1940 but in the space of only 10 years, according to TIME magazine, she had had more than 160 exhibitions! That’s a mind-boggling work ethic to have and obviously she would not have produced that many works of original art had she not absolutely loved what she was doing. It had ceased to be “work” and it was never quite a “job”. That’s what I want for you and that’s exactly what you deserve. According to Olivia Waxman in TIME magazine, by the early 1950s, Grandma Moses, “had the only Ecole Americaine picture hanging in Paris’s Museum of Modern Art”.
5. **She did not let anything stop her, she was tenacious and resilient and everything fell into place:** it would be easy to paint a rosy picture and say that painting solved every problem she had, but Grandma Moses actually suffered from arthritis! The arthritis did not go away but it did not stop her from living her dream and being a prolific painter either. Develop the skills of mastering your emotions and your mind and I guarantee you that whatever life serves up will not stop you from becoming the superstar that you were born to be.
6. **She was in charge of her own narrative and defined herself and her dreams:** the critics said her work was “primitive” but she did not allow them to define her or her work; this is what she had to say about her work and her word was king: “I like oldtimy [sic] things – something real pretty. Most of them are daydreams.”

What truly counts is how you feel about yourself and what you’re doing; what you say about yourself and what you do. It’s your opinion about you that counts. You’re the expert on you and nobody else. In the next article, I will provide a catalogue of other similarly inspiring stories such as that of Gogo Nofundile Mayathula-Memani of Gugulethu in Cape Town.