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#### How do you balance following your dream, with taking time for yourself?

Everyone I know works at least 4 jobs. Isn't that weird? I don't recall people doing that while I lived on the east coast. Do we work to live or live to work? Where is the balance and for what purpose do we all do this really? I ask myself this every day and time and time again I think I've found the answer; yet I don't ever feel like I fully have the answer. What makes your life worth living?

I see dedicated and motivated winemakers, chefs and industry people living their dream every day. For me it was always imperative for me to do something that would make a difference and inspire others on some level, in order to truly feel as if I was living my best life. Through this mindset and many years of being a professional photographer; and marketing, writing, and capturing the stories of others, I've been building on this dream.

Eventually, it lead to the notion that "still" photos are no longer enough to capture the iconic stories of others, and that I had to start a television show where interviews and videos could fill in the gaps. I love peoples' stories! To capture them on a daily basis was all I could do to keep the soul filling, nourished feeling I so wanted to have.

I think it really began for me one day one when I was asked to photograph one of Chef Thomas Keller's (of the French Laundry) elaborate holiday parties just after having moved here to the Napa Valley from Boston. Here I was, capturing a holiday party like none other. I was invited to stroll the levels of deliciousness among the iconic French Laundry structure on Washington Street in Yountville, and encouraged to taste through the masterfully created spread while I photographed. I can honestly say, I felt like I was in an adult version of Hansel and Gretel... except there were no bread crumbs being left along any path of mine; I was already home.

The space was transformed with colorful candy, decadent pastries, an elaborate cheese spread, made from every kind of animal you could possibly milk. In another space I saw an entire room dedicated to miniature life-like gingerbread houses that had ski-chair lifts built on the side of these shrunken Swiss style chalets in such a fashion it made me want to shrink myself immediately and live in this kind of

wonderland. There were popcorn machines; caviar topped ice cream cones filled with shaved salmon locks. Performances from colorfully costumed children singing the sounds only angels could make. It was truly a fairytale.

Following the party, I was asked if I'd like to attend the after party, which was for the staff only. Of course I would attend! While I danced along side Thomas Keller and his team I started to fully realize I was living the dream. You don't get to do this often... Rarely does a

journalist get to truly delve into a subject to this capacity, and to be completely awakened by all of the sense to this degree. With that I realized that the "behind the scenes" of all of this must be filmed. How could the rest of the world really go without seeing what I had just witnessed? How could the rest of the world go without seeing all of what WE living among this valley and witness every day: the

level of  
endless labored dedication? My work life had officially blended with my play-time.

Where else in the world can we honestly say that our career blends in with everyday life and both become one? For years this was and still is my life on most days... Even as I write I realize the significance of the life I have here in this valley and I realize how blessed I am to be doing such things. However, as we often play hard, we truly work even harder. This, like many other gigs, was landed by my own relentless determination to succeed, an inner knowing that there is no option to fail; no option to go without having these amazing opportunities to craft such amazing photographs; and that one day all the dedication and hard work would amount to a successful name and brand I earned for myself.

So many of us work as hard as that staff did to put on such festivities, slaving over meticulously creations in that kitchen to make it all happen. It was through their very own relentless hard work that I began to realize and ask myself, when do we take a break... when do we rest? When do we sit with ourselves and just be? Because it's truly through that kind of being with one self that we are able to appreciate a different simplicity of life, and that kind of balance is important to truly connecting with your inner self. Don't get me wrong; I wouldn't change anything for the life I've lived non-stop in these past 5+ years; but when it all comes down to it, I know I need do more for myself, to nurse and recharge myself.

This is something I remind myself as I write these words at 11:30 at night. Even if that stop button is on temporary pause, it's important to turn it ALL off just for a weekend. It's a balance I find myself struggling with every day.

How do you balance following your dream, with taking time for yourself? Are you living your best life? [Email me!](#)

Warmly,

- Nicole

*Nicole Marino is a nationally published photographer and television show host living her passion in Napa Valley and originally from Boston Massachusetts. Through her company @BIGshot in Winecountry, "capturing inspiration," she captures inspirational moments and shares them with the world through means of writing, television interviews, videos and photography.*



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