

## Never Give Up Your Dreams

Everyone has special dreams as a child. Some want to be great athletes, others famous movie actors or actresses, and certainly many dream of becoming recording stars. These kinds of dreams are common but seldom realized, and most are long abandoned and forgotten as the decades roll by. Real life careers and family take precedence and the fantasies fade away.



Denise Brigham, a typical Chicago suburban housewife, was one of those. As a child all she ever wanted to be was a big recording artist. Everyday she would wait until her mom left the house and then she would dress up in oversized gowns, put on a record, and using a salt shaker for a microphone she would sing her heart out for hours until she would see her mom coming back down the street and then she would quickly put everything back and become a shy little girl again. Her mom had lived a tough life. She loved her daughters and wanted nothing but the best for them, and show business wasn't a career she thought of as promising. To make matters worse Denise was constantly picked on and made fun of by her schoolmates, and she became very insecure and thought she had no talent. That is why she came to sing only to herself in private. That was the way she could be admired by the throngs that existed only in her imagination. As time went on she followed her mother's advice, learned shorthand, became a secretary, got married, and raised her family.

This is usually where these kinds of stories end, but not this one. Denise never lost her love of singing even though the dream of being a star had long faded away. Instead now she would wait until her husband left the house and then she would go into the bedroom and sing to CD's until she would hear him come back in. Then, as before, she would quickly shut them off. That didn't always work however as sometimes she wouldn't hear him open the door, and Adrian would stop and listen, but never let on that he heard her as she would get very embarrassed. For years that kept her happy, but something unexpected was about to happen. A couple of times a month Denise and her husband would go to a local Italian restaurant where the owner gets up and sings to his dinner guests. As they were leaving there one night she made an offhand flip comment that she would give anything to sing with him just once, but she didn't really mean it. Two weeks later though when they went back, Adrian secretly arranged for the owner to bring her up to do a duet with him. When he called her to the microphone she almost passed out. She stood there petrified but got through it, and the crowd whistled, cheered and applauded. She couldn't believe that people actually liked her singing, but it gave her a little confidence.

After that Adrian started taking her to area karaoke bars where again she received overwhelming compliments and plenty of encouragement. Little by little she began to think she really did have some talent, and now it was her fear of singing in public that began to fade. Before long she couldn't find enough places to go and sing. She was going out almost every night having fun and meeting many new friends, but she found it a little frustrating to sing a song and then have to wait for over an hour to do another. Some nights she would only get to do two songs if the bars were crowded. She wished she could do more, and again an opportunity was coming. One evening they went to dinner in a different restaurant where the owner hired a guy to come in with a small sound system and put on a show singing to karaoke tracks. Adrian looked at her and said, "Why don't you do that?" She thought he was crazy, and she didn't think she could ever do a show on her own, but he knew better. He went out and bought the equipment and got her booked into a different restaurant on Friday nights for a month. The management liked her enough to extend her run. Slowly she gained the confidence that she could actually do her own show and succeed as an entertainer. Now she was the happiest she had ever been and couldn't wait for Fridays so she could GO to work! The one month gig wound up being extended to three months, but then one evening the restaurant told her they were switching to a new act and that night she cried herself to sleep and wanted to quit. Adrian said no way, and the next day he went and found another place for her to do her show.

From there she started performing in a number of bars and clubs and her show grew in size and popularity, but now the road was also going to start getting rocky. Her show was good and she started developing a group of fans, but there are far more entertainers in the business than there are clubs and bars and the competition for gigs was brutal to say the least, and too often downright dirty. Getting steady work was rare, and for all the nights of happiness there were just as many more when tears flowed. It's tough enough singing your heart out in a bar where no one is really paying attention, but when club owners would renege on promises and bookings that often became more than she could handle. The fun was going out of it, and again she thought of giving up.

During this time however Denise had met a friend on MySpace who was a singer and was just finishing up recording his first big album nearby in Chicago. He called Denise's husband one day in August of 2006 and said he wanted them to come to his CD release party downtown at the recording studio. Adrian told him he really didn't want to go because of the horrid traffic and miserable parking, but the singer insisted. He said there would be people there they needed to meet and he wouldn't take no for an answer! Walking into the Chicago Recording Company that warm Monday evening they had no idea what to expect, and what they were going to experience was beyond their wildest dreams. This was no small suburban studio like Denise had recorded a demo in once before, this was definitely the big time. CRC is a multimillion-dollar studio that caters to the stars, and everybody from Frank Sinatra to Michael Jackson has recorded there. As they walked around they were introduced to a who's who list of famous musicians, conductors, and industry and media people. It was almost a surreal experience, and when they left they both knew it wasn't the world they were part of. They went back to their home in the suburbs and back to their normal life working in the local clubs.

Nine months went by of the same old routine until another club owner backed out of some promised dates in order to give them to one of his friends. That was the final straw for Adrian and he blew up saying it was time to try something different. He wanted Denise to do an album with her small jazz band in a friend's home studio, but for that they would need new arrangements written. He called Carey Deadman, who they had met at that party, and asked if they could meet him and talk about it. Carey is widely considered Chicago's top arranger so he was easily the first choice. They met, but when Carey found out it was a small band in a suburban studio he had no interest in getting involved. He was with the hit play *Wicked* at the time, plus he does a lot of work for other shows and theaters, so he had no time to devote to a small project. He went home with a sample of Denise's show, but told them to look for someone else. They started calling others but couldn't find anyone they were completely happy with, and the frustration level began to rise. A few weeks went by and then one day the phone rang. It was Carey, and he wanted another meeting.

Labor day of 2007 Denise and Adrian sat down with him in a Starbucks and were about to get the shock of their lives. Carey told them that he had since listened to Denise's singing, that he liked the kind of music she wanted to record, and that he thought there was a great potential there, but, and it was a BIG but, he would take on the project only if it could be done his way. He had no interest in writing for her six piece band and recording in a small home studio, instead he wanted to not only be the arranger, but he wanted to actually take over the project and produce the entire album, move it down to the Chicago Recording Company, and use a real orchestra, the same one he worked with in *Wicked*. Denise couldn't believe what she was hearing. After almost 50 years, her childhood dream of being a recording artist was coming back to life, and she was shaking worse than that first night in the restaurant. For days she kept pinching herself to make sure it was real.

Recording a major album is a very slow process. The next nine months were all about production meetings and writing, changes and rewrites, and then more of the same, but in May of 2008 they walked into CRC for the second time, and this time it was for Denise. At first it was hard to stand

there and believe that all of the technicians and orchestra members scurrying around were for her, but they made her feel very comfortable and treated her like a true star. Now there would be no more singing into a saltshaker, instead it would be a \$25,000 studio microphone. That started an almost year long process of multiple recording sessions, more writing, way too often delays and serious cost overruns, and still a few more tearful nights when it seemed like it would never get completed, but finally on April 29th 2009 Denise got to hold her own CD release party at CRC with all of the same people that had been there for the other party. After a year and a half of hard work, and a budget of well over \$100,000, HOTEL LAFAYETTE had become a reality. To top off the daylong celebration Denise also arranged for a young girl from the Make-A-Wish program who wanted to be a recording artist to come in and record two songs with the orchestra, and then honored her too at the party that night. Denise told everyone that she didn't want this girl to have to wait years like she had to do!

In the end HOTEL LAFAYETTE was released to rave reviews everywhere. Nationally syndicated radio host Johnny Magnus went so far as to tell his listeners "when you hear great orchestral vocals you always think of L.A. or New York, never Chicago. Now you have to!" Marc Angel, CEO of the Music Of Your Life radio network told his audience "folks, we get a lot of new stuff in here, and most of it is pretty good, but I've got to tell you, this is the best!" By the end of July the album had climbed to #1 in national radio airplay in the Adult Standards format ahead of Michael Buble, Diana Krall, Rod Stewart, and even Tony Bennett. From there it went into the Grammys in five major categories including Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album, and in December broadcasting professionals voted it as the #4 Standards album of the year beating even Barbra Streisand on their annual list of the top 50.

Today HOTEL LAFAYETTE has sold worldwide including Australia, Japan and all across Europe. Her music is now heard on hundreds of radio stations in the U.S. and abroad and Denise is now a recognized star in the world of Adult Standards music right along side all the other great names. Now instead of singing in small dark clubs Denise is performing in concert with either her own traveling production show or with "Pops" symphony orchestras in performing arts theatres. At a point in life when most others have long given up on or even forgotten their childhood dreams, she is just starting to live hers.

Denise is living proof that anything is possible if you work hard, believe in yourself, and never give up your dreams. It can happen.....!!!

**Additional information, media material and pictures are available at:**

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