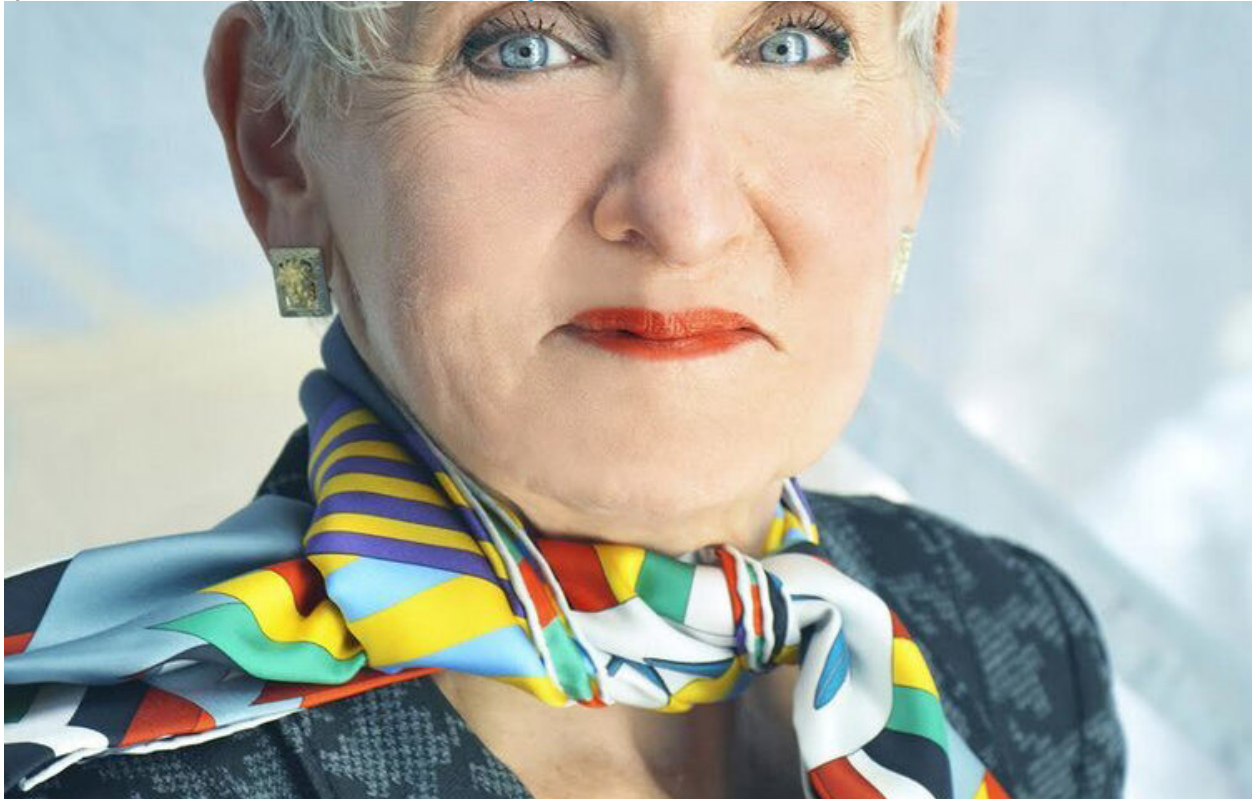


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Her ‘most meaningful’ act is next

By **Mary Lou Falcone**

I am 78 years young and starting a brand-new chapter – Act Three of my life.

If you had told me in the mid-1960s (at age 20) that I was destined to experience three distinctly different careers in life, I would have been shocked. In my wildest dreams, I never could have imagined what was in store. Because I trusted the universe and my reliable gut reaction, I got to experience life’s expansiveness, its richness and depth, along with its trying times.

Having been given the gift of a singing voice, I used it in my early years as a lifeline to express emotion when words weren’t possible. In my teens, I trained as a classical singer at the famed Curtis Institute of Music. Then came Act One of my adult life, performing in opera and concert. During my 20s, I realized that the singing career was my entree to something else. But what? The path took some time, but Act Two became clear when, at 28, I made the bold decision to create a public relations business.

While I loved performing, I didn’t need it; I did need to communicate. As fate would have it, the proverbial light bulb moment took place while performing with an opera company in the midwest. My curiosity lured me to the company’s public relations department. In my spare time between performances, maybe I could apprentice there? The company’s general manager had other ideas. “Why not just take over the national and international press representation of the company?”

Even though I knew nothing about PR, I was game to try. That “yes” parlayed into a successful business that has lasted 50 years. PR allowed me to communicate with passion and knowledge about music and artists, shining a spotlight on countless careers from Van Cliburn, Renée Fleming and James Taylor, to institutions like the Vienna Philharmonic, Carnegie Hall, and LaScala.

Toward the end of Act Two, I began to wonder: Might there be an Act Three? While contemplating this notion, life took a turn that I didn't see coming, laying the groundwork for that third act.

My soulmate, the artist Nicky Zann, was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia (LBD), a neurodegenerative disease for which there is no cure and which affects approximately 11 million people worldwide. It is often misdiagnosed, as it mimics Alzheimer's disease.

Caring for my beloved husband was a challenge and a gift. The challenge was in being his sole caregiver during the pandemic, watching the person I loved most in this world slip away day by day. On the other hand, making Nicky's impossible journey as positive as possible was a gift to me.

And Nicky gave me a parting gift. He told me shortly before he died that I had to write. After he passed, I began to write about our love story and his illness. The writing has become a basic handbook, especially for caregivers and families.

Today, I have my third act: Advocate for LBD awareness. With the book as my calling card, I address groups of medical professionals, family members, and caregivers throughout the country, from the Mayo Clinic to the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Additionally, I've expanded my advocacy for dementia awareness as an executive producer for the film, "*Facing the Wind*," soon to be launched. At 78, my third and probably most meaningful act energizes me and hopefully will inspire others.

Mary Lou Falcone is the author of the memoir "[I Didn't See It Coming: Scenes of Love, Loss and Lewy Body Dementia](#)." More at www.maryloufalcone.com