

No Bubblegum

real stuff. no fluff.

We are delighted to feature accomplished musician, writer and budding filmmaker Asha Mevlana. As a violinist signed to a major record label, a cancer survivor, and someone who truly lives by her heart — Asha is an inspiration. Rather than list our entire Q&A verbatim, we felt it more impactful to briefly summarize the broad lines of Asha's life, and then share some of her personal insights, in her own words. We are struck by the strength, courage and beauty of this exceptional woman, and hope her story resonates with you as well.

The Violin. A native of Newton, Massachusetts, Asha discovered the violin at age 6 and began lessons using the Suzuki method (where her mother learned the instrument alongside her). Like many other children, she wanted to quit at various points throughout childhood, but her mom forced her to continue — and, ultimately, she developed a passion for the instrument.

Asha Mevlana attended Wellesley College and majored in music, with no intention of pursuing it professionally (it didn't seem like a realistic option to her at the time). Instead, she began a career in Public Relations in New York; one year later, at age 24, Asha was diagnosed with breast cancer. During the 8-months of chemotherapy that followed, she remained at her job for health insurance reasons; however, this was a major turning point for Asha on many levels (as you will read below).

After teaching music and working at a non-profit for breast cancer research in New York for two years, Asha moved to LA where, along with some twists and turns and plenty of adventure, she launched a very successful music career.

Here are 4 insights Asha Mevlana shared with us that really stood out.



Insight #1: We create our lives.

“During my chemo treatments, I was taking improv violin lessons. I had a very strict teacher who, even on days when I was throwing up, forced me to show up to lessons. She would say, “You paid, and there is no excuse not to come.” There were times I couldn’t stand her because she wouldn’t let me get away with anything; however, this teacher turned out to be a life teacher for me. She was the person who, even while I was in chemo, asked what I really wanted to do with my life. At the time I laughed and said, “I want to be a rock violinist”. I thought she would laugh too, but she took it seriously. I never thought I could actually do it.

Up until then, I always thought I had to do what everyone else was doing; I didn’t have any role models who’d done anything different. My violin teacher opened my eyes to the fact that

I really could create my own path. And, yes, maybe I wouldn't be successful and maybe I would — but the one thing I did have control over was making these decisions and working to build the life I wanted— instead of following what others thought I should do or otherwise limiting myself. This was a huge realization. Since then, that's exactly what I've done. There have been many scary and unpleasant times; there have been huge highs and huge lows. But at least I know that I've created this life for myself. I try to view everything as a lesson; there is always something to learn, and especially during the really low points. Being an artist or a creative type means living with the unknown all the time, so I've learned to be more comfortable with that.



#2: “Cancer gave me a gift.” *“After being diagnosed with breast cancer, I realized I had two choices: become so overwhelmed and fall into a deep depression, or rise up, face my fears and begin really living the life I wanted. Somehow cancer gave me a gift — an opportunity to try again. It gave me the chance to question my beliefs and, surprisingly, become balanced — something I never remembered feeling.”*

#3: Less planning and more living.

Before my diagnosis, I was big planner — with 1 month, 1 year, 5 year, and even 10 year goals. Afterwards, I realized it was important to have goals, but also to be okay with the idea that they might change. And I needed to stop trying to control every outcome. The diagnosis helped me surrender my control because it forced me to realize I just couldn't control everything — no matter how much I planned or tried.

I used to only do things I knew I could be successful at, or at least had a good chance at. I never tried anything I might fail at or be mediocre at. I didn't take risks and was terrified of failure. After the diagnosis, I decided to face my fears. It was a real test of living with and in the unknown — something that was completely uncomfortable and foreign to me. But I was just sick of being afraid of things."

#4. "I make a habit of living outside my comfort zone."

"I now make a habit of living outside my comfort zone because I realize that's when I learn the most about myself and feel the most alive. When I'm scared of something, there must be something I'm supposed to learn from it. So I dive into whatever it is — to conquer that fear. Traveling alone was one my fears, so I went to Colombia solo to learn salsa; I was scared of speaking in front of people, so I joined a stand-up improv class with a final show for the public; I'm terrified of drowning, so I decided to do a kayak trip; I went bungee jumping and skydiving to get over my fear of heights."