



How an unemployed carpenter became a reality TV star

Carpenter Paul DiMeo shines as a minor celebrity who uses major craftsmanship to create hope on the reality TV show, **Extreme Makeover: Home Edition**

I needed to eat

I'm reluctant to call myself a star and prefer the moniker "Minor Celebrity." And in my case, "Minor, Minor Celebrity." And a lucky one at that. It all began for me back in college where I majored in theater with the hope of acting in dramas and musicals on and off Broadway. Television was always an option, but I like live theater; I get energy from the audience. So I went to New York after college, hustling audition after audition, and quickly realized there was no shortage of talent in New York City. Still, every once in a while, I'd see an advertisement for an audition calling for my exact talents. One called for a thirty-something male, slightly balding, who played a mean piano, sang, played the harmonica, and could juggle. I thought, "This is me!" I showed up early, assuming there were not many people who could do all that. So did about six hundred other thirty-something, slightly bald males. I got a call back but didn't get the part.



"There are many actors who are just as good and never find work creating as they expected to create."

I sharpened my trade by going to classes and acting in community theater productions. I loved it, but I needed to eat, so I worked construction, primarily as a finish carpenter. I helped create the kind of space a client envisioned and then orchestrated the build. What I liked most about this business was the translation of an idea to a reality. I liked the work, but it was not my passion.

Not exactly acting

I moved to Los Angeles looking for work in television and started designing and building sets. But designing sets is not acting. So I moved back to New York and continued to go to auditions. It seemed like all the acting I did was Off Broadway—way Off Broadway. So I decided to return to Los Angeles and continued to work construction and build sets.

One project was a remodel of a home in the Hollywood Hills under a tight schedule that had to be done in time for a gala hosted by my client. The client was elated with my work, and the party went off without a hitch. Lucky for me—and this is about luck—a producer attending the party asked who the contractor was. He had an idea for a reality show in which a team of designers would totally refurbish a home in a week. The working title of the show was *Space Invaders*, and the idea was to find families that had been through very tough times, send them on a vacation for a week, and after their return, hand over the keys to a new home. *Space Invaders* became *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. That was 2003.

Working on a reality show isn't exactly acting. I'd love to show off some of the characters I've developed. It would be great to internalize a script and create a lasting memory within a story. But the producers of *Extreme Makeover: Home*



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Let's make it great work

The families we help do need us. And their need is what makes my work meaningful. No, it isn't singing alongside Bette Midler in a Broadway production, or playing a role opposite Leonardo DiCaprio on the silver screen. But listening to an eight-year-old with an autoimmune-deficiency disease talk about what he always wanted in a bedroom, or a mother of five who just lost her husband in Afghanistan and needs a kitchen without mold showing up on the sheetrock, brings tears to my eyes. I'm lucky to have a job that creates meaning through giving. Our entire team brings at least momentary happiness to these families. We make things better for them.

I once worked with an eighty-year-old craftsman whose art was tiling bathrooms and kitchens. (I say "art" in every sense of the word because his mosaics were beautiful!) We were working on a celebrity's home and I learned a lot from him. I'd go on and on about how set construction work was temporary for me and how I would actually make it in show business. I told him, "I'll live in a house like this one day." He replied, "I hope so. But today is Wednesday, and we have work to do. Let's make it great work." It gave me pause when he said this. He wasn't preaching or being sanctimonious. He was saying that it's a privilege to work and an honor to create. And his message was a gentle reminder that we all need to do our best in whatever we do—right now. When it comes to the future, he would say, we are always "betting on the come." Although this gentleman is gone, I still think about his message to treat the future as a come bet—betting that life will bring us what we want or need when the time comes.

It's an honor to create

My expectation early in life was to create entertainment for the masses. Create. That was where I was going to get meaning from my work. I thought I had the talent. But there are so many actors who are just as good and who never find work creating as they expected to create. I've been lucky to work with some major stars who humbly create entertainment—nice people who always want to do great work, who appreciate all the help they received during their journey. These stars give back to the world. And when I meet stonemasons or painters, I recognize they are major stars, too. They create, and they also give back to the world. That's when I realize I am a lucky minor celebrity who is reminded every day that it is a privilege to work and an honor to create.



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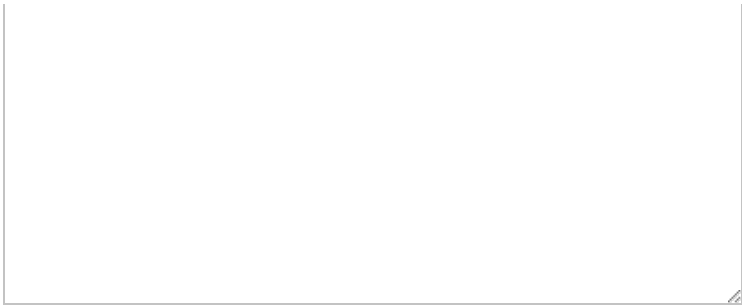
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