

Act Two

After his employer downsized, Laurie Folkes '70 found a new career in film and television

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PHOTO: PERRY SMITH/UNH PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICES

Laurie Folkes '70 knew he was taking a risk when he decided to move from computer sales to acting during the country's worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

But if he had qualms, they vanished when, on the first day of his new career, he found himself on a movie set with Al Pacino.

The film was the HBO drama “You Don’t Know Jack,” a biography of the physician-assisted suicide advocate Dr. Jack Kevorkian. Folkes had shown up after a talent agent had urged him to rush from his home in New Jersey to Brooklyn, N.Y., where a movie in production might have a small but paid nonspeaking part for him. Following an industry practice intended to keep production details from leaking, the agent had refused to say anything about the film. When Folkes arrived, he was thrilled to learn that he would sit next to Susan Sarandon in a movie-set courtroom as Pacino played Kevorkian on the witness stand.

“I thought, ‘Wow.’ This is my first acting job?” Folkes recalls.

Folkes has since landed scores of film, television, and print-advertising jobs that have brought him steadily larger roles. In his first speaking part for television, he worked with Tom Selleck on the CBS police series “Blue Bloods,” playing a homeless man who asked a passerby, “Hey, buddy, got any change?” For other jobs, he donned a black tie and tuxedo for a promotional spot for the reality show “Bridezillas” (he played the father of a bride going berserk) and the regal robes of a visiting African dignitary for one of his several appearances on “The Good Wife” with Julianna Margulies. Perhaps his most prestigious assignment was a supporting role in “Moving Stories,” a short film that had its premiere at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival.

“One of the most fun roles I’ve had—and one of the most outrageous— was in the baseball movie “Reunion 108,” Folkes says. Scheduled for release in 2014, the bawdy indie comedy is based on the minor-league experiences of ballplayer Billy Sample and features Folkes in a leading role as the star’s best friend.

None of this might have happened if not for the recession. Growing up in East Orange, N.J., Folkes had loved performing in talent shows and school productions. But his father, a child of the Great Depression, urged him to accept a football scholarship and attend UNH so he could get a “real” job. While majoring in biochemistry and playing football, Folkes took as many performing arts electives as he could and sang with the R&B band Satin Soul. But after graduation, he put performing on the back burner as he and his wife, Jane, raised a daughter and he worked as a sales and marketing executive in the computer industry.

In 2009, when his then-employer eliminated his division, Folkes returned to performing, joining the baritone section of the North Jersey Philharmonic Glee Club, one of the oldest all-male African-American choruses in the Mid-Atlantic region. One day he heard a fellow chorister say he was going to a location shoot. Folkes asked about the work, and the man put him in touch with the agent who sent him to “You Don’t Know Jack.”

Folkes hopes someday to land a leading role in a major film or a regular spot on a TV series. In the meantime, he supplements his acting income by working part time at a company that gives him time off when he has an audition. And he has an answer for anyone who reminds him that, even as he is pursuing new goals, many of his UNH classmates have retired. “Retirement,” Folkes says with a smile, “has never been a goal

of mine.” Or, in the language of Hollywood, he hopes it will be a long time before anyone says of his second career, “That’s a wrap.”

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