

ACTRESS

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30 miles north of Manhattan, she was drawn to the stage.

"People say, 'What are your hobbies?' I say, 'I've been doing shows ever since I was a kid.'"

"When I left college," she says, "all I wanted to be was a musical theater chick. I auditioned tons. It just didn't pan out."

After a friend dared her to get up at a comedy club's open-mike night, Courtney had a new obsession. She moved to Los Angeles and enrolled in the training program for the Groundlings comedy troupe, working her way up to the 30-person main company in 2004.

Lots of laughs. No money. So she held down a variety of jobs, her fallback being catering. "Have tux, will serve crab cakes," she quips.

She landed sporadic acting jobs during this period.

"I was a switchboard operator on the first season of 'Mad Men,'" she says. "That was portentous." Courtney also tried out for commercials, but was about to abandon those efforts in 2007.

"I landed about one a year," she says. "Just enough to make me question the gas money and all the driving in rush hour. When you audition for commercials, it's a lot of driving. What I netted wasn't exactly matching the hours I was putting in. I figured I'm not a face that makes people want to buy Lysol. Then I auditioned for Progressive."

She has now shot more than 30 TV spots as Flo. "Usually when they've covered everything in the script and there's still a little time left at the end," she says, "they'll say, 'Let's throw out some fun stuff.'"

That's when Courtney's musical theater training kicks in and she'll have Flo belt out a few lines.

"They all look at each other and say, 'Great. Let's try something else.'"

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