

Growing up on a sprawling ranch in the San Joaquin Valley surrounded by animals of all kinds, **Leslie Gallagher** '85 always dreamed of becoming a veterinarian. However, there was one seemingly insurmountable problem. "I failed every math and science class I ever took," she says.

Gallagher knew she'd have to pivot. She arrived at Scripps during the Reagan years and joined the Young Republicans club, guided by the lodestar of her parents' politics. "These days, I'm a card-carrying feminist, an animal rights activist, a Democrat who wants to run Planned Parenthood," she says. "But back then, in some ways, I think I was pretty insulated from the world." In college, she set about expanding her horizons by majoring in international relations and studying abroad first in Oxford, then Seville, where she discovered a passion for the Spanish language. Upon graduating, she answered an advertisement in the newspaper for a position at the Peruvian consulate and worked there until another listing caught her eye: 'Dynamic executive seeks bilingual secretary, must be willing to travel.'

The executive in question was Emilio Azcarraga Milmo, the head of Televisa—the largest media empire in the Spanish-speaking world. Gallagher showed up for her first day of work wearing a too-big suit she'd bought for the occasion and quickly found herself managing hundreds of employees across the company's Los Angeles, New York, and Miami offices. She was 23. "On any given day, I'd have the King of Spain on line one, the President of Mexico on line two, and Rupert Murdoch coming in for a meeting at three," she says. "It was like coming to work for God."

Gallagher spent the next 10 years immersed in Azcarraga's heady, glamorous world, with its rarefied trappings: a fleet of sleek luxury cars ("everything bulletproofed, of course"), a handful of private jets and megayachts, the largest private collection of contemporary art of the time, and five black German Shepherds that padded silently around the mogul's silk-carpeted Los Angeles home. When Azcarraga died in 1997, Gallagher inherited one of those dogs and named her Sophie.

Feeling unmoored by the loss of a man she'd considered a second father, Gallagher was trying to figure out her next steps when she arrived at the groomer to pick up Sophie and found the dog paralyzed; no one would tell her what happened, but she surmised that the dog had slipped in the bath and ruptured a disc. Gallagher consulted a

and a homeopath, all of whom advised her to euthanize. Unwilling to give up, she started trying to rehabilitate Sophie in a friend's pool. Within weeks, she was walking again. "I thought, 'maybe I could actually do this for a living, maybe this is my backward path into the veterinary field,'" Gallagher says.

Gallagher traveled around the country taking classes in human massage, animal massage, and animal rehabilitation—an emerging field at the time. She studied to become certified as a veterinary technician and volunteered for an animal surgeon in Los Angeles, who began to refer his clients to her. Among the first to call her for help was American rock legend Bruce Springsteen. She panicked the whole way over to his Beverly Hills compound, wondering whether she was completely out of her depth. But she quickly got 'the Boss's' paralyzed German Shepherd back on his feet.

Two decades on, Gallagher's company, Two Hands Four Paws, is the gold standard for animal physical therapy on the West Coast, boasting facilities that can treat up to 70 animals a day. Gallagher, who credits much of her success to the business acumen she gained while working for Azcarraga, is considered a leader in the field. "It's so cliché, but my advice for today's Scripps students is to not give up on your dreams," Gallagher says. "I took a completely circuitous route to working with animals, but I have truly found my calling in life." Pausing to pull out an inhaler, she smiles and adds, "The great irony is, I'm allergic to dogs."

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