By Melissa Prax

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Ada Cheng left her tenured position as a professor to become a stand-up comedian and storyteller.

She taught at Depaul University in Chicago for over a decade before she decided to switch careers in 2016.

"You got to jump off the cliff to fly. You've got to take the chance with yourself. ... When I left, I didn't have performance background. I was an academic for 15 years," Cheng said.

She says she woke up one day and realized her heart wasn't in academia anymore.

"I taught subjects on gender, sexuality and I used stand-up comedy to show in class — great for

conversation. So right before I went to bed, I was looking through stand-up clips. So that day, I woke up and thought, 'I think I'll do better as a stand-up comedian.' I was getting bored," Cheng said.

Cheng started her new career in her 50s.

"I entered this field late, so I also feel I'm in a very odd position as an older immigrant woman of color doing this among young people. ... Of course I would like to have a sense of belonging, but I don't think that is going to happen in any space that I will be in, whether in this country, or in the arts space, the storytelling scene or the improv scene," Cheng said.

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Cheng uses her identities and experiences as material.

"This is the story that I'll be telling about my parents' marriage and how that helped me understand her role as a woman in society and in our family and how that affects our relationship and my own understanding of myself as a woman," Cheng said.

"I used to say, 'I tell stories so I can bury them,' and it's not the case anymore. Now, I tell stories, and

stories feed energy back to me, and I learn about myself more," Cheng said.

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