



COURTESY OF WEEKI WACHEE SPRINGS STATE PARK

The Mermaids Of Weeki Wachee Springs Are Making Their Living Under The Sea

BY [LILLI PETERSEN](#) | MAY 14 2018 | [f](#)

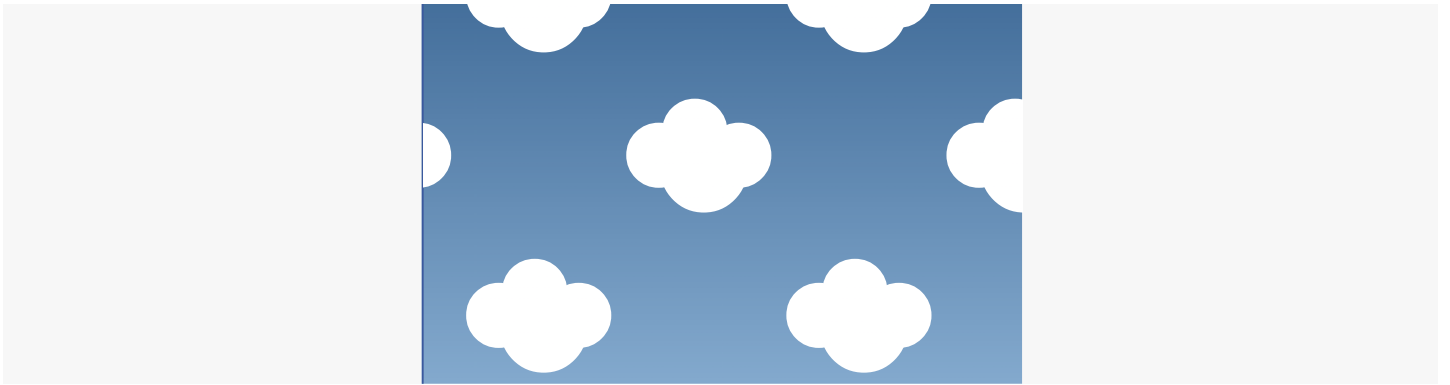


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When you declare your college major, there's no box you can check to become a professional cat cuddler, ice cream taste tester, or cat video maker. Heck, you probably never even believed those kinds of careers could exist — but they do. In Elite Daily's new series, [I Have The Job You Want](#), we're bringing you all the details on what it's like to work in some of the most ridiculous, unbelievable, and totally envy-inducing fields you never thought possible. These are #careergoals, for real.



It's always a sad moment, somewhere in the vicinity of first grade, when you realize that, no, being a mermaid isn't a valid career option. As it turns out, though, there are a few women who don't seem to have gotten the memo, and they're all based down in Florida, where the [mermaids of Weeki Wachee Springs State Park](#) are living out your underwater dreams.

The mermaids have been putting the park, and its natural spring, on the map as a tourist attraction for over 70 years. [Since their start in 1947](#), the famous mermaids have performed underwater shows in the park's natural spring, met with fans, and even traveled away from their spring to perform in enclosed aquariums. But while the mermaids have been at Weeki Wachee for seven decades, Kourtney Ellinghuysen has only been a Weeki Wachee mermaid for about two years. The 21-year-old has been part of the Weeki Wachee team, working full-time as a mermaid, since the summer of 2016. And it's been two years of pure magic, by the looks of things.



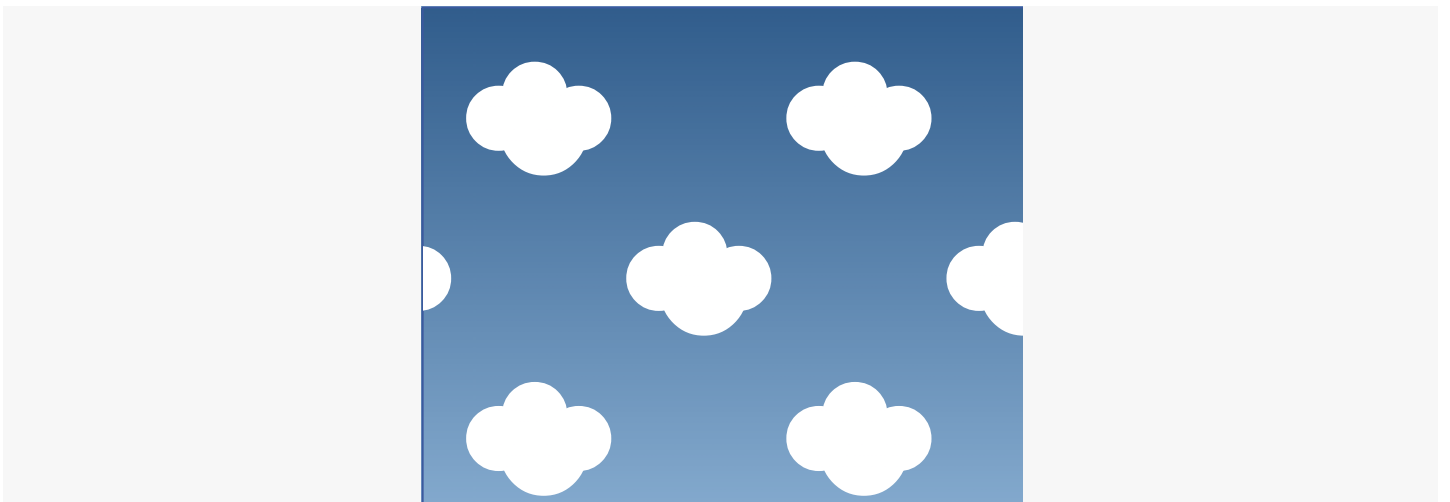
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Mermaid Kourtney. #weekiwachee #mermaid #mermaidlife

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Wachee frequently as a child, going on field trips or visits with her mom. But still, she says, if you told 6-year-old Kourtney that she would grow up to be one of the mermaids, "I probably wouldn't have believed [it]," she says, lapsing into an imitation of herself as a little girl. "'*There's no way. Are you really a mermaid!?*'" I would honestly probably get so excited."

You and me both, Kourtney.



THERE'S A MOMENT WHERE IT GETS REALLY QUIET BEFORE THE
MUSIC STARTS, AND IT'S JUST THIS BEAUTIFUL, SERENE
SPRING. IT'S GORGEOUS.

Seven days a week, the **team of 16 mermaids**, accompanied by their two princes, perform shows for the delight of fans, visitors, and other aquatic enthusiasts in a theater 16 feet below the surface. Twice a day, they perform a version of — what else? — *The Little Mermaid*, with an original show called *Fishtails* in between, displaying "underwater feats from the past six decades." Each show lasts about 30 minutes, giving your average mermaid a total of at least an hour and a half a day submerged.





artificial water can measure up to the experience of swimming in a natural spring. "It's gorgeous."



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Happy Friday! Hope to see you at the park this weekend! #LoveWeeki #LoveFL #TGIF #weekiwachee #mermaid #mermaidlife

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There's an air of sisterhood among the mermaids, and listening to Ellinghuysen talk about them feels like hearing any woman talking about her friends or teammates — down to the arguments about what to wear.

"We always have the conversation about what tails and what tops we're going to wear, always," she says. The costumes are communal, so it's a constant game of who's wearing what for which show.

During their shows, she says the mermaids often play little jokes to keep things entertaining for themselves, as well as the crowd. For every performance, a showrunner sits in a control room where she or he can see the whole stage and issue underwater



For instance, Ellinghuysen says, "[In *IT*], Pennywise the Clown does this weird dance, like he's throwing his legs around and looks really goofy, and a lot of our sea witches got thrown [stage directions] that you have to throw the Pennywise dance somewhere in your choreography. So everyone would try to mix it in somewhere different."



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Congrats to Victoria C. For swimming the role of the evil sea witch for the first time!! Great job, Victoria!
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While Ariel may have been able to while away the time collecting forks – excuse me, dinglehoppers – and singing karaoke with Sebastian, it turns out that in real life, being a mermaid is some really hard work. Not only is it a full-time job, but it's also a really *demanding* full-time job, with a whole lot of training and physical effort. "The audition process was a *lot* harder than I thought it would be," Ellinghuysen admits. Because she had a history as a dancer, she thought she had it in the bag. "But it is a lot harder than it looks."

Besides demonstrating that they have the grace and personality to perform below the surface with some underwater ballet moves, potential mermaids must **complete a timed 300-yard swim** both with and against the strong current of the spring, which runs a **galloping 5 miles per hour**. To get through it, she took some inspiration from a certain Disney heroine, but not the one you might think. "You gotta keep thinking, 'just keep swimming, just keep swimming, just keep swimming,'" she says.



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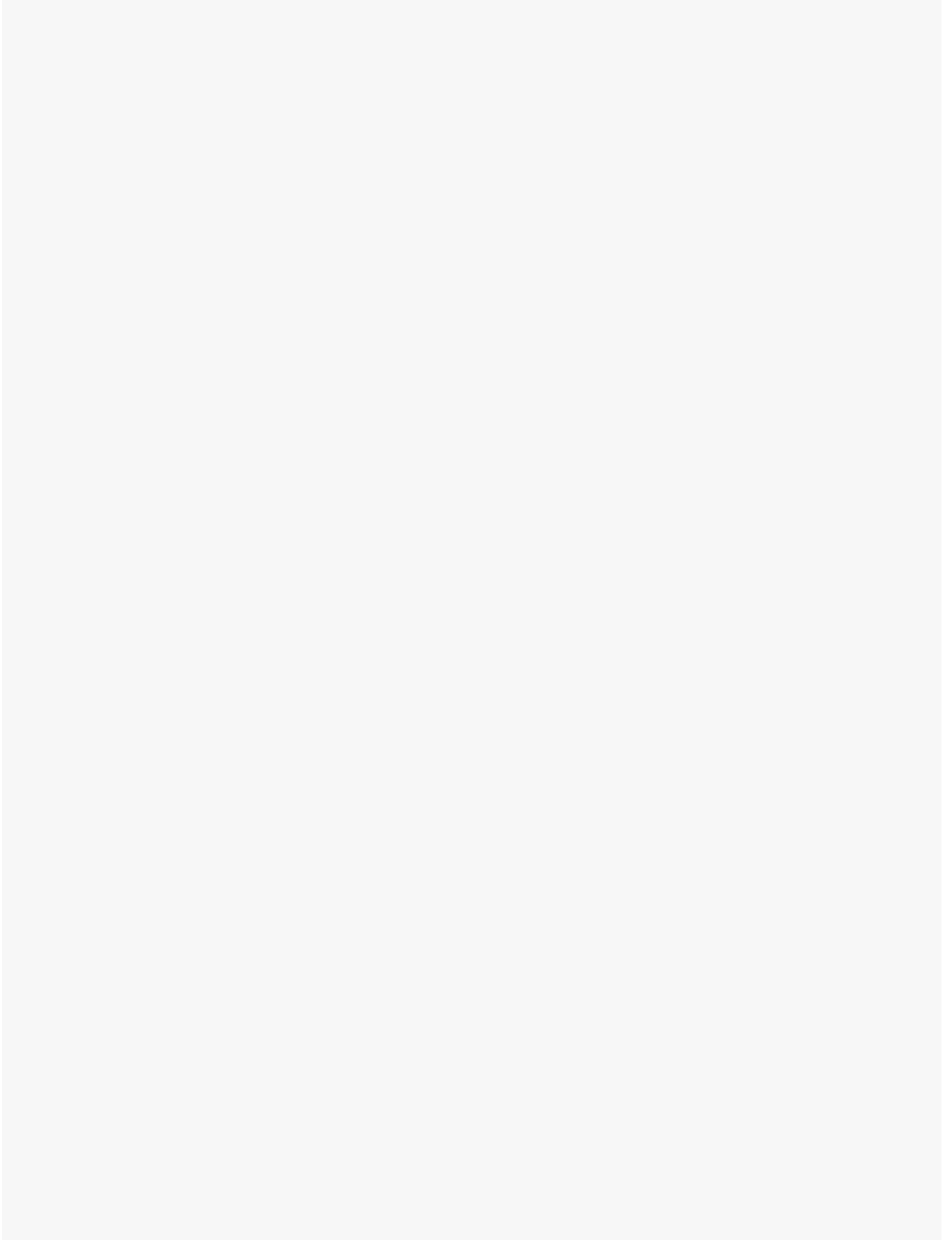
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Two mermaid tests today! Weeki Wachee Mermaid Kourtney attempts to swim the length of at least ten windows on a single breath for the finale of her mermaid test! Congrats Kourtney! ♀ [#weekiwachee](#) [#mermaid](#) [#mermaidlife](#) [#florida](#) [#LoveWeeki](#) [@k_ellinghuysen](#)

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The hardest thing to learn, Ellinghuysen says, wasn't the choreography or how to look relaxed and graceful underwater. For her, it was using the breathing hose — the pressurized air tool that allows the mermaids to stay underwater for long periods of time. "It's not like you think it's going to be," she says. Ellinghuysen had to train herself to stay relaxed while breathing in through her mouth and out through her nose, instead of vice-versa, on top of thinking about things like air pressure and keeping herself focused.





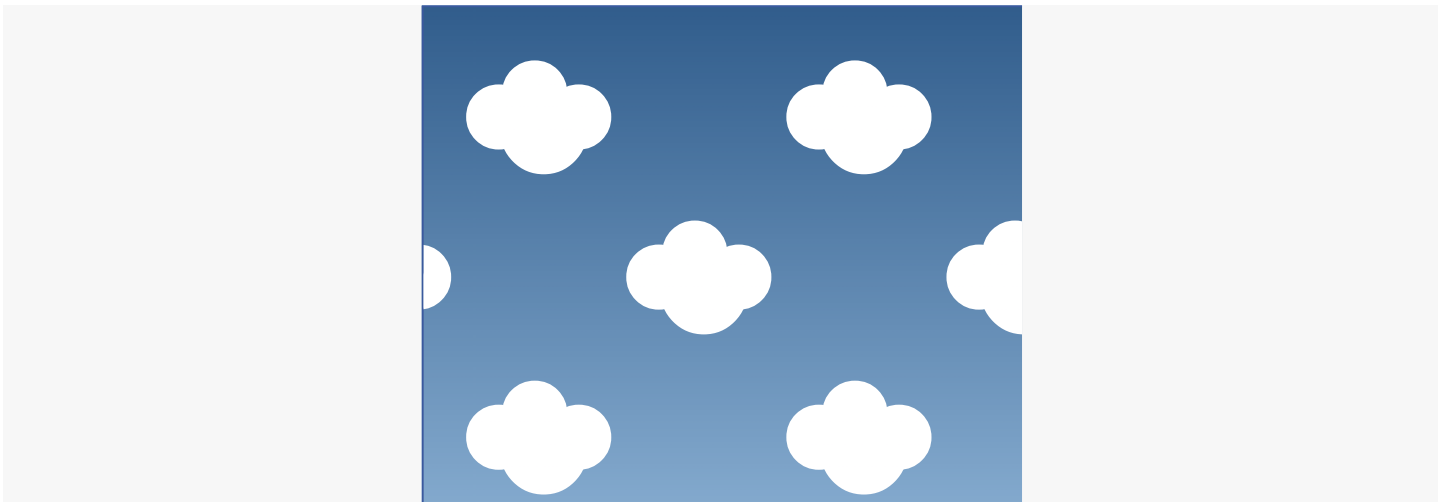


says. "The spring is our home, so we clean our home." The mermaids do all the maintenance work in the spring, including cleaning the windows of algae, resetting air hoses, and more. (The ever-chivalrous princes take on the unpleasant job of carrying away the buckets full of smelly dead seaweed.)



SOME [KIDS] GET SO ALMOST STARSTRUCK THEY CAN'T TALK.

But the good moments make up for everything else. "My favorite thing about this job is definitely the kids," Ellinghuysen says, "and seeing how they react to us." There's always at least one mermaid available for a meet-and-greet after a show, something that can make both kids and mermaids excited. "Their faces just light up, their eyes get so big. Some of them get so almost starstruck they can't talk," she says.

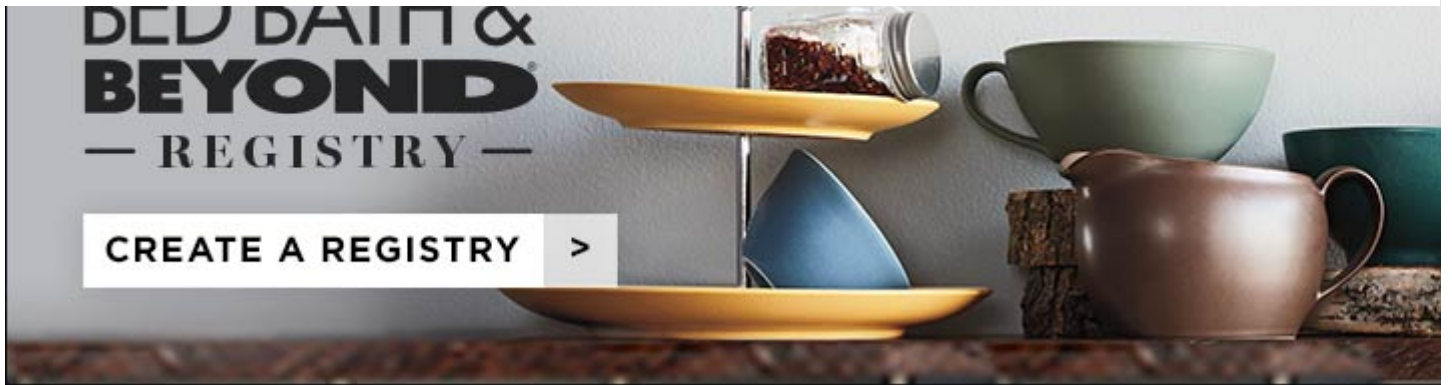




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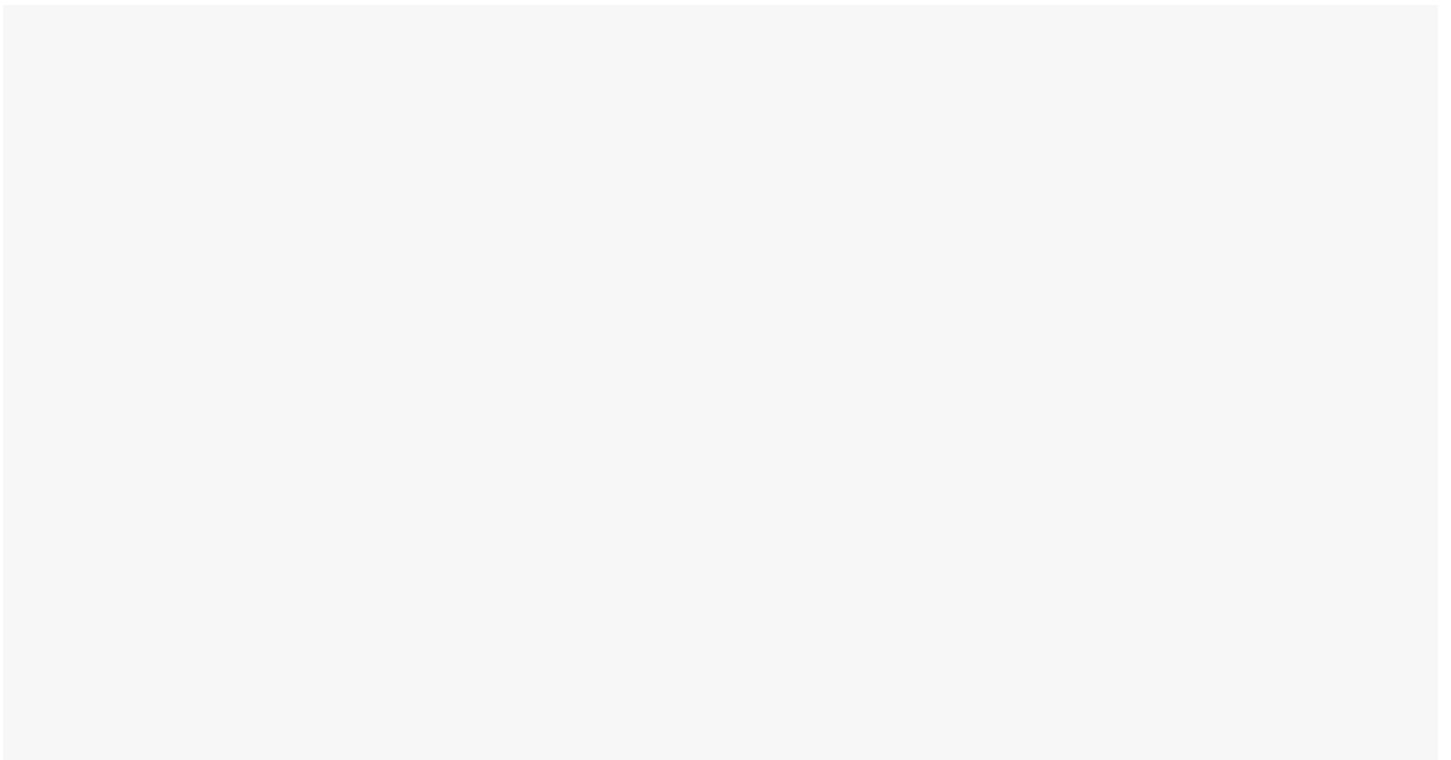
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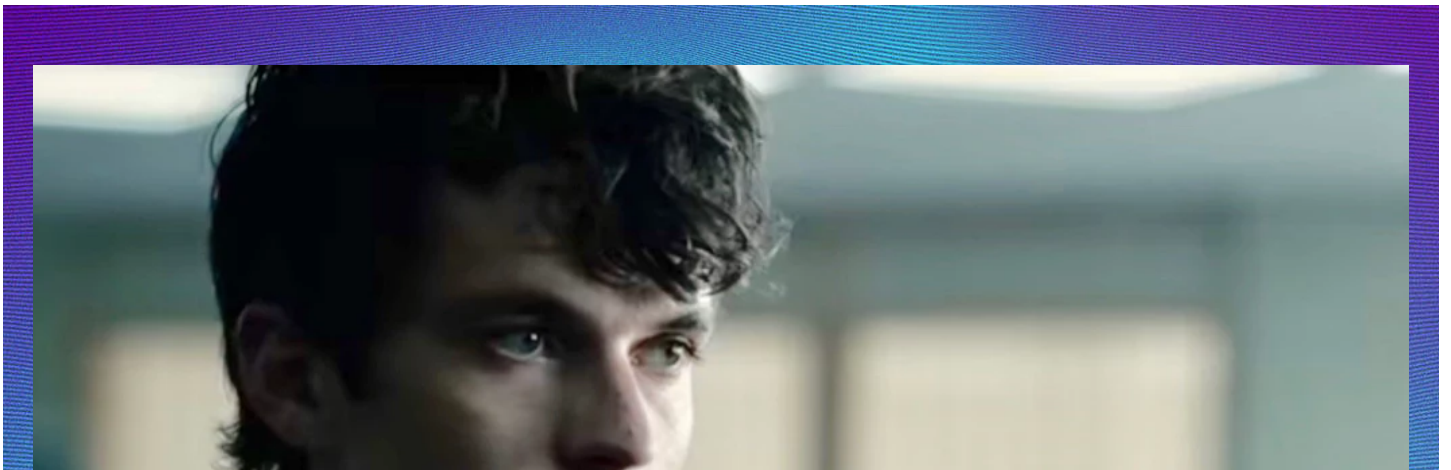
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One of her favorite moments was when the mermaids had just arrived at an aquarium where they were doing a show. Though there was no performance scheduled that day, the mermaids decided to go through a practice in the water — to the delighted surprise of the kids at the aquarium. "I remember looking through the glass and seeing this little girl do that really excited, almost running-in-place, hand-shaking — she just couldn't contain it all," Ellinghuysen laughs. "She was so excited to see us swim."

While the job is definitely a fantasy, Ellinghuysen doesn't pretend it'll last forever. She has a second job as a dance teacher a few hours a week, and on top of her full-time work, she's currently in school and wants to become a paramedic. "So that's where my crossroad is at," she says.







This Comedian's 'Black Mirror: Bandersnatch' Day Featured Twitter Making All Their Choices

BY [LIZZY ROSENBERG](#) | 4 WEEKS AGO | [f](#)

If you happen to be a diehard *Black Mirror* fan like I am, there is a pretty likely chance that you already saw the full-length film, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*, which officially came to Netflix on Friday, Dec. 28. Now, I will try not to give anything away to any of you (because that would be incredibly sacrilege), but if you did happen to see the episode for yourself, you will probably get a total kick out of [this comedian's *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* day](#), which was entirely based off Twitter's decisions. It was seriously too funny.

Just after the holidays, Australian comedian, Becca Hill, was touring around London with her mother. And in total *Black Mirror* fashion, she decided to create her own Bec-A-Snatch Day (yes, just like [the show's infamous T.V. movie, *Bandersnatch*](#)). Her ode to the episode would allow for Hill's fans to make any and all decisions for her and her dear mother. The thread started out with a tweet which read,

Welcome to Bec-a-snatch. For one day, you have 5 mins to make each decision for me.

LOL. Check out the start to the thread below. TBH, it's honestly a pretty cute idea, but I'm not entirely sure I could stick to it. Could you?



... so she went with the consensus.

Twitter then continued to dictate the entirety of Hill's morning, from choosing **what she would listen to in the shower**, to deciding on **her outfit**, and even choosing **how she would speak to her mother**. She made sure to snap a photo after each decision was made, to show she was actually taking Twitter's advice. Although it sounded a little grueling on her part, the Twitterverse seemed to have the comedian's best interest at heart. The mother-daughter duo appeared to be having a lovely time, sans any decision-making at all, whatsoever.



Things then took a slightly harrowing turn: Hill and her mother got separated. But instead of following those fight-or-flight instincts you usually feel when you're separated, Hill took the advice of her followers.

The consensus to "Cry," was not super helpful, though, so Hill polled them again. Thankfully, after a little crying and — finally — a phone call, they were reunited at long last by Borough Market's pork pie stand.

LOL.

The comedian proceeded to poll her followers, prompting them to choose everything she would do with her mom. They decided on how she should document the day, how many drinks they should get, if they should tour The Globe theater, and if she should drink tea



In case you haven't seen the movie, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* takes place in the '80s, and is all about how about how a computer programmer loses his sense of reality when he delves into a fantasy video game. The movie looks at what happens when people involve technology a little too much into their lives. There's even a pretty awesome **interactive element**, allowing viewers to choose their own ending, and IMO, it's definitely worth watching.

Don't get me wrong: The *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* movie was totally awesome, but I definitely wouldn't want it to be my everyday reality. While Hill and her mother's day out in London seemed to be a total success, it would be pretty hard to have all your decisions chosen by Twitter. Luckily, though, it was only for a day, and Bec-A-Snatch has come to an end. Cheers to making your own decisions, friends.