

Christina's Personal Narrative

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Introduction

Hello! I am Christina. I am an illustrator and graphic designer. I am a wife and a mother of two boys. AJ and Joel are in college obtaining their degree in engineering. I am married to Jason who is a Director of Marketing for SHR in Houston, Texas. I have been a college student at ASU for three years and look forward to graduating this year. I am obtaining a degree in Organizational Leadership. I currently work for Starbucks, a company I have loved and supported through the last many years but only started working for them three and a half years ago Why did it take me so long to belong to this great company. Starbucks is doing so much for our communities and the global community in its vision, mission, values and goals. And now back to me. I am the core Starbucks coffee lover.

The Early Memories

My earliest memories were of nature and exploring the beach at my grandparents. My grandparents lived in a huge home on the beach in Sea Girt, New Jersey. I always wanted to be there, since I loved their home and all the cousins that were continually coming, going, and playing many games. Summer was full of swimming and eating on the porch as we all were covered in sand. The days that we would visit my grandparents without the extended family there was so serene. I can remember just sitting on the porch swing feeling the sea breeze against my face and the warm sun on my skin. You could almost fall asleep. I loved this place. It was a place of great joy and safety. We all played together and explored the shore as far as we dared to venture beyond where our limit was given by our parents. I was known by people who I did not know or recognize. They would tell me your Carl's granddaughter. I was always mystified by this. My grandfather was a very well-known and respected benefactor from this area. He was

very active with many outreaches into the community. He was a wonderful leader and a great example of patriarch to this very large family that I adored being a part of. He would visit with each of the grandchildren as we entered the house. If he was working in his shop, we would go play as we waited for him to finish his inventions. He would sit at the huge dining table or in his chair and he would sit us on his lap. He would give us a hug and blow as funny, kiss into our necks that made a silly sound as it tickled. He would ask us how our day was and say he loved us. I always felt such love and excitement at Grandpa's house. I loved that people admired my grandfather and that it was even more special that they would make it a point to tell me. I cherish family and would miss the opportunity to visit with my grandparents in my adult life.

Starting My Life Long Adventure of Learning

As a young girl I was so eager to start school. My sister, Linda was already attending school, two years before me. I was very close to my sister and while she was at school all day I was lost and feeling very lonely. When we were home it would just be the two of us playing for hours outside. I enjoyed her fearlessness. I did not push the boundaries given me by our parents, but Linda constantly found a more creative version of the rules. We would adventure beyond the yard down to the creek and off into who knows where. My little feet would just follow in step behind my sis no matter what the punishment would be. I would forget how afraid I was and just listen to her sing or giggle as we explored. One adventure she took me on was finding snapping turtles in the creek and picking wild crabapples. I received a spanking for this. I do not remember my sister crying as I did. She was very upset over having to release the turtles and throw out the apples. The turtles and the apples were carried home in the same apple basket. Adventure came at a very expensive cost.

I began to achieve a little more courage as I was entering school in 1971. I was so fascinated, eager and overjoyed to start this great adventure. I was a quiet child, so I quickly learned the over active children were usually getting into trouble. I would be told from the adults when I was young that “children are to be seen and not heard” and this meant that we were to sit quietly and read or color. I am someone who still watches from the sideline before joining in on an activity. My shyness was usually manipulated in Kindergarten by the bossy girls. Back in the class room the teachers were far too busy to focus on interactive elements within the groups. I quickly distanced myself from most of these girls and I would play with the boys or just explore the playground on my own. I met another shy girl who would sit with me or adventure with me at times. Some days would be so quiet I was afraid to speak. Other times the children would be so noisy I could scream, and no one would hear due to the shrill from all the children. My friend and I would just hold our hands over our mouth and giggle at the others extreme behavior. It felt like a Zoo.

One afternoon while we were sitting down to have a snack before our nap time, we were sitting next to each other at a very long table with all the students lined up on each side of the table. We were all washed up and sitting quietly in our little chairs a little sweaty and out of breath from playing on the playground. Ms. Johnson our teacher held a tray of milk and cookies. As she passed them out, she would ask the student if they would like milk and would they like a cookie. Each child would say, “Yes, Ms. Johnson. Please” and then follow with “thank you.” If you did not, she would pause and wait for you to give the appropriate response. As she came to me, she asked, and I quietly replied. My shy friend, Maria’s voice cracked, her hands trembled and she lowered her head. She could not reply when the teacher asked her. Her face became flushed and she began to cry. The teacher took the milk from where she was holding it in front of

Maria and angrily said, "Well then no milk for you." My heart sank and I put my hand on Maria's shoulder to calm her crying. After the teacher moved on, I thought it was safe so, I pushed my milk in front of her and she smiled. It broke my heart how shy she was. She was far shyer than I was, and I wanted to stop the pain she felt. I thought we could share the milk and cookie and that I could encourage her to be brave. My teacher circled back around after giving all the children their snack. She noticed my act of kindness and soon joined in again and abruptly pushed my milk back in front of me. Maria was so shocked by her that her eyes were as wide as saucers. I feel she was very intimidated by our teacher. I was so sad. I wouldn't touch my snack after that. Nothing tasted sweet or refreshing. I just went off to my nap as Maria had a few seconds before. The lack of tenderness and servant leadership in my teacher struck me so hard. I knew she was a good person, but this intolerance of our shyness was difficult to understand. I moved on in my life with a heart for the hurting and a tenderness for those who are not given the chance to be who they are. This girl may have grown up to be an introvert and this was her natural response to conflict that was not reduced by this fiasco. Our young lives were not uniquely developed, were where given marching orders and we were to comply and to fit the mold.

Love of Art

As I was in school, I soon discovered I could draw better than most. My art was always personal. I didn't really want others looking to me to give me praise. I knew a few friends that could draw superheroes and others who loved to draw cars. I was always in nature and away from the noise, so I drew birds, horses, cats and other quiet moments in my day. I remember my fascination with horses came from my aunt's farm. I wanted to ride the horses, but my father felt

it was too dangerous. I always wanted to keep my hands busy, so my drawing was great for this. When I couldn't get out and adventure or play, I could draw, paint, sew, sculpt or do a task of sorting my father's tools and items. I loved to help adults and any task was a good task. Having the rebuff of a teacher or adult would just sink my heart. I wanted to be accepted, helpful, to please others and to be useful. I found my art was a safe place for me to communicate with Mindfulness and to be focused. It was where I could win. We had many assignments that required our art from kindergarten on. That was where I excelled. I was actually proud of myself and I feel this was one of my peak experiences (Harrington, 2007, p. 19). I feel it is good to have something I am good and can be passionate about.

Early Life Challenge Developed an Artist

In the last years of Junior High, I had decided I wanted to be an artist. I love science and all the experiments, but art was my passion. Each piece I created I reflected on my art teacher in Elementary. She was excellent. She was a servant leader. She gave us her passion and it helped us to develop ours. This was one of the teachers that truly communicated with us. She was a talented illustrator and a gifted teacher. She was teaching us to illustrate people in this session. I loved each class we had with her. She would demonstrate the technique she wanted us to use and then allow us to create our piece. She asked if she could draw someone's portrait in class. I did not raise my hand. I was too shy. She chose to draw me. I can remember looking at a portrait she drew of me. I was so amazed. It was beautiful. I immediately thought of the words my mother had used against me, ugly, dumb, and other more extreme descriptive. I sat there so humiliated thinking the others were laughing at me. Why could I not see myself as this. I realized that I had very low self-esteem. It was a product of my mother's lack of clarity in her role as a parent and a

wife. I soon learned that my life was not normal, and I started to talk with the guidance counselor and then as my mother got worse, I talked with a family therapist. The negative and hurtful ideas my mother put in my life was due to her pain from addiction and her unproductive ways of dealing with it, but this pain was something I needed to give to the therapist and heal myself. Surrendering abuse is very important for anyone who is caught up in this abnormal relationship, I believed my father knew of this behavior. I thought all adults treated children this way. Teachers we adored could turn and behave abusively like Ms. Johnson. I saw so many friends being treated poorly and thought this was normal. I thought it was my fault. I was bad. I needed to do more. It wasn't.

My father soon required my mother to change. The children's protective services came into our lives and required my mother to change. She was out of our home for several months. Life was so different as my mother was away. I was so happy and cared for by my father and relatives.

My mother never really recovered. She would try to fake the rehab hospital and the counselors, and the courts. She left my father for a boyfriend that would allow her to behave like she wanted to. She was given visitation rights with supervision. This difficult time of my life really affected my career, myself image, and my mission. I could never take for granted those in my life like my step-mother who was so beautiful to me. I try to be the most kind, ethical and moral person. I seek to praise others and not to share hurtful words or twist truths to hurt others. I can still here all the horrible words my mother would use for me instead of my name. Anyone can fill in the blank. This challenge strengthened me and yet also has kept me very soft, bendable and forgiving. When someone is hurtful to me, I feel the pain, but I also try to understand the

motive behind their feelings and create a resolution to the impasse. I wanted to make my career a counselor or a child advocate. I wanted to understand and to help ease the pain in people are experiencing. This challenge helped me to develop my core values early in life (Harrington, 2007, p.168).

As a teen my father and step-mother encouraged my artistic desires. I really loved my step-mother she was a blessing in my life in many of her supportive and nurturing ways. I escaped into my art from early in life. Dealing with the challenge from my life I retreated into my artistic life to escape and create something beautiful when I had so much pain. I remember not wanting to live any longer. I remember being overwhelmed by all the hate my mother communicated to me. I was so sad. As the art teacher reached into my world by illustrating my portrait that day telling me I was beautiful. Showing me how to see myself was a turning point or a high point in my life. I know the counselors where aware of my struggle, but the rest of the world did not know. Did they? Wonderful changes that my father and step-mother put in my life encouraged and enriched me. My father called me his little artist and offered opportunities for me to paint projects. He had me paint signs for a few businesses he serviced with electrical work. I was amazed as I reflected on this as a professional. I was high up on scaffolding at times and using the professional products as a child.

Flourishing as An Artist

As I attended high school, I had an advanced art program I was able to join. I was able to build a portfolio of art. A few pieces of art I created were hung in the hall. I was part of the Art Major Program. I felt the belonging I craved. I was overjoyed from time to time. I really found my passion. I was encouraged by my art teachers. I was enlightened in these years. I left the

athletics program since the coaches were not focused in on the serious issues in our lives. I was a great runner but with the experience with my mother I clung to my core values and the behavior of my coach forced me out. I remember walking off the track field as I witnessed our coach's behavior with my close running mate right out in the open at the track meet. I put the pieces together as I ran the 880 all the changes of the running groups that week removing me for the presence of my running partner. As I ran, I was gaining advantage, I realized I was winning. With every kick of my leg I began to cry harder and just before I crossed the finish line I turned and left the track and the track and field team. I always thought my friend did not entertain the inappropriate attention. I noticed just a few months ago she was in every track picture in my year books. She never left the program. She also distanced herself from me because they knew I knew. I didn't want to and this crushed me and I turned to art. Although I have had some wonderful role models with my teachers there have been a few that have been very destructive. I still love to run. I remember running to keep my anxiety at bay. It is my wonderful fitness love but the team experience for the two years I ran was tainted by the scandal. I am very judgmental about roles of teachers and parents. I want to use the challenges from my life in my leadership. I feel ethical behavior is needed to lead and when this behavior is not measuring up changes in leadership need to be made. I chose to be very thorough with who I would choose as a mentor and a leader. My instructors advised me to go to the Art Institute. As I researched the schools, I found that moving to Houston to attend art school was my next step in challenging my future as an artist. Many of these school experiences developed my personality and give me grit and a heart for change. I was still a scared little girl in an eighteen year old's body but I tried on a few attributes like courage.

College Trained Artist

As I chose to leave for college, I felt such a terror and exhilaration as I felt in kindergarten. I was proud of myself and what I accomplished. This was a waterfall moment. I was diligent that Summer after graduation to earn and save as much money as I could. I lived with my sister after graduation. I had not support from family since I chose not to be an accountant. So I saved and improvised. My sister, Linda left to live on her own since she was 17. She graduated a year ahead of me. I was so eager to spend some time with her before moving to Texas. I was hired for three jobs and worked a constant cycle of my jobs. I had very little time for myself, but I was so exhilarated as I saw my money grow. I was very clear about taking only what I needed with me so my things from my childhood stayed behind, taking the good memories and escaping the pain and those who cause it. In January, I left for Houston on an airplane for the first time ever. I was nervous as I boarded the plane. Flying was new. This city was new. I would be living on my own far away from everyone. I started working a few waitressing jobs which filled my days. I loved the warm winters in Houston, and I made friends. I visited the art school and tried to enroll in but the price for out of state tuition was beyond what I could afford, and it put me in saving mode again. I put my heart into work, and I enrolled in school the next year. I was very dedicated to earning my degree. My role models were my Aunt Cathy, my stepmother and my grandfather. As I was attending art school my grandfather passed away. I came home twice a year, and this was the saddest visit since I left to go to school. I wanted so much to make my grandfather proud of me. My grandfather did so much more than I could ever hope to achieve. College was wonderful and I graduated a few months after my grandfather passing. My goal in leaving and not asking anyone for help with college but paying for it on my own was still a great waterfall moment. I wanted to be so brave and courageous like

my grandfather was and show him I admired him. I didn't talk to my grandfather like my aunt. He was so awesome and wonderful. He had lost his father at only eleven years of age and supported his mother on his own. As a young teen he was required to find a way to lead and try to hold on to the life his father created for him and his mother. He was never an arrogant person, nor did he use money to separate people from him. He was a real genuine and intelligent man. I would miss grandfather and my stepmother so much as I was away at school. I didn't realize how short time is and how it cannot be bought back with any amount of money or success.

College was my goal and I obtained it, but I did not get to share that with my grandfather. My classmate and my friends were all so proud of us. We celebrated and were already employed in local design businesses before graduation. My step-mother was so very proud of me. I was able to visit her soon after graduation. I was so elated to have her hugs and word of encouragement. She was the one who inspired me. She was my mentor and the reason I would reach high for success.

Career as an Artist

I had started working for Quality Typography, a typesetting shop as I was about to graduate. Keith was my boss. He was a wonderful Christian business owner. He liked that I was in the graphics club and the art major track in high school. It had given me a lot of experience with printing and graphics before I even entered the college at the Art Institute. I graduated as I was working here. I also held down a waitressing job to help keep bills paid. I remember the electric company and the phone company crediting me my deposits they required for my initial account. I finally had credit and was caring for myself. I had no idea how hard it would be to pay back the college loans. It would take until fourteen years after graduation. My boss Keith tells

me that he has looked to next quarter and he will not be able to afford to keep the office. He will have to move back into his garage and pay for the machinery and allow his business to default if worst case scenario happens. He will not be able to afford me. He will give me a great reference and two weeks full pay and a bonus. I was sad for him. I didn't really worry about myself. I knew his Christian moorings would not allow him to default on the office lease. I wanted him to get the ability to pay it. Hopefully he was trying to get a business to take of the office space.

I move on to Miller-Johnston Advertising where I learned many excellent business foundations from Sam Miller. He was a long-time marketing award winner. He had a very small design firm and contracted the majority of the writing and the design and illustration. I had about ten to twelve projects to accomplish with design and illustration as I also handled the office manager's position. Sam was colleagues with Cliff Gillock and other amazing marketing and design professionals in the Houston and Dallas market. I had studied Ogilvy & Mather before I even finished high school and Cliff Gillock was amazed that I could quote some of these early design hallmarks of Ogilvy & Mather's. I have to say working with Cliff Gillock and Sam on an Oil Tanking - Houston campaign was a hallmark moment in my career life. I enjoyed the many project management opportunities as well as the graphic design and advertising projects. This was a company that allowed great advancement in my career.

Single Life is More than an Art Career

My career was growing. I often took time off to visit my family on holidays. My sister has married and had a child. I love coming back to see my nephew and my family. It is difficult to get back more often but I take time and budget fiercely to afford it. On a few visits home I am aware that my stepmother is sick and had a lung removed due to cancer. She needs to use oxygen

to breath efficiently, but she looks happy. My father states she is doing well, and she will improve but stepmother dies. She had a rapid decline in health. My sister and my father kept most of the information from me. It was as if I was being protected again as I was by my sister when we were children. I was so broken by her death. I returned home to see everyone and mourned. My sister shares with me that mom brought out all my art from my high school years and looked over them and told her how proud she was of me and how having my art around her made her happy. I was so crushed. I would have left Houston and came home if I knew I would not get to see her again. She was why I was trying to build my career, trying to be a success. She entered my life when my biological mother left. She stopped all the cruelty and gave my dad such a loving and sweet relationship. She was the best mother a person could hope for. She gave me unconditional love and held me responsible for how I treated others. She required me to think of how the other person would take my words not what I meant by them. She made me a tender and loving person. She pulled me out of torment. I may not have survived the childhood my biological mother created. She and my Aunt were there for me in quiet moment and supported me and listened even when I did not say a word. They would talk they would create special tender times to take my mind off what I could not control an abusive mother who tried to destroy any and every relationship. This was one of my lowest times in my life. My father was always so positive and didn't think she would die of this cancer. I was devastated to lose her. I was devastated over how sad Dad was. He tried to get my step-mother, Betty to eat a little more each day. He stayed by her side and yet she still died so painfully. He felt so alone, and I am glad he turned to his children. We prepared for her funeral and supported one another as family does.

A Mentor of Giving

My aunt Cathy helped with mom's funeral and we make all the right choices. I remember that Mom never liked lilies since they reminded her of death. Each Easter our church had lilies at the altar. In the choice of flower arrangements Aunt Cathy showed my sister Linda and I the options. We both looked at each other and then Aunt Cathy and said in unison that mom wouldn't want lilies. It was so sweet that all three of us knew her so well and helped to make this moment perfect. I admired my Aunt in so many ways. She gave so much to me in a time of my life when I was fragile. She was there to care for me when my biological mother was in rehab. She was there when my stepmother and father were married, and she always celebrated my birthday. I was only a new born when she took me to get my baby picture. She was such a tender and wonderful friend and Aunt. I can still remember her hugs. She was there at so many beautiful moments and served as my grandfather as an accountant, secretary and faithful daughter. She was my favorite person. We understood each other and shared special moments when I visited my grandfather. She was divorced and when her husband left her, she moved back in with grandfather and grandmother with her three children. Therefore, she is why my grandparent's home was always a fun and loving place to be. I wished I had spent more time with her. I loved each experience. She gave me such joy.

Career Advancement

My first two positions help me in so many ways as a leader and to develop my leadership skills. I keep finding a new job as these firms are not able to keep themselves solvent. I received bonuses at these positions due to my high work ethic. As I am working at graphic design, I have also started to work in the evenings to save money. I want to return to college to further my

career. I want a business degree. I have already seen the need for business foundations. I leave Miller-Johnston because he did not want me to go back to school. He felt it was not needed and I would have a career with him if I didn't go to night classes. I enrolled in Fall classes at the University of Houston. I was sad to leave the design firm. I loved my career, but I felt I needed to have a bachelors to excel in my career. I will be a lifelong learner.

Back to College

I am freelancing and working at a comedy club as I attend school again. I am doing illustration and design for the owner, Lynn. She is an independent business woman and I see her as a mentor. I am so happy to be in control of my career and to have others instill in me the need to pursue your dreams. To keep pushing. As I am at school, I realize how very hard it is to pay back the Art Institute loans. I was very happy that I used as much cash as I could and did not take out the maximum available to me. I was giving termination letters at the University of Houston three times due to my account being unpaid. I would use all my tips and pay them off as soon as I could. I did not take any loans while at the University of Houston since the current loans from the Art Institute were needing to be paid. Paying for two educations at the same time became so difficult. I was able to go home only once a year now. Money was needed by the government and I did not want to default. I knew of a few friends that worked for large companies that not only allowed them a schedule to go on to advance their degree but also gave tuition reimbursement or paid for it right out. Of the three agencies I had worked with so far this was not possible. I was a victim of my own low self-esteem. I always accepted what I was given and needed to like my boss Lynn, expect more and ask for it when not offered. I have high work ethic and I put all extras on hold to pursue my dream of education.

Family is Precious

I have had a difficult start to life due to my biological mother, but I have been fortunate to have a father with such love and tenderness. He is a wonderful father and I love him so and cannot bare his pain. He had visited me that year since my stepmother died. I was back at school and working constantly. I noticed the visit lifted his spirits and we had gone dancing at the Yellow Rose. My father taught me to dance on his boots when I was very little. I remember my foot so small on top of his boots as his did a little two step. As a young adult I was enjoying a free dance lesson at a country club when the dance instructor asked me who taught me, I was lost for a moment when I said I always knew this dance. In school they taught you to waltz and some of the formal dance for etiquette, but twostep was at home when I was so little. It was wonderful seeing my father on that visit. When he returned home to New Jersey he told my sister he was so happy about the visit. I was glad my boss let me off work to see him. I am focused on family and nurturing relationships. Some businesses really adapt to this and fill a void for those who have had dysfunctional home experiences.

In this next year my father met a woman in a bereavement group. Her name was Anita. Dad started sending pictures and sharing the way she made him feel. My sister was now in Texas with me. She moved with her son Travis and her husband Richard. I got them an apartment in Houston and was so eager to be close again. I loved my nephew Travis and we became close. He loved to introduce me to friends as his Aunt Chrissy. I was so proud of him and happy to have family in Houston.

Dad came to visit again, and this time brought his new friend Anita. They were now engaged. Meeting her was wonderful. She and dad were so happy. We went dancing and again I

loved to have the chance to dance with my father. My father and Anita danced each weekend and twice a week if they got the chance. Dad was no longer depressed, and they were wonderful for each other. I was so truly happy for them. I have carried the burden of others happiness. I realized that this is not healthy and that I can only focus on having joy and lead a life of fulfillment. In this visit my father finally brings up my lack of fulfillment in my engagement with Christopher. We had been engaged for two years. Dad met him and my other boyfriends before him and never really said anything negative or pushy. We were about to say goodnight as I dropped Dad and Anita off at their hotel. Dad asked if he could say this and that I would not be offended. I said yes. He said that he and Anita wanted me to have someone who loved me as much as they loved each other. That I am owed someone who truly loved me. He hugged me and said I was a wonderful daughter and that he loved me too much not to say something. That bravery and love from my father was so important. This was another waterfall moment for me. I always wanted everyone to get what they want. I help and I sacrifice. This guy was not someone who loved others deeply. He was selfish and I did not realize how selfish until just two years ago. I was at football game and Al Sanchez asked me if I remembered him. This was twenty-five years later. It was funny. I was freezing cold and it was snowing at the game. I said yes Al. We talked for a few seconds and he introduced his fiancé. I then was told Christopher committed suicide. It was a revelation. I had not seen or spoke to him in twenty years, but I was the one fighting for him. He shut me out. I was the one giving. I was the one being positive. He who he was. That was sad. I could not change it. He was athletic, gorgeous and popular but he was so angry. My father was right. I loved myself more. I asked for better. I have a great life now and I did not marry this friend, but I still cared. In leadership the positive attitude and the respect I give are just foundations and from there the relationship has to have reciprocation. There will be times

that someone will not take the help or the proper course of action.

Loss of my step-mother was hard but my grandmother fell ill, and everyone was worried the pneumonia was going to kill her. My aunt cared for her most of the week and then must have her admitted the hospital. A few days later she too had pneumonia and she died quite suddenly. I was devastated. Grandma recovered a few weeks later. She was not able to attend her daughter's funeral. My aunt was so loved and respected. The many ways she touched people and allowed my grandfather's home to be a refuge for all kids. She even had my friends there when they had teenage problems instead of running away from home. It was all because of her. She managed the maid, bookkeeper, and the real-estate issues and my grandmother's nurses. She was so wonderful to everyone but her. After her death I tried more to value the time I have and to see when your limits are being pushed too far. I have quit jobs that were wonderful but were too much stress and too little concern for my health. It is important to have work life balance and my beautiful aunt was not able to have this herself. I always have cherished family and will keep my family close in prayer.

Church Has Great Meaning

As my sister is now in Houston with me, she invites me to church with her. I start visiting a church called Second Baptist. I have walked forward in church as a young child and joined in the early seventies. I attended my parents' church until I left high school. It has been a while since I was at church but after a few weeks I join. It is here that I focus my recreational hours after school and work. I loved Dad and Anita's church. We had just visited that August to celebrate with them. It was one of my Aunt Cathy's last photos. I am still a part of this church today.

College and Career

Career and school were difficult. I was offered a job with NeoScript publishing. This job was a wonderful opportunity. I was developing web sites and sales and marketing products for the real estate industry that allowed for the first time a virtual tour of the location and the unit. Before this you could view a video but not walk through the environment. My boss was given the technology as an agreement from Adobe. The support and development with this group was wonderful. A high point of my career and in leadership. The owner made an agreement with investors not to accept any other outside investment and he lost his technology and market place due to this. Others paid for the trade secret information and have gone on to make wonderful careers. I adored working for this group but after they could not make payroll.

Marriage Was Not Expected

I was an aunt for many years. I had dated many friends and didn't feel it would happen for me. I was engaged three times. I was cheated on again and again. These people would even come back and admit they were wrong to leave me, and I would date them. Low self-esteem seems to be my largest fault. Does my high work ethic apply to relationships? I think so. I had worked at Kinko's for a few years as I was working for my graphic design company. I was hired by Keith who owned a store in Houston. He was impressed at how I helped all the customers there to print out documents in the self-service area while I was getting my customer's documents prepared. He asked me to be the computer specialist for his store. He offered me no cost printing and a discount on film output. I was having problems with the labs in town since they took too long, and their technicians would occasional have too many mistakes. This was a great deal for my business. This spoke to my high work ethic and my ability to help others. I

cannot see people in pain when I can help.

I was a part of the Kinko's/FedEx group where I met Henry from the store that has the film output. He would call me when the system was available, so I didn't have to waste time. Henry and his co-workers were now my friends. He was such a fun and genuine person. It is here that I met my friend's roommate Jason. Jason was given all the benefit of Henry's great ethics and caring attitude. I am friends with Jason.

To Be Married

I was attending Second Baptist for many years and was very involved with the singles ministry. I had not expected to meet my husband at work. I was really surprised that he did not accept my rejections. I was finally addressing my low self-esteem and would not date someone who did not have my beliefs or my best interests at heart. After a few months of effort Jason asked me to marry him and we began our lives together. I was at NeoScript publishing on April 14th when he wanted to have dinner. I was very busy at work with a huge project and canceled on him. My boss walked into my office to tell me that I would be fine finishing tomorrow, and didn't I need to finish my taxes? I didn't realize that Jason called him and told him what he was planning and that I couldn't cancel. We had our engagement at a wonderful restaurant and were married in December of that year. I was amazed that this was my reward for aspiring and requiring more. These career changes can occur for many reasons and for myself it has been something of an evolution to my growth. (Boyatis et al, 2002, p. 8). This moment started a change beyond my personal life and into my professional life.

I started working contract with Shell and a few design firms when I discovered and

opportunity with the Houston Chronicle. I was hired and worked here for the Chron.com side of the paper.

A Wonderful Experience at the Houston Chronicle

I loved the ability to code and to think through the path of the code. My experience here was so rewarding and nurtured my technical bent I have had since I was a child. It came from my father's learning mindset and enabling me to learn technical reasoning very early. My bosses Nathan at NeoScript and Jim Townsend at the Houston Chronicle saw this skill and allowed me to develop websites and the multimedia products.

While I had to leave NeoScript due to funding issues. I really had a wonderful network and great experience. I was with an employment firm when I was sent on an interview with Jim Townsend of the Houston Chronicle. I was reluctant to work downtown since it is very expensive to park contract. I was sure I would not get the job. I was pregnant and I was focused on work life balance. I did not want to have the stressful jobs I have had in design and I could not work without pay now that I was part of a relationship. We would come to an agreement not just me calling the shots as I have for the last ten years. As I left the interview, I was certain I was not going to get the job.

My employment firm called me before I got home. I was informed that I was just the right candidate and I would start on May 11th. I was at the highest point of my career life and for the next two years I was extremely fulfilled with my career and starting a family, but I had ended my struggle at college. I did not want to miss the opportunity to have children. My sister had

stated many years prior that she just did see me having children. I had earned forty plus credits at the University of Houston.

I was able to have a second child. Two years later I stepped down from this wonderful Web Developer position with this ground-breaking team. As I informed my boss was I that I wanted to focus on my two children, he stated I was going to be missed and that I was always welcome back. I knew this would be difficult to leave my career on a high-point and I also knew that this was a calling to have work life balance for me. I work through the birth of my first child and to the birth of my second child. I would focus on freelancing and developing my business.

A month after I took my leave from the Houston Chronicle my boss Jim Townsend hired me to work contract for his NutriNews nutrition site. I have impressed my boss in many positions in graphic design. I was happy that Jim was also willing to add me in his new group. His leadership was always wonderful. He offered me more contract hours as I would travel into the Houston Chronicle on Metro. Since I was advancing what we were able to produce on the Chron.com website he valued my learning and research. These were very comfortable work environment and very ahead of the curve on work-life balance with flexible work schedules (Harrington and Hall, 2007)..

Away from the Lime Light with Freelance and Volunteering

For the next twenty years I have been freelancing with several companies like Duke Energy, BP's ads and diversity inclusion program, and a few small businesses. I volunteered with the Texas PTA and held the role of VP on a few occasions. I volunteered with the high school band to support the arts. I volunteered with the community and served on the board for

four years. I volunteered with Second Baptist Church in the nursery ministry. I worked with Second Baptist for seven years in the volunteers and nursery program. I taught preschool with First Baptist of Katy. I also was a lead teacher in the four-year-old curriculum at Kingsland Baptist Preschool-First Steps for ten years. I enjoyed giving back and advancing my personal identity beyond my career and into child development and altruistic endeavors (Harrington and Hall, 2007).

College and Starbucks

As change is inevitable, I still did not think I was prepared for this new phase of my life. I am now refocused on my learning and development. As I left the volunteer and freelance opportunities, I was able to work a position with a former client as a Volunteer and Membership Coordinator. This was a three-month position that was very exciting and engaging. Although I was not able to gain a long-term position, but I had the opportunity to work with a legal group within a tech company as I developed a redesign and transfer of their website and handled membership communications with the legal group. This helped to build my self-esteem. I was encouraged to go back to finish my business degree after completing a project management courses I & II with the University of Houston's Professional Learning. It was then I applied at Starbucks. I have been with Starbucks for three years and I plan on finishing my degree in Organizational Leadership in August of this year. I hope to walk in December. My boys both want to be there. I am looking forward to this and hope I will obtain the highest grade possible to encourage my boys in their challenges in life and in their college degree.

Christina's Reflections

As I have a high work ethic and I am an overcomer. I have advanced my growth to a balance and insightful view of myself and others with self-awareness and education. My role models have impacted my view of my future and my career. I hope that I can carry on their legacy in who I am and how I treat others. I have desire work-life balance and I can see that by stepping out of my career to focus on my children's development and volunteering in my community I have in fact done a good job of balancing these two opposing forces to give my children a stable home, a good future and a confidence that would not have been possible otherwise. I have also continued to educate myself and am returning to the work force with the long desired Organizational Leadership Bachelor's Degree with a Business Minor. I am interested in a non-profit organization project manager in a graphic design and marketing department. I am also passionate about child development, organizations. I seek to make a difference. I desire to be a part of a conscious and progressive type of organization is making in society better at every turn.

I have been a person who was creative and sought out those opportunities to develop my creativity and the right opportunity will provide this for my future. I seek a future with an organization that is a lot like family in nurturing and developing the employee. I want a company that has convictions that are evident in their actions like Starbucks (Sull & Houlder, 2005). For me what matters most is work life balance and money is secondary. If I am not healthy and at peace no amount of money or career hallmarks will give me joy.

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