

Leslie Meyer
Autobiography

I am forty-one years old and I am married to my best friend. I consider myself a people person and enjoy connecting with others. I have a sister who is forty-six and a brother who is forty-five. I value time with family and treasure weekends spent together at my parents' lake cottage on Kelley's Island. I grew up in Huron, Ohio, a small town near Cedar Point on Lake Erie. My mom is a retired business teacher and guidance counselor from Huron High School, where she worked for thirty-two years. She attended Bowling Green State University as an undergraduate and earned her master's in guidance and counseling at University of Toledo as an adult. My father is a retiree of Ford Motor Company, where he worked thirty-three years immediately following graduation from high school. After retiring from Ford, he later served as a consultant to Ford Motor Company for ten years. Growing up in a vacation area certainly came with its advantages in terms of employment. As a teenager and young adult, I held jobs in fast-food, worked as a camp counselor, and was a restaurant server. What stands out as significant to me now is the fact that my parents worked for the same organization for their entire careers. I, on the other hand, at the age of forty-one have changed careers at least a handful of times as an adult.

From a very young age, I wanted to be a teacher. I admired many of my teachers from elementary school and dreamed about the day that I might have my own classroom. I "played" school for countless hours as a young girl. The fact that my mom enjoyed teaching also influenced my desire to teach.

Several significant events have affected me regarding pursuing my career over the years. The first one that stands out is attending new student orientation at The Ohio State University. I distinctly recall sharing with my mom how excited I was that my academic advisor had encouraged me to take several exploratory electives during my first quarter to gain further clarity

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on my career direction. My mom told me that I had four years to earn my bachelor's degree and that there was not time to do a lot of exploring. She told me to go back into my advisor's office and rework my schedule to include requirements for my degree instead of taking several of the exploratory classes my advisor recommended. I did not think a lot about this at the time, but looking back I wonder if exploring other areas outside of teaching would have helped me to solidify the right career fit instead of being in the position I am in now where I am changing careers in my early forty's. I am a person, though, who believes that everything happens for a reason so I have accepted where I am now.

In 1997, after graduating cum laude from The Ohio State University, I secured a position as a special education teacher for students in grades four through six. I have never felt as unprepared for a job as I did the first day that my building principal walked me to my classroom. I was nervous, anxious, scared, and stressed. My education had not adequately prepared me for the "nuts and bolts" of classroom management. Thankfully, I had a wonderful mentor teacher who helped me tremendously in making the transition into teaching my first year. After three years of teaching, I was counting my days until retirement. At that time, I told myself that I was too young to be so dissatisfied in my job. Teaching students with special needs was a thankless job. Regular education teachers were frustrated with the idea that students were starting to be included in their classrooms for subjects such as science and social studies. Teachers were reluctant to make modifications to meet students' special needs and it seemed like a constant stream of students were always being referred for testing to be identified for special education services. I loved the actions of teaching and I tell folks to this day that it is the closest thing to performing that I will likely ever do. Getting students excited about learning was something that I deeply enjoyed, but I absolutely despised all of the paperwork and documentation associated

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with teaching special education. I felt as though I had a very poor work-life balance. Teaching was consuming me and I was exhausted by the job. Near the end of my third year of teaching, I talked to my parents about the possibility of making a career change or pursuing my master's degree in guidance and counseling. My dad told me that I went to college to be a teacher and that teaching was something that I should continue to pursue. As I look back, his thought process made sense to him because he worked in one line of work for his entire career. My mom, on the other hand, encouraged me to pursue other options and shared in my frustrations about the demands of the job. She said that my teaching degree could allow me to do many different things that would require people skills, organizational skills, and management skills. While pursuing master's programs in guidance and counseling, I was offered a position in sales and marketing at a large landscape company.

During the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, I was in green industry sales. I was not completely satisfied in my career and I spent many hours watching news coverage of the event. I started talking with family and close friends about my desire for a career where I felt that I could make a difference. This historic event made me consider my personal and professional goals, interests, and values. I felt some urgency to start investigating new career options, but at the same time, I was dating a guy from Columbus, Ohio.

The next event that stands out was my decision to move from Huron to Columbus to be closer to my boyfriend, who is now my husband. As I began to search for position, I was unsure of what roles or positions to pursue. If I stayed in sales, I knew that I only wanted to sell a product or service that I was passionate about. I ended up being hired on in sales for an educational software company. I held this position for just a few short months due to a downturn

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in the economy. The company could no longer afford to pay me my monthly minimum salary. I was the last person hired and the first to be let go.

Next, I took a position as an executive assistant for a large dental practice management firm. I supported the president of the company for approximately two years. I have never had someone in my personal or professional life treat me the way that this man did. He was overworked and spent weeks at a time away from his family. He took his misery out on his employees. I was always taught by my parents that you don't quit a job before securing another job, but in this case, I did something totally out of character for me. I finally reached the boiling point one morning after he started to raise his voice with me and I quit. While I don't regret the decision to stand up for myself, I do think that it was indeed challenging to find a new job while unemployed.

During this time, I did a lot of soul-searching about the actions I liked in my work experiences. I also considered my interests and values. I determined that the perfect job for me would be a position where I had the opportunity to utilize the unique gifts that come naturally to me- my people skills and my organization skills. It was important for me to find work that was in alignment with my values. I realized how much I enjoy coaching, motivating, and inspiring others, and encouraging them to achieve their personal and professional goals. I desired a work environment that was goal-oriented, positive, and supportive, where humor is part of the workplace. I wanted a career where I looked forward to going to work each day because it was fun. I had a strong desire to use my enthusiasm to encourage others to take action. I wanted balance between my personal and professional life and I wanted my career to be more than just a job. I wanted my career to be of personal interest to me and my goal was to find a place where I felt my contributions could make a difference. When I looked back at my past work experiences,

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I discovered that I enjoyed making order out of chaos and creating systems for organizing information so that is meaningful and accessible. I liked using my creativity to strategize new ways of doing things to work smarter and not harder. I was most content when I had an opportunity to work with a team. I enjoyed teaching and training, but I was frustrated in positions where there was little opportunity to grow within the organization. I wanted to work for an organization where visions was shared and expectations were clearly communicated. Also, I enjoyed opportunities to represent the company in public and serve as a role model to others both within and outside of the organization.

My next career move, was taking a position as an administrative assistant at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. This role allowed me to get my foot in the door working for the hospital's foundation. A year after taking the position, I was promoted to assistant director of development communications. The part I loved most about this position was meeting with patient families and retelling their stories in our donor newsletters. The tough part was that most of my job involved project management where I had to spend much of my time in front of a computer not engaging with people.

I started investigating master's programs in counseling and student affairs. I went on countless informational interviews to gain insight from actual counselors and student affairs professionals and determined that I enjoy helping people who are already making positive steps to better themselves. Last summer, my husband and I sold our home in Columbus and moved to northern Ohio so that I could pursue a master's degree in College Student Personnel at Bowling Green State University. My career goal is to work in academic advising or career services in a higher education institution. I am now working as an academic advisor at Owens Community College. After I graduate, my husband and I want to begin the process of adoption.