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My Career Story

We're told to pump resumes full of adjectives that exhale power. More metrics show more achievement. Better academic pedigree implies safety, stability. All the facts on the line items are true, but they don't speak truth and inner Knowing. What motivates us? Who has made a lasting impact on our career choices? How have we learned and grown?

I think a lot about the threads that weave together, fortifying the braid of my career. I started with direct implementation. The institutional question that stuck with me in college was: What's *the* one way to improve an entire generation? I took it literally. The skinniness of youth. My answer was education; bold female educators speckle my lineage. Our histories shape us. (We must also recognize when they blind us.) Teacher wasn't my goal. I tried other paths in. The United Nations Association: events and education about the ideals that shaped the bid for peace. Teaching English in Korea: Really an excuse to put my intercultural communications classes to work and etch more countries into my worldview. And fall in love with kimchi. *Did you know it saved Korea from the avian flu?* they would say. ESL school administration: Whoa, the systemic racism embedded in a well-meaning bureaucracy.

So I went to grad school in Kansas. *Of all places*, wondered many people in my life outwardly, and sometimes just silently on their faces. It was pre-Obamacare and I wanted to stay on my parents' insurance. It was 2009 and the economy had molded into a crater. My grandparents, who were my couple idols, were there. I had a full ride. That was enough. My coastal Catholic liberal arts undergrad education spun to an agrarian middlest-of-the-Midwest state school to study communications in nonprofits and the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The program was woefully underfunded. There were signs on all campus doors reminding students, *Guns aren't permitted inside; leave them in your car*. I learned how to conduct research, qual and quant, much of it centered on systemic racism in tv news. I had to go outside the department to seek professors who knew nonprofit work and embed myself in post-grad externships at 501c3s to study them from the inside. I met some of the kindest folks. I also experienced more culture shock and religion in the school walls than I'd experienced studying abroad in ground zero, Catholic Italy. 21 credits later, grieving the sudden loss of my major professor to a heart attack, I was back in Oregon thinking I'd finish a thesis on nonprofit communications: in house or piecemeal for hire. Social media fundraising was burgeoning.

Instead, I found my way back to writing (what fueled my career dreams as a kid) through a fledgling print magazine company. My boss had an incredible energy, warmth, and a knack for bringing together creatives who became a work family, and are now lifelong friends. She's an advertiser though and through, but she fostered a flagship magazine with utter independence for our editorial staff. A golden egg privilege that few communications professionals ever

experience. My gratitude for seven years in various editorial roles will anchor me the rest of my life. A small nagging always beckoned me back toward nonprofit life, but every day I got to write about farmers and nonprofits and inventors, and other bad ass Oregonians who poured their lives into their passions. That nourished me for a long time.

Eventually, I craved a city and career evolution. By that time, we'd used the flagship editorial work to win huge contracts for digital and print paid media, and I had lots of freelance client work to sustain me in transition. I kept growing my branding and marketing technology experience through contracts, eventually incubating in an agency that promised only social-benefit work. My identity had become something I'd never heard of two years prior: Content Strategist. *This is it*, I thought. The holy grail. I'll never forget sitting in that coffee shop with the co-founder, me with my stack of magazines and him with his experiential branding pedigree. Abuzz, we murmured that it felt like we were getting away with something, that Strategist was the buzzword that finally put a label on our skills. Ha! There we were, bonafide Content Strategists.

Working with nonprofits in an agency suite allowed me to see inside so many facets of the social sector, from the philanthropic side to the boots on the ground. I was (in a sense) doing my thesis out in the real world, and getting paid well to do it. Like in the magazine world, agency life let me dip my toes into more missions and containers for mission fulfillment approaches than I could have dreamed possible.

The big T enticed me, promises whispered in every engagement to solve the American Gladiator challenges that stand between missions and fulfillment. Technology. I let the river sweep me away and started working on huge website builds. I transitioned into a company that allowed me to work with even more nonprofits and more complex technology. I learned and launched and iteratively improved. My tech skills grew, yet I also realized that I was getting bruised by the rocks in the river and the flood of two-dimensional solutions. Tech is just a piece of the solution, and it's not the primary contribution I want to give.

Now I'm here in a quiet swimming hole, deep and afloat with the knowledge of dimensionality. Here I swim today, diving down to examine all my stones of experience. Coming to the surface to ask what's next; where can I channel my ideas, learnings, and drive into one organization, one mission. I started my career with specificity: one organization at a time. I then went wide, casting huge yet shallow ripples. Now, I'm ready to integrate. I want to be on a team where everyone is working toward one big, chewy goal. Our threads will still fortify through independent crafting, team weaving, and crocheting in other organizations' work and the perspectives and ideas of the people we serve. But I finally feel prepared for the focus of one mission, a calling.