

Open Your Shades and Enjoy the View  
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Perky, cheerful, sparkly, and bubbly. I often hear people describe me that way. Yep – I'm one of those annoying people you hate to be around in the morning. I come out of my morning shower chattering away a hundred miles an hour to pretty much anyone within range who'll listen. I'm raring to go and excited about the prospects of the gift of another exciting day. Have I always been like this? Well – actually, yes. Every one of my grade school report cards had some comment (although nicely worded) about my incredible ability to chatter my way through the day with my classmates.

Through the years, I've earned my living as a cook, a lounge singer, a kindergarten teacher, a waitress, a piano teacher, a medical records clerk, an office manager, a secretary, a concert manager, and a tour guide. At each venture, I've thrown myself completely into the task and loved every minute of it. Please don't think each job didn't have tasks that weren't fun, but the opportunities that came with each position far outweighed the monotony. I washed a lot of dishes as a nursing home cook but the memories I made with those elderly residents are priceless to me. I ruined a lot of clothes with finger paint, glue and spaghetti sauce while teaching kindergarten, but I was also covered with hugs, kisses and the joy of watching my students learn.

I know what you're thinking. She's so lucky. She's so happy. She's led such a charmed life. Well, that all depends on how you look at it. As an undergraduate, I was brutally attacked on my residence hall floor and frequently harassed due to my sexual orientation. After five wonderful years of teaching and winning awards for my classroom, I was fired solely due to my sexual orientation. I have several health issues that affect my day to day living choices. My car window was shot out while driving through Bloomington (which was blamed on the rainbow PRIDE sticker in my rear window). I've lost too many friends to AIDS to mention, survived an abusive personal relationship, and was shattered when my parents divorced after 37 years of (I thought happy) marriage.

But like the crazy assortment of careers, all those experiences shaped who I've become: a former kindergarten teacher turned human rights activist committed to ensuring the quality of life for Illinois State University students. Had I not lost my teaching job, I never would have returned to campus and experienced all the wonderful days of the last sixteen years here. As a result of my parent's divorce, I gained an incredible stepfamily that I adore. They say for every door that closes, a window opens. I just never dreamt my windows could bring me such a beautiful view. Do I make the choice to be the perky person my friends know? Maybe. Do I make the choice to keep the blinds on those windows open far enough to see what the next closed door could bring? Absolutely!