

Introduction: Hi, my name is Christine Ristaino. I graduated from Skidmore College in 1989.

Question 1: Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from your Emory graduation to your current role?

Response: When I finished college, it was during a recession and there were no jobs. And a friend of mine said that she was going to pick a city and live there. And I said to her, *Oh gosh, I wish I could do that.* And she looked me straight in the eye and she said, *Why can't you?* So we moved. I am from Massachusetts, I was living in Saratoga Springs where my college was. And we just picked up and we moved across the country to Seattle. I actually wanted to be a teacher, but my father said, *Honey, don't be a teacher. You have to work all summer long. It doesn't pay a lot of money. You know, major in business.* Anyone who knows me knows I'm not really a business person. But I did major in business. And I learned a lot but I loved English. So I minored in writing and loved creative writing. And then when I moved to Seattle, I ended up at Kinkos Copies. Afterwards, I got a job at the University of Washington in the romance languages department. And for fun, I started taking Italian classes. I loved Italian, and I realized if I want to study literature, which I loved, why not study Italian literature and travel. So I started. I got a second bachelor's in Italian literature. Then I went to grad school. And after that, I ended up at Emory University teaching Italian, which I've been doing ever since.

When I decided to go to graduate school, I was pretty confident that I could get into a graduate program in Italy. And I went to Italy the summer before—actually, the semester before I graduated my senior year, I went to Italy. I ended my job at the romance languages department. I was doing that and taking two classes a semester. And interestingly enough, when I was taking two classes a semester and working at the university in the romance department, I had no life because it's really hard to work full time and take two classes. So I was always coming home, I'd see all these people at my house with my roommate and I'd just wave to them and go into my room and do work. And what was interesting was one day, I finished my finals and I called up all my girlfriends and I said, *Hey, tomorrow, Saturday, I've finished all my finals, let's go out and have breakfast.* And so we went to this restaurant/bar where my friend Tom worked. He cooked us this extraordinary breakfast. All my girlfriends, we were having such a great time, and it was a beautiful day. So we went outside. And there was this guy from New Zealand. And he was there, he had just arrived in the United States. He was there with a few new friends and he came over and talked to us for a bit. He became friends with my friends, I wasn't that interested in him at all. But then the following year, when I was doing a lot of work, and I would walk into my house and say hi to everyone who was there, he would be there. He had become friends with my roommate. And towards the end of the year, we went to a few movies. And now, I'm married to him.

So anyways, back to grad school. We were applying for grad schools, both of us. And the requirement was that our schools overlapped. He was going to go to grad school for English and I was going to go for Italian studies. We applied but that summer, actually in the fall, I went to Italy. And then I stayed over the summer and I was working as a babysitter. I was applying to grad schools initially and I felt super confident about the process. But after that, I started having panic attacks. And when I entered grad school, I was very fragile. I was having panic attacks. I had lost a lot of self-confidence. And so it's one of those moments when you think it is going to go one way and it goes another. I did really well in graduate school, but I was fragile. And I started off with less confidence than I had during the application process. We, my husband and I, had schools where we overlapped, fortunately, and we were

going to go to the University of Wisconsin, that was our number one choice. And UNC Chapel Hill was our number two. We decided on Wisconsin. And then at the last minute, my husband discovered that they wouldn't take his master's degree from New Zealand. They said, *We consider a master's degree from New Zealand the equivalent of our bachelor's degree.* So that did it for us. We switched and we ended up at UNC Chapel Hill. And I couldn't be happier about that choice. I've made some of the best friends of my life. The professors were excellent. The education was extraordinary. And ultimately, my husband and I ended up in Atlanta near one of his brothers, who is a pathologist, and he works in Atlanta. He went to Emory's med school. And we love Atlanta. We love what brought us to it. The whole process was fantastic.

Question 2: What does creativity and living a creative life mean to you?

Response: Living a creative life means allowing life to take you in the directions it needs to take you. It means bringing in the creative part of your mind to everything you do and allowing yourself to be open to creativity, to love, to joy, to sorrow, to pain—everything on the spectrum—and seeing where that will take you. For me that is creativity, that's living a full, creative life. And it's living a life that is in the moment, and doing work with other people that is meaningful and focused on justice, love, and connection.

Question 3: What were things that were unplanned/unexpected but meaningful to your growth?

Response: Between getting my first bachelor's degree and finding my job, I was really nervous. I was moving to Seattle. I had never left the East Coast, I was a small town girl, I didn't understand how to live in a city. So basically, I was terrified. And in my brain, I kept hoping something would happen. Something would happen that required me to be in my hometown. I was so afraid. And my parents were really sad that I wasn't coming home, but they didn't object. They said, *Okay, well, we understand.* And ultimately, I left with my friend Sarah. It ended up being the best year of my life. We didn't have any money. Sometimes we would share a can of beans together at night. We worked at a factory for the first few months that we were there. It was a toy factory. So even though I was really nervous about living on my own, this great adventure turned out to be a great adventure. By the end of my stay in Seattle—I was there for about six years—I was actually going abroad for the first time. And so I moved out of business into Italian studies, and I've never looked back.

So I actually graduated from UNC Chapel Hill with my masters in 1997. Then I went to Italy for a year and worked in Italy at an Italian school. And then I returned and I worked on my PhD at UNC Chapel Hill. And in 2000, I got a one year job teaching a crazy amount of classes. One semester, I taught five classes. The next year, we moved to Atlanta because my husband found a job. I had a fellowship, so I just wrote my dissertation. And I was also pregnant and really sick. I managed to almost finish my dissertation and then my daughter was born. Two months later, Emory called me. I had applied for a job at Emory and I didn't get it, but I got the dissertation fellowship instead. So a year later, Emory contacted me and said, *We have a temporary position open.* So I jumped at the chance. And I had a newborn baby, maybe she was two and a half months old by the time I started working at Emory. And it was just a crazy life with this newborn baby and a job at Emory that I loved. So I worked a lot and I was breastfeeding my daughter. And a friend of mine happened to be staying with us four days a week. She was living in Chapel Hill, but going to grad school at Emory, but she wanted to be with her fiance. So

she would come up here four days a week and stay with us. And it was great because the three of us all took care of my baby. It allowed me to be a working professional. We had some daycare as well. Anyways, it worked. I fell in love with Emory and my students and wanted to work there. And three years later, a permanent position opened, I applied for it. And I got it. And I've been at Emory since 2002. And it is by far the most meaningful job I've ever had.

Question 4: What do you know now that you think the 'you' back then would have found helpful to hear/know?

Response: I just think it's so important to keep your eyes open and be willing to go with the flow of your life. When I was a junior in college, I got a job working at a company. They had to lay off about 100 people and then the press called us and they wanted us in the advertisement department. The company did it to lie and say that we didn't lay anyone off. I said, *I really don't want to go into business*. So I did get a job in business when I arrived in Seattle eventually. And I was an office administrator for the romance languages department. But I could see that I wanted to be a teacher. And I had been wanting to be a teacher since I was young. At eight years old, I would carry around a briefcase and I would pull out exercises and test my poor four younger brothers, like they would be my students. And now, I'm an educator, I teach languages and I write. I've written books and I love writing.