

Meet Red

Biographical Interview

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There are many people in my life over the age of 40 whom I would enjoy interviewing. I chose a 63-year-old, single female who has been a mentor and inspiration in my life. We will call her Red, and she was very receptive to the idea of telling her story. It's fascinating to discover the many layers that exist in a person whom is in our lives daily and how much we really don't know about that person. Our interview took place late on a sunny Saturday afternoon. We sat on my front porch sipping homemade sangria and munching on brie and crackers. The afternoon sun warmed our bodies, despite the cool breeze. Red was forthcoming with her story and talked with ease. With her acknowledgment, I taped some of our conversation that lasted about two hours. The only hesitation was when she would inquire about the purpose of the assignment; she had concerns about the content she should disclose. I encouraged her to tell her life's story, nothing more. I informed her it was confidential, only to be read by my professor and to further my understanding of theories in human development, there was no hidden agenda. This is the life journey of Red.

Comment [PGG1]: APA Style – spell out numbers under ten. Use numerals for numbers over 10.

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Red grew up in a very chaotic home, experiencing fighting and poverty throughout childhood. She was one of four children and had a strong, loving mother. She attended Catholic school and was committed to her faith. She experienced the obligation phase of development early. She entered adulthood at the young age of 17, when life took a change of course and she become pregnant in high school with her first child. She claims it was difficult, as her family, friends and the church that she idolized shunned her for being with child. She was alone through the pregnancy and it wasn't until after the birth, they

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offered support. Her moral clock, instilled through family and church was in conflict with the hormones and emotions of her biological clock. She spoke of the necessity to survive financially and emotionally. She recalls, the optimism of youth helped carry them through the challenges and she assumed she could get through anything. “Luckily,” she said, “we had a very strong support system in our family and community of friends after the baby came and we were married.” She had to quit school and went for her GED, but initially it was a humiliating experience and she dropped out of the program. She went back again and a teacher from the GED program asked why she was there? The instructor told her that she didn’t belong, that she was very intelligent and should be in college. This teacher was a mentor who offered guidance during this period of early adult transition. “I realized that I had value, I was smart and I was worth something. It refocused my drive and energy for education. I didn’t want my daughter to have a mother who didn’t finish school and I succeeded getting my GED,” said Red. She was intelligent and had a desire to improve her life. The positive reinforcement and the strong elements of her psychological clock effected her development. It was a time of many transitions all at once in her life; she became a mother, a wife and moved out of the family house. Red says. “I had to grow up, no drive-in movies, frat parties, or date nights; it was diapers, house cleaning and dinner on the table.”

Red reflects on the impact books had in her life, “I never read books growing up because it bored me. I never did it in school and my family life was too chaotic. In my early twenties, I began to read because it was a form of

entertainment. I began to read about Transactional analysis. I realized I was okay and I gained a lot of confidence in myself. I discovered myself...probably what kids in college were doing I was just doing it differently.” Red says the twenties and thirties were a blur, busy raising kids, supporting the family and trying to be a mom and wife. They didn’t have much money and lived in a one room apartment. Her social life revolved around the family. She spent weekends with her older sister, went to their parents for Sunday dinners and played cards with neighborhood friends. “Life was demanding, but I had a good spirit and had fun,” she said. She was getting aide and affirmation from her convoy, which positively influenced her socially and psychologically.

Comment [PGG2]: Indeed. Perhaps we should call this the “blur” stage of development

She worked in the factory to help support the family. After her second child was born, it became difficult to get both children to daycare and still arrive at the factory by seven in the morning. She was a stay at home mom for six months, but knew she wanted to work. She was trying to maintain a balance in her devotion to self and others in her life. She got a job at a local five-and-dime store. She loved it. She was able to work short days that revolved around the family schedule. Although she didn’t have the responsibility of being a manager, she was in charge of setting up displays and ran the candy department. The aspect she loved most was dealing with the customers. The store manger did not like dealing with the vendors so he always had her manage the day-to-day operations. Red’s boss left to start his own store and she was sure that she would be promoted to the manager. She came to understand that they would never put a female in that position and she eventually had a new male manager.

The new manager lacked experience and came to her for clarification about everything. Her gender was affecting her socialization in the workforce. This upset her and challenged her perspective of what is just in society, a principle of Kohlberg's post-conventional reasoning. During her time at the store, she had gotten to know the sales people and noticed that they all made decent money and drove nice cars. She was confident in her abilities and quit to begin applying for sales jobs. Success came and she got a job selling gift items to stores and she represented forty-eight products. Red spoke with enthusiasm, "I loved everything about it, loved interacting with the people, loved the challenge and I knew that I had found my niche." She recalls a meeting with a customer who inquired about how long she had been in sales. When she replied three weeks, he proposed to her if she could get him the answers to several questions, he would give her the business. She succeeded in finding his answers and he gave her eight products to display at Walgreens. "That was it, I was hooked and I became a sales representative," says Red triumphantly. Her eagerness to accept the challenges along with her skills allowed her to find a successful flow in development as an adult.

She always thought she would go back to school, but never had the time or money. She recalls living in Florida and they became best friends with the neighbors. Red begins, "We would talk and play games and they knew so much....they had a bigger educational background and had gone to college. They knew about literature, history, psychology and science. The required course work they took in college made them well rounded. At that time, it

affected where I fit in the world and I was trying to find myself. Once I became older, it was less important. I was self-taught. If you pretend long enough you become that person you've envisioned. **Everyone is scared and we all need courage. It takes practice and you fake it until you make it.** We are silent for a while. I think about her extraverted personality, passion and energy conflicting with her intelligence and identity; thus, the internal and external factors of development fighting for control. This conflict can have negative or positive results in development.

Comment [PGG3]: Interesting quote

Red was doing quite well with her career in sales, but her husband's career relocation caused her to resign from her job. She had spent most of her adult life fostering her husband's career and allowing her choices to be put on hold. **The balance of self was lost to her obligation of doing for others during this time.** She talks almost with sadness, "Relocating, leaving family and all I knew at age thirty-three and being alone in a new environment with a shaky, failing marriage was a huge change. Then three years later another relocation, I had to give up a tremendous job opportunity to move to upstate New York." Red felt like she was in limbo for several years and had ambiguous emotions about how to move forward with her life. According to Levinson she was in a mid-life transition, a period of reorientation. She eventually found a job selling for a moving company, but her life was changing. The kids were older and self-sufficient, and her marriage was ending. She hated to disappoint the children about love everlasting, frankly, could not believe it herself. In Sternberg's triangle of love, there were elements missing and they had moved into the companionate stage.

Comment [PGG4]: It strikes me that there are times when "doing for others" is also a way of doing for ourselves as well. Let's face it. Part of being nice to my wife is motivated by the desire for her to be nice to me in return.

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At forty-two she divorced the man who she thought was the love of her life. This man had been her world since she was seventeen. She felt it was truly a loss of an entire lifetime and part of her identity. "It was disappointing, liberating and terribly scary at the same time," says Red. She didn't even know how to balance a check book and had never used an ATM card. She had never been included in the financial matters. She had new responsibilities but also new freedoms; she could make her own choices and decisions. In a sense, she was entering an orientation phase of development as an off-time event. She spent less than six months alone before remarrying. She recalls that the second marriage was a huge mistake. It resulted in her leaving her children for the first time ever when she relocated to Alabama with her new spouse. Red had always been married and that was her sociological role and comfort. She says it was a very sad time and she suffered without the close proximity to family and continues, "the loneliness and the sadness I felt, caused me for the first time ever to consider antidepressants." Her health was being impacted by the tensions between all the clocks. She says her life took a major change in 1996, when diagnosed with breast cancer. Her recovery became her main goal and she had a new determination about life. She felt that her situation needed to be changed. At fifty years old, she filed for divorce and purchased her first home completely on her own. She was now close to her children and excited about the pending birth of her first grand child. These were glorious and hopeful times and it totally clarified where and how she wanted to spend the coming years. She

recalls it was a very contented time in her life. She was in a phase of reorientation, mentally, socially and psychologically.

Red's professional life had been going well for many years. She had flexibility and the capability to live anywhere, which gave her the freedom to move close to her children. At this point, her babies were having babies of their own and their lives were busy with careers and family. Red works out of the home, limiting her interaction with people. Travel and disconnection from a real sense of community seems to take a toll on her over the years. Work is simply work at this stage of her life, and with current times, it's not as satisfying as the young warrior years. It was difficult when one of her daughters relocated and she felt the family was once again disjointed. She conveys that it was a great move for her daughter and she's happy for their new life. Regardless, she feels alone and thinks about where she wants to "grow old". Red experiences fears about finances and her health, maybe this is normal as a boomer becomes a senior. She says, "despite previous events and decisions, I never really considered growing old alone."

Comment [PGG5]: If you start the sentence in the past tense, maintain the same tense throughout.

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Our interview ends with these last comments from Red:

I have been shaped by a mother of the depression who was insecure and uneducated but with survival instincts that brought myself and my siblings to adulthood. I believe my self revelations in the early years have contributed to my ability to meet the challenges I have faced. Now in my sixties, I find that I need to live for the moment and not project out to where I will be at 75 (if I make

it that far). I think I am approaching a new stage of my life. My 90 year old neighbor always says to me, you're not old, you are young. The truth is I am currently neither. The wear and tear on the old body shows a bit, and maybe even in my spirit. But I think there will be a liberation of sorts as well, from the striving for more "things", from the worry of parenting, from the vanity of youth, from the climbing the corporate ladder. Yes, I have thoughts and fears about health, Medicare, social-security, money in general. But there is also the freedoms of choosing who you want to spend time with, based solely on your love of those people and how they make you feel. Taking each experience and relishing in it for what it is right now, the projection for how things will affect the future becomes somewhat diminished, Today is what we have, isn't it grand to get to the age where you start to truly understand that.

Red's life does not follow Levinson's theory of development. She experienced the early adult transition phase much earlier than most, because of her biological and social situation. Maslow's hierarchy of needs motivated development in her late teens and twenties, she needed to survive. She had her convoy, as Antonucci states, consisting of her mother, her sister, husband and friends. She had maturity in her defenses for survival, relying on humor and a strong sense of self. Her social and moral development was affected by role conflict at a young age; is she a mother, a wife, a teenager, a daughter, an employee or a friend. Development was also influenced by the social and moral

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constructs of a Catholic girl in 1960 being pregnant and the resulting relationships with family and the community. Perhaps she struggled with the tensions of fate and freedom; self and society that contributed to her character. Her exploration phase of career took place later and most of her major life events were off-time events. I believe she experienced cognitive development through the reconstruction of new knowledge from her experiences in her world and this had a positive impact on her life and sense of self. The question of nature versus nurture remains unanswered in the development process, it's complicated.

Red says she will remain red until retirement, and then not sure when she will allow the gray to take its place and be at peace with it, but in spirit, once a redhead, always a redhead.

Thank you Red.

Michelle,

This is very nicely done. You have described Red's experience very well and made application to various theories very appropriately. I enjoyed reading this.

Style	5/5
Description	10/10
Analysis	10/10
Total	25/25