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August 2023 through July 2024 has been a year of a lot of change for me. I began my role as Communications Coordinator in August of 2023, so it has been almost a full year aligning with the UCE July-June fiscal year. I now feel more confident having worked through all of the annual calendar events, including the big three: Serendipity Auction, Pledge Drive and Rummage Sale.

Prior to UCE, I have been doing contract work for the last 8 years in web communications for several local small businesses (Play It Again Sports, The Alchemist's Wife/Follow Your Nose, and the Sentencing Advocacy Group of Evanston). And most recently I maintained and uploaded the library of images used within the popular parking application SpotHero. I enjoyed the work from home benefits, way before the pandemic made it cool. That schedule worked well for me. As a single mom, I had a lot to juggle with two starting college at once (sadly no university has BOGO options), supporting my youngest whose entire freshman year was e-learning due to the pandemic, and caring for a senior - my mother. I was truly feeling the "sandwiched generation," putting their needs first, which is not always easy with an in-person job.



Meanwhile, I craved something more stable and meaningful for my own personal growth. The ebb and flow of contract work can be rough. The August opening for Communications Coordinator was the perfect calling to make a change. As the year moved on, I sadly lost my mother to leukemia on December 9th and all of the medical visits and inner family drama took a real toll on my mental health. I could not imagine a more supportive work community than UCE during all of this turmoil. I feel really fortunate for my colleagues and the genuine kindness of congregants, you are my new family.

I knew 2024 was going to bring a lot of change regarding my sons as well. My twin sons enrolled in Spring study abroad programs that sent one to France and the other to Germany for six months. And my youngest graduated from Evanston Township High

School. So I got to thinking - what better way to shake off the mundane and celebrate my high school grad than to book a trip to Europe to reunite us all! I feel refreshed after my joy-filled European vacation with my three adult sons. We saw seven new countries in seventeen days: England, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic, and Ireland. These were short trips, two or three nights per city. But it was enough to get the flavor of the country. There is no way to perfectly and succinctly describe the many amazing experiences and sites seen. The most memorable moments were the small revelations of humanity, everyday people watching, and lessons learned navigating the tricky train systems (which were really the only place we faced language challenges).

One example of an unanticipated revelation came when we were touring the royal palace grounds in London. Suddenly we heard this ethereal singing. The crowds parted to reveal a single opera singer had positioned herself in a wonderful acoustic corridor to sing for tips ([see video here](#)). It was Italian opera, and we suddenly felt transported to Italy. We stopped to listen for as long as we could, breathing it in. It was a small encounter but so memorable! And seeing monuments I have only ever seen in movies was breathtaking. Yes, I splurged on a hotel room where we could actually see the Eiffel Tower from our balcony (see my photo) and it was worth every penny, err Euro. It was a dream come true.

I just encourage those who dream to see the world, if you have a chance, DO IT! Travel whenever possible and break out of the mundane. It was an awesome experience and I hope to explore more. July is my birthday month and I feel less old, just more wise. I look forward to getting back to a routine and my new role at UCE, working on all the Communications & Event rentals, and I hope to meet more of you this coming year!