

Let Me (RE)INTRODUCE Myself



by Allison Hester

When Jim McMurphy called me a little over a year ago asking if I'd be interested in coming back to work for *Cleaner Times*, I knew all too well, unfortunately, that the answer would have to be no. At that time, my husband had just been called up for a year's service in Iraq and I was going to be home, alone, with my two preschoolers. I had already committed to taking the year completely off of work, but I admit Jim's offer was still tempting.

For those who don't know me, my name is Allison Hester and I was the managing editor for *Cleaner Times* from 1994 to 1998. Thinking back, I can't help but laugh at how incredibly naïve I was, both about the industry as well as about life. Just 24 when I started, I had no idea what a power

washer even was. (Note: these were the days before they started popping up in every big box store.) But I learned, and the more I learned, the more I loved the industry and the wonderful people in it.

During my time at *CT*, I wrote on all kinds of topics related to the power washing and water jetting industries, from technical aspects to business practices to industry profiles. As a side note, one article that received a ton of positive feedback was an explanation of what this new-fangled thing called the Internet was all about!

I also attended a number of industry-related meetings, toured several manufacturing facilities, and even participated in a pressure washing school where I got to use the technology first-hand. I was a founding member of CETA's Young Executive Society (YES), a program for industry members under the age of 40. If you do the math, you'll realize I barely qualify for that group anymore!

My favorite experience at *CT*, however, had to be the article series I wrote on the history of the industry, which

was recently re-run. It was an honor to interview so many of the industry's pioneers, allowing them to reminisce about the early days and honor their ingenuity and hard work.

Early in '98, I married my wonderful husband, Michael, and as I started a new chapter in life, I felt it was time to follow a new career path as well. I left CT in March '98 to take on a management role in communications for a not-for-profit organization here in Arkansas. My primary job there was creating health educational resources for parents of children on Medicaid. Although it was a worthwhile cause and a job with great pay and benefits, I decided to leave at the end of '99 for personal reasons. I did, however, manage to work on my Master's in Communications before leaving. I also gained a lot of experience in graphic design.

With no real job prospects, I decided to start a freelance career. Since 2000, I've worked for a number of national and local clients, but my work seems to have specialized in three areas: faith-based organizations, youth-related programs, and Arkansas tourism. My largest freelance project lasted seven years publishing a bi-monthly newspaper for Little Rock's historic preservation organization.

In 2003, I took on my most important role when I gave birth to my son, Ethan. My daughter, Abigail, was born just 20 months later. Both children are amazing gifts from God, but my son, Ethan, has especially been a blessing to me. He was diagnosed last year with "high functioning" autism, a condition that is both amazing and often trying.

Both children are now in preschool three mornings a week. Michael safely returned from Iraq shortly before Christmas, and life is pretty much back to normal—whatever "normal" is.

But that phone call from Jim never left my mind. So here I am—definitely older, hopefully wiser. And thrilled to be back. *cr*

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