

I was recently asked by a mortgage company my clients often use to write a bio, I balked. Mostly I think it is because I don't enjoy writing about myself but also because I don't think it is very interesting. The first draft I sent to them was filled with usual where was I and where did I go to school... the real heart of the story are my values I have and why I have them.

My parents ran a decorating business. Design, custom furniture, drapes all of the home decorating needs were met by their business. They had clients from all walks of life, including a couple governors and an ex-president. As with all family businesses, I was conscripted into working for their company. I learned, and even had knack for, building things... taking things apart and putting them back together. I got to repair some of the machines; I enjoyed that, but I also had to do the books. My dad was dyslexic and all his errors were all divisible by nine, a sign of flipped numbers. When times were tough, and that was cyclic, my parents kept their employees busy redoing the furniture and drapes in our house. I got to see every new style spring to life in my very own house. I know that helped me stage all my renovations and now helps me with my own clients.

It is funny to think back to that house I grew up in. It started life as a 50's ranch (a bit of a grand title for it) at 850 sq ft. It had a floor furnace and a tiny kitchen. I pestered my parents for a piano; even the upright I got when I was five was too large for the house. We soon added on, and on, and on. Again, I was the labor force. I was the one who got to under the house to run new lines; the center beam was too low for everyone else, ugh! My parents didn't leave that house until I moved back from working up north after my master's degree, I was house hunting, and THEY found something. That was in 1978.

When I found my first house, mortgages rates were bucking the Texas usury law cap at 9.75%. They were charging 8 points at the closing table to make up for the inflation rate (listen up everyone who is complaining about 7% or 6 or 5!!!). I was turned down for a standard mortgage even with a 25% down payment! Single, female, self-employed... three strikes... you're out. It was a good thing I was turned down. I got a commercial note from City National Bank at 9% with no points. I learned a thing or two about amortization that day; it was a much shorter term (5 years) but very doable.

I learned persistence and a strong work ethic from my parents from all that time in their business. I learned to repair almost everything I own. I put myself through a BA with honors in piano at The University of Texas in '73 and a Masters in Music from the University of Michigan in '74 using my piano repair skills. I even turned that into a career starting at The University of Texas as a piano technician. I went on to work at Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio, but I froze! The winter of '77 and blizzard of '78 were brutal. I resigned, came back home to Austin and started a piano technical service with clients including the Erwin center, the Austin Symphony and Austin City Limits. Did I mention, I too, have

had famous clients. I have worked for the likes of Elton John, Ray Charles, George Winston, Lyle Lovett and Rudolf Serkin. I started Pfennig Piano Company, a retail store, in the mid 80s with Steinway and Kawai pianos. I sold that company in the early 90s and returned to running the technical business.

But, that still doesn't quite get me to real estate, does it? My first house flooded on Memorial Day (the big flood!) in 1981; 16 inches of rain fell in my neighborhood in under four hours! I finished fixing the house up and moved. Again, a bad thing turned out to be good thing for me. Like my parents, I could have been content to stay in that first house, but I had to go. I've lived in and renovated nine homes and turned a few more just for profit, a very good thing. I have always bought the ugliest duckling in the best neighborhood I could find and use my own building skills to do the redesign and renovation.

In 2003, after all those years as a technician, I had to quit. A repetitive motion injury refused to heal... NEXT! I had been investing in real estate in Austin for 30 years, and knew a thing or two about the process and had a critical eye for construction. My buyer clients often call me the negative-spin broker. I don't mince words and I don't talk about how pretty the foyer is. I point out things my clients don't see but need to pay attention to when they are caught up in the euphoria of finding the perfect home. For my sellers I can often solve design problems and stage their home for best effect.

As an investor, I hired many different real estate agents; they didn't always operate in my best interest. After the required two years under other brokers, I founded Pfennig Properties in 2005. I am determined that my company will treat clients the way I want to be treated. To that end, every client has the right to fire me at any time for any reason until there is an executed contract.

I am in the process of finishing my house on Bon Terra in Austin, my mother is 84 and refuses to leave her home in rural Hays County, just outside Austin. I am the last... so it falls to me to keep her there. To that end I have purchased a home a half mile (the closest actual house) from her and I will move there until she no longer can stay! I will continue to work in Austin (it isn't THAT far) and will probably return when I am able.

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