



The Story in the Numbers

by Sherri Mahoney-Battles



As a young girl I developed a love for reading. I read every book within reach devouring them at a rapid speed. At times, it seemed the library in my small town would run dry before my thirst could be quenched.

Certain authors drew me in, and I fell in love with the characters my imagination created, painting rich scenes in my head that no actress, movie, or television show could ever compete with.

People often comment on my career choice, confident I suffer through my days surrounded by piles of paperwork and dry numbers in a state of misery. Clients are often apologetic for dumping their tax and financial disasters into my hands unaware of my eagerness to dig through their boxes and files.

You see, for me it's always been about the stories.

Every tax return, pile of paperwork or box that gets dumped on my desk tells a story. Some of my clients have been with me for over twenty-five years. They have gotten married, divorced, raised children, gotten jobs, been laid off, collected alimony, paid alimony, been in lawsuits, sold homes and retired.

The stories that have unfolded are too many to number. These are their stories, rich with all of the pieces of lives being lived. As the years have gone by I have enjoyed traveling that journey with them watching their stories unfurl.

A new client will come in, and we start our journey. Years pass, and the story grows and changes. Over the years their children grow older. One year we are working on plans for funding college education, a few years later we are working on credits for college education, and then they are showing me pictures of grandchildren.

The story continues, and we talk about plans to sell the family home and how to maximize their investments to make their retirement years more comfortable. My phone rings, and their grown children set up appointments and come in with jobs, a new home purchase, a baby on the way and another story starts. Can you see the story in the numbers?

Most people hate to look at numbers. They may not like the story they see or they don't like the truths that they tell. Sometimes they just don't realize that there is a story in the numbers. The reality is that we get to write the stories and numbers that make up our lives. You are the author of your own financial story.

Maybe you don't want to be an author but a painter instead. Paint your financial picture. Can you see scenes from different periods of your life? Do you see scenes or landscapes rich with colors that illustrate financial periods of comfort or success and others darker and more dismal during times of financial stress or failures?

As you travel through your life, the scenes and the stories change. Whether you are a writer or an artist, the numbers in your life offer stories and pictures that are part of your journey.

So, I encourage you to embrace your numbers. Read the story they tell, and look at the pictures they paint. If you don't like the story or if the painting isn't one you want to hang on your wall, rewrite it.

After all, it's your story and your work of art.

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TAXING MATTERS
52 Cranberry Highway
Orleans, MA 02653

508 240 6740
sherilyn@taxingmatters.com

WWW.TAXINGMATTERS.COM

Sherri Mahoney-Battles, of Taxing Matters, specializes in income tax preparation for small businesses and individuals.

As an Enrolled Agent, licensed by the IRS, Sherri has been representing clients for over twenty-five years in cases of audit, collections, and appeals and does extensive work with non-filers.

Visit her website at www.taxingmatters.com email Sherilyn@taxingmatters.com or call her at 508-636-9829.