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## Quarter-life crisis produces an author

### Dallas native wants to help others in their 20s start life anew

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By KATHARINE GOODLOE / The Dallas Morning News

By the time Christine Hassler was 25, the Dallas native was a literary agent at one of Los Angeles' most prestigious entertainment companies.

She'd dreamed of the job since high school – and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on an education preparing for it.

She had everything she'd planned on – an assistant, an expense account, industry screenings and a regular paycheck.

And she was miserable.

So she quit her dream job and became a fitness instructor, thinking that would lead to happiness.

It didn't.

But at age 26, Ms. Hassler decided her life was still on track when her boyfriend proposed to her in a way she calls "amazing and romantic."

A year later, he left.

Now, at age 28, she has figured out how to put her 20s back together – and how to help other women do it.

Ms. Hassler's book, *20 Something, 20 Everything: A Quarter-Life Woman's Guide to Balance and Direction* (New World Library, \$14.95) splices her story among those of the more than 300 women she interviewed for the project. And it turned out they were a lot alike.

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Christine Hassler

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"I was always looking for the next best thing," she says.

"I didn't like high school, couldn't wait till college. Didn't like college, couldn't wait to graduate. I was never quite happy. I kept proving myself wrong, over and over."

Ms. Hassler recently gave *The News* some insight into that endeavor during a telephone interview from California.

**Question:** Your book is basically about quarter-life crises. But why do people in their 20s need to start over?

**Answer:** I don't think it's really starting over. I think it's starting your life as an adult – it's a transition.

It's the first time in your life when you're not really being taken care of and when life isn't scripted for you.

**Question:** You said twentysomethings are often figuring out what they believe vs. what they've been programmed to believe. Why don't we do that sooner?

**Answer:** I don't think you really have time. Up until your 20s, you're growing up. You're dealing with your body changing, with going off to college.

At that point, you're just learning survival and social skills while trying to get an education. I don't know if there's room for it.

**Question:** Why did you write this book for women? Why not men?

**Answer:** Mainly because I felt I wanted to write a book where I'm on common ground with those who will read it. I'm not a man. I think, more than anything, the role of women has changed. Women need a guidebook at this point in their lives.

**Question:** You say in the book's introduction that your twentysomething years were your "20-everything" years – but not the "everything" you pictured. Why not?

**Answer:** I imagined I'd have a fabulous career and be in the entertainment industry. I thought I would definitely be married and on my first child by 30. I thought I would be making a lot more money than I am now, or than I ever did.

I didn't think I'd have a roommate at age 28, or that I'd struggle with everything from body image to finance to carving out a new relationship with my parents. It just wasn't what I planned at all.

**Question:** In the book, you say three questions – Who am I? What do I want? How do I get what I want? – form a "twentysomething triangle." Which of those was the hardest for you to figure out?

**Answer:** Who am I? Really, because so much of that had been constructed on external things. I was a straight-A student. I was a good girl. I was cute. I was smart.

I let other people define my identity for me, and if it was

negative in any way, I was more likely to believe it than the compliments.

**Question:** Can you explain the role exercises play in the book? At one point, you ask readers to interview other women in their lives, and at another point, you instruct them to take a "life inventory."

**Answer:** I thought that in writing a self-help book, people are responsible for answering a lot of their own questions. But sometimes we need a guide – and that's what the exercises are.

**Question:** Did writing this book help you out of your own quarter-life crisis?

**Answer:** It gave me something to do, to put it simply. When we're really, really down, we look for something outside of ourselves. What could have happened to me is I got so down and depressed that I stop living my life.

But this book gave me a life – and it's evolved into much more than that. It's brought friends. It made me feel less alone. And it inspired me to do more. If you're going to write a book about getting it together in your 20s, you'd better not be slacking off.

**Question:** So what do you plan to do next?

**Answer:** I'm moving. I'm getting married. I don't know. We'll see. I'd love to write more.

E-mail [kgoodloe@dallasnews.com](mailto:kgoodloe@dallasnews.com)

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