



# Home care

## WHO

CYRESE SAMUEL |50|

## WHERE

HUNTSVILLE, ONT.

## WHAT SHE WAS

ADMINISTRATOR

## WHAT SHE IS

REDESIGNER AND  
HOME STAGER

## HOW SHE MADE THE LEAP



**THE DAY** Cyrese Samuel sat down with her son to discuss his future was the day that changed her own. Samuel had always advised her children to pursue a profession they were passionate about. After all, careers last years and should be something you love to do, she would tell them. So it should have come as no surprise when her son, then 18, suggested she do the same. “Brent turned the tables on me and told me it was time to pursue my passion. He said for many years I’d been helping others by sharing interior design and decorating advice, and I should now make it my career.”

Her son’s idea caught her off guard. “I was busy being a mother, doing stuff for the kids and my spouse. My focus was not what my next career would be,” says Samuel, then 45. But Brent got her thinking.

Back when she finished high school, Samuel toyed with the idea of studying interior design at the

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BY CONNIE ADAIR



Ontario College of Art & Design. However, level-headed even as a teen, she decided instead on a practical path to a job she felt would be more in demand. She earned a college diploma in data processing and computer programming, and worked in the computer industry until her son was born. As she and her husband, Roger, had planned before they were married, she quit her job to stay home with Brent and later their daughter, Laurene. Eventually, she went to work with Roger when he started a computer software development business.

Taking the course was exciting, but Samuel could not say the same for the effort involved in setting up her business, Change by Design Home Staging and Interior Redesign. “I didn’t have a lot of start-up costs, just a domain name,” she says, but admits that administrative tasks are her biggest challenge. While Samuel’s husband lent a hand by helping to create a website, maintaining it tends to fall to the bottom of her daily priority list. “I still have to update it,” she explains.

As she became more involved with the CRDA, Samuel learned of Havens

to her front door, they could see right down the hall to the couch where she spent much of her time recuperating, and she felt she had no privacy. So Samuel moved the couch around a corner, which also allowed Annie to see the television and her backyard.

“You think you’ll do it to make them feel good, but you feel good too because you can do something to help,” says Samuel, who keeps in touch with Annie and is pleased to report she is doing well.

“You get attached to people,” Samuel admits, “and it’s not always good news. It can be heart-wrenching because they become like part of your family.”

In her second year with the CRDA, Samuel was elected vice-president of its board of directors and co-chair of Havens for Healing. Determined to increase awareness for the Havens program, ovarian cancer and the association, she enrolled in a public relations course. Now a four-year member and association president, Samuel continues to generate ideas for obtaining media coverage and spreading the association’s message.

Shortly after changing direction professionally, Samuel’s private life also took a turn. Two and a half years ago, she and Roger started welcoming foster children into their home. “My husband grew up in a home with foster children, and his 76-year-old father is still fostering children,” she says, adding with a laugh, “Brent says the foster kids benefit from better parenting than they had because, thanks to him and his sister, we have 22 years of parenting experience.

“It is encouraging to know that dreams made a long time ago can come to life at a later date. I always say, as long as we have life and breath, there is opportunity for change.” ■

### { WORDS OF WISDOM }

“There are so many opportunities out there to do something you love and make money at it. People are working longer, so it might as well be at something you enjoy.”

All the while, she was putting her creative flair and interest in interior decorating to good use, helping family and friends freshen their homes or spruce up new digs.

After her conversation with her son, an online search led Samuel to the Canadian ReDesigners Association (CRDA), where she signed up for a course to become a Certified ReDesign and Staging Specialist. “I hadn’t heard of redesign, but it’s what I’d been doing all along.” While an interior designer starts with an empty room and fills it, a redesigner uses a client’s existing furniture. “The concept is one of the best-kept secrets,” says Samuel. “It brings in creative ideas, but leaves a person’s own stamp on a home. And in this day and age, you can’t afford to throw everything out and start anew.”

for Healing, the association’s initiative in partnership with Ovarian Cancer Canada. Through Havens, CRDA members offer complimentary room makeovers to women recovering from or living with ovarian cancer. When she discovered she could use her skills to help women undergoing gruelling medical treatments, Samuel knew she had made the right decision to switch careers.

Redesigning a room in a cancer patient’s home has therapeutic benefits. “When one recipient, Annie, walked downstairs and saw a man painting her living room walls light colours, she burst into tears,” Samuel recalls. “Since she’d started chemotherapy, she’d become sensitive to colours, and staring at dark walls was getting her down.” Furniture placement had also bothered Annie: When people came

