

Austin's  
*ultimate*  
power couple  
Elizabeth Christian & Bruce Todd

POWER DEFINED (AND LOVE + COMMITMENT, TOO)

BY JULIE TERESHCHUK  
PHOTOS BY KOREY HOWELL PHOTOGRAPHY  
+ COURTESY OF ELIZABETH CHRISTIAN



Elizabeth Christian + Bruce Todd  
enjoy a private moment.  
*Photo by Korey Howell Photography*  
*Makeup by April Monroe of Rae Cosmetics*



"I love talking about my father," says Elizabeth Christian, pictured here with her father George, who died in 2002.

**S**TEPPING OUT FROM UNDER HER FAMOUS father's long shadow, as well as the death of her mother when Elizabeth Christian was an infant, are both challenges the longtime Austin PR maven has risen to. Yet they pale against the impact of her husband's near-fatal cycling wreck. "That afternoon changed my life forever," says Elizabeth Christian. Thanksgiving Weekend 2005 marked the start of an agonizing recovery for former Austin Mayor Bruce Todd, and a stark re-evaluation by Christian of what their marriage meant to her. Todd spent five weeks in intensive care; a month of in-patient rehab followed, and finally, he came home. "There were many weeks where we didn't know if he would ever get out of bed again," says Christian. With Todd critically ill in the hospital, Christian, seemingly running on fumes, also managed to kick-off a media campaign to mandate helmets for all cyclists, a cause which she and Todd still ardently support.

What long-term impact has her husband's 2005 cycling wreck had on her? "The commitment was always there," says Christian, a trim woman in a dress the perfect color complement to her pale skin, blonde hair and azure eyes. "But you don't lightly treat a marriage when you've almost lost someone." With Todd now having made a full recovery, Christian reflects, "It was hard, scary,

intense ... But we were one of the lucky ones. I've got a whole different perspective now on what some people have gone through."

The eldest child of George Christian (a close friend and aide to President Johnson), Christian has an unabashed passion for politics that turned into a passion for a certain local politician. Newly single, and with six-year-old daughter Alex in tow, Christian returned to her native Austin from northern California in 1993. Neither recalls her cursory job interview to become the incumbent mayor's re-election campaign manager as earth-shattering. (She had raging strep, he was late for an appointment, is about as far as it goes.) Still, highly recommended by Todd's strategy team, she was hired, beginning work in January 1994. Gradually, the pair's professional respect for each other morphed. "Thank goodness, we won the campaign," they both joke. That July they married, deliberately avoiding any media fanfare, celebrating with their newly blended family on Nighthawk burgers followed by bowling. "We let the kids choose," recalls Christian, grinning.

The couple settled in Austin's Northwest Hills neighborhood, survived the typical trials and tribulations of families (blended and not), including a double dose of teenage years. After he left



"We're all close," says Elizabeth Christian (center), the oldest of the six Christian siblings.

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office in 1996, she set-up her public relations firm. “My job is to help clients sell an issue or a product or a service, and talk about it in a meaningful way that’s of interest to the public,” she explains. Over the years they’ve collaborated on some projects, and now Bruce Todd Public Affairs is housed within her firm’s downtown offices.

George Christian’s death came in 2002. It still hits his eldest daughter hard; although her strong faith provides her the comfort that she will see him again. “I miss him every moment of every day,” says Christian, pausing to collect herself. “Probably for a year after he died, I would realize I needed to know something and pick up the phone” to call him. Dixie Stanforth is a close friend and neighbor, who traces the impact on Christian from her father’s death to Todd’s cycling wreck. “Her father’s death was extremely significant, and started her searching spiritually. Bruce’s accident continued the process, as it really rocked their world. She knows more what she believes now ... It has given a depth that makes her an even more engaging person.”

Christian “absolutely adored” her father, yet now realizes that her move (precipitated by a short-lived marriage) to Los Angeles after graduating from UT’s School of Journalism was, “the best thing I could have done. I had some time to grow my career in a separate arena ... It allowed me to come home to Austin with good solid credentials.” Out west she worked for the *Los Angeles Times*, and then, together with her second husband, owned a newspaper in northern California.

Yet, for some, there’s an elephant in the room when it comes to Elizabeth Christian. Namely, is the 55-year-old’s success simply due to her association with two of Austin’s most powerful men? Well, it’s time to show our long-trunked friend the door. Elizabeth Anne Christian (who no one, by the way, ever calls Lizzie,

## the essential Bruce Todd



Bruce Todd’s impoverished childhood, made tolerable by community support, has fueled his highly developed work ethic and sense of social responsibility. During the former Travis County Commissioner’s two-term tenure as mayor, Austin attracted such companies as Samsung and Apple Computer, becoming a major high-tech manufacturing center. Todd also spearheaded the conversion of Bergstrom Air Force Base to a \$500 million civilian airport. Since leaving office, he has been providing public affairs expertise to clients from across the country, while also, together with his wife Elizabeth Christian, continuing his dedicated community and civic involvement. He’s known as a fundraising powerhouse (although he would

cringe at that description), crediting his “limited” success to “knowing the cause, believing totally in it and being able to explain your passion to others.”

A life-threatening brain injury from a cycling wreck in 2005 has instilled a new respect for life, and energized his passionate fight for cycle helmet reform. “I realized that nothing in life is guaranteed and I should live every moment fully. So, if you have good things that you want to do, do them now.” It also crystallized his view of his wife. “I wouldn’t have been able to make it through if it wasn’t for Elizabeth.”



See Bruce Todd Revealed online:

[www.austinwomanmagazine.com](http://www.austinwomanmagazine.com)

Beth or other diminutives) stands on her own two feet.

While her bloodlines as daughter of LBJ’s White House press secretary introduced Christian to the close-knit Johnson family; her hard work, organizational ability and media chops are what have grown her business. “She has created her own persona, her own awareness,” says longtime Austinite Carl Stuart. “And she’s made it on her own.”

The firm has been honored by its industry peers annually; while Christian’s own and many awards include being named a 2009 Girl Scouts Woman of Distinction, an award that “celebrates women of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place.” As president of Austin’s Headliners Club, she is only the third woman to hold that position; she is on the Board of Visitors for Southwestern University and on the Board of the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In 2004, Christian was named Public Relations Practitioner of the Year by the Texas Public Relations >>

## Who Are You?

Social media plays a large – and growing – role in Elizabeth Christian’s world. She gamely rose to *austinwoman’s* challenge to write Twitter-like descriptions (140-ish characters) of Todd and herself.

“Bruce is kind and decent and a man of honor. He keeps his word. He’s proud of his son and of his public service, and he feels he still has much to give.”

“I love to laugh nor do I hesitate to cry. I’m happiest when I’m learning something new. I’m proud of the company I’ve built and happy to live in Austin.”





# POWER

## *pillow talk*

An Often Lighthearted Look Inside Their Life

### (NOT) DATING

**EC:** There were so many events I went to as his campaign manager ... Later I realized, he thought we were dating. I told him afterwards, 'Dating does not involve name tags!'

**BT:** What tipped things over? I've thought about it a million times, but I've never had a better answer than that I just fell in love.

### LOVE REDUX

**EC:** Coming into a later-in-life marriage, you accommodate grown-up things; like having children. On the other hand, you're more committed to make it work, because you don't want to go through all that again. Plus, it's much more about the marriage than about the wedding.

**BT:** We have benefitted from having good relationships with our ex-spouses, who are both happily remarried.

**EC:** I feel sorry for people who have to struggle with an ex ... I don't think our children have ever felt like pawns in some power struggle.

### DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS...

**BT:** Other than "small" and "smaller," I have no idea of her dress and shoe size. If I knew it, she would ask me to forget it. She knows that the only thing worse than my memory of these details would be my lack of taste in women's clothes and shoes. I do know her ring size – large.

### WHAT SHE MEANS TO ME

**BT:** Never having to say I am sorry. She knows that I am sorry. It is my getting it right in the first place she would rather I do.

### AT THE CORE

**EC:** We have been immersed in government and politics; essentially my whole life, and his whole adult life. It's a real shared interest, and has been an important piece of our marriage ... Another thing I'm glad about, and it was a priority of mine, that it be a marriage of shared faith and not conflicting or competing values. That's been important.

### CHILLIN'

**BT:** We do a lot of movies. At the Alamo Drafthouse. And we travel.

**EC:** We love to cruise. Long cruises, 12 or 16 days, so we have time to unwind. Because we both plan things for a living, it's a pleasure to get on this fancy ship, put your stuff away, and then not think about a thing ... That's super important for business owners.

**BT:** Last year we went around Cape Horn. That was fabulous. This September we're going out of Dover, south to France and Spain.

**EC:** In the back of my calendar there are world maps. When we book a cruise, I get my pencil out and draw in our ports of call ... I'd like to have the luxury of time to go and live somewhere for three months ... I'm Scottish on my maternal side, and there's something about Scotland that calls to me ... I love France, I do speak a little French and it's fun to practice that in my Texas accent ... I want to go back to Japan. When Bruce was in office we went on a sister city trip ... Loved Adelaide too.

### SHAKE, RATTLE AND DEAL...

**EC:** I'm a game player. I've got a group of women I play bridge with ... And we're always looking for fourths ... Bruce and I also hang out with another couple; eat Chinese food then play until three in the morning ... I love Scrabble too ... I'm a Longhorn fan. We have football season tickets, but I don't go to UT baseball much because I just don't have time. But I used to go to the Dodgers all the time in Los Angeles.

### YOUR TURN NOW...

**BT:** During my time as mayor, she was a stabilizing influence, helping me with all the domestic sides of life ... After I left office, she ran the school bond election. It was important that I then be supportive to her.

**EC:** You can have it all, you just can't have it all at the same time.

### EMPTY NESTERS

**BT:** I'd move downtown in a minute.

**EC:** No, thank you. I like having space. I like having a yard. I like to garden. I don't want to get rid of one stick of furniture ...

**BT:** We bought the house right before we got married. I said, 'We can't afford this.' She said, 'It's perfect. We will never have to do anything to it.' How many times have we remodeled now, sweetheart?

### MONEY

**EC:** We're pretty frugal. Neither of us are big believers in swank, although I like things to be nice, don't get me wrong ... But spending a ton of money doesn't seem smart to me. We don't merge our business finances.

### HONEY, WHY DON'T YOU...?

**EC:** I'm probably harder to live with than to work with ... I am a compulsive homemaker. He just doesn't notice. So we've come to an agreement: we make a list of the stuff I need him to help me with ...

**BT:** The deal is to make sure there's a written list, as opposed to verbal commands ...

**EC:** For 15 years, that's probably our one area where we do try and change each other ...

**BT:** I know of two plant colors – green and dead. Along with cooking, the landscaping is under her creation and supervision. My household talent can be condensed to two words, 'Yes, sweetheart;' and is limited to picking up the morning papers, making coffee and delivering a cup to her in bed.

**EC:** I know Bruce sometimes gets irritated at me being 'Sarge' around the house.

### FULL & FRANK EXCHANGES

**EC:** Bruce wants to say it once. I would be happy talking for three hours, until I sense we have resolution. Then I'm done.

**BT:** I'm ready to keep it short, because I've already got it right.

**EC:** That's what he thinks!

**BT:** It's easier in the office than it is at home.

**EC:** We're used to being together in the work world, and enjoy it. One thing to guard against is not just talking about work, which becomes very easy to do during really stressful times. You have to be careful to be husband and wife, and not just business partners.

### LIFE'S JOY

**EC:** I don't think it's a good idea to have a mom who's your best friend, but I would be a friend of Alex's, were I not the very proud mother. I see what people love about her ... And she of anybody on the planet calls me on stuff, much more than Bruce. She doesn't let me PR my way through.

Association; and in 2001, received the *Austin Business Journal's* prestigious Profiles in Power award.

Her award-winning talents were fittingly called on in 2007 when the Christian team flawlessly (and pro bono) orchestrated the worldwide media coverage for Lady Bird Johnson's three-day final tribute, helping the family tell the complete story of their mother's own achievements as a far-sighted environmentalist, rather than simply as wife of President Johnson. "It was an honor" to be chosen, says Christian of the event, which drew together in one room such notable mourners as the Clintons, the Carters, the Bushes Senior, Laura Bush, Nancy Reagan, Caroline Kennedy and Maria Shriver.

And what of Christian's alleged "wife of" advantage in business? Sure, that may have won her a few handshakes and calendar time over her 15-year marriage to Bruce Todd; yet her own passion and persistence are what have successfully steered innumerable client campaigns over the years. She's not afraid to put her own strongly held beliefs out there too; and none more so than in 1996, when, along with Willie Kocurek, she co-chaired the campaign to approve AISD's \$400 million bond election (the largest for a school district in the history of the state). "Elizabeth is a woman of strong views; she is a woman of tenacity," confirms Carl Stuart, who also served with Christian as an Elder at northwest Austin's Covenant Presbyterian Church. "There was a controversial issue that Elizabeth and I, and two others, were opposed to. At the outset, it was 23-to-4 for the issue. We ended up winning."

While it may have strengthened her tenacity, Todd's cycling wreck has made the avid, lifelong athlete risk averse. "My danger meter is much more sensitive ... Accidents happen in the blink of an eye." No more softball for the woman who would have loved

## Todd Talks: Power, Money + Influence, Bruce Todd-style

Like many youngsters from rural Texas, Bruce Todd left Breckenridge, TX (population 7,500) at 18, headed to The University of Texas at Austin. He qualified as a CPA, working his way through college at full-time jobs, including supervising night court. After years of public service, he formed his own public affairs firm, yet still devotes a generous amount of his time to pro bono, civic and community causes. What drives this 59-year-old's ingrained sense of public service?

"When I was growing up, in a single-parent household, six kids, at poverty level, I vividly remember people helping us ... Those things didn't come out of thin air. They came out of somebody doing something ... So I think that in this community we have a responsibility to do likewise when we can ... Whether it's time, primarily, or money. It's just something everybody ought to do. I think it's a matter of helping through example ... There are people in our community who have been so generous with time and resources, and Elizabeth and I look up to them ... Their work for this community makes it what it is."

to play softball professionally; no more thrills from her beloved downhill skiing. Today she still loves to challenge herself physically, although now it's with arduous high-altitude hikes in Colorado, where the family has a part-share in a frequently used condo. Then there's yoga. "I'm as passionate about yoga as I am about life," says Christian. Why did Dixie Stanforth introduce Christian to yoga? "Elizabeth wants to do the best she can do. That personality is ideally suited for yoga, because you aren't competing with the people in the room, but you can draw energy from them," explains the UT kinesiology professor. "She is a total Yogi ... She is Gumby," laughs Stanforth. "The challenge was to develop the strength to move through poses that >>



LEFT: Christian and Todd relish the opportunity to travel, particularly overseas ... They are pictured here in St. Petersburg, Russia. CENTER: Elizabeth Christian pictured in 2006 with her husband Bruce Todd, daughter Alex Rose and stepson Jeremy Todd. Both Alex and Jeremy are now based in New York. When Christian and Todd married, "Putting our two kids together was interesting," says Christian. "Now they are really good friends." RIGHT: "I'm passionate about my daughter Alex and intentionally try to be the best mom I can be," says Elizabeth Christian.

Elizabeth Christian's PR firm is one of the largest in Central Texas.



the rest of us couldn't do when we were six months old! Now she is spectacular, and has found a sport her body is perfectly suited for, but she also works really hard at it."

Christian and Todd now live just minutes from local philanthropist-about-town Jo Anne Christian, who adopted Christian and her younger sister Susan after marrying the girls' father, George. Christian was three years old when her birth mother died. She has a few random snatches of memory, aided by a wealth of treasured photographs. "One of my mom's (Jo Anne's) biggest gifts was that she encouraged Susan and me to still have a relationship with that side of my family." The girls spent summers out in West Texas with their birth mother's family. That says a lot about Jo Anne Christian. "I don't think I appreciated that until I was fully grown. Now I realize that was maybe a hard thing to do, but such an important thing."

Jo Anne Christian is known as one of the three women who spearheaded the funding for the Long Center, for which her daughter and Todd are also longtime supporters. Extremely visible themselves on Austin's charitable scene, notes the younger Christian, "Our philanthropy is much more time than treasure." "Neither of us has trust funds. So we've learned if I can offer something that's my core product, that's where we can really make a difference. If we can help somebody get publicity so they raise a bunch of money, for example." Todd explains their shared philosophy on civic engagement: "It is important to pay back to the community what the community's given us, frankly. So it's a sort of check-and-balance way of looking at life ... In a way, you kind of owe it. Not only is it a good thing to do, it's the right thing to do."

Today, part by design and part by natural ability, Elizabeth Christian lives in no one's shadow. The only shadow is the one cast by the Capitol dome which fills the view from her 15<sup>th</sup> floor conference room. As Christian graciously offers a visitor a chair facing the view, she turns her back on any shadows, literal or figurative; real or imagined. Powerful in her own right, comfortable in her own skin, this opinion maker has earned her own place in the sun. ★

## Insight, Surprises and Other Straight Talk

From Some of their Closest, and Most Garrulous, Friends

### Carl Stuart, Investment Advisor:

**Q:** What would surprise us?

**A:** She gave up alcohol for Lent. I thought that showed a remarkable lack of judgment on her behalf. I have gotten drunk with her more than about any body else that I know.

**Q:** Tell us about her.

**A:** The way in which she cared for, loved and advocated for Bruce during the long healing process of his brain injury was inspirational. It would have been a full-time job for somebody else, yet she did it while running her business.

**Q:** What makes them tick as a couple?

**A:** As we say in Texas, this is not their first rodeo. In second or third marriages, people have either learned from the experience, and apply to it to the subsequent experience; or they haven't learned a damn thing. I perceive that Elizabeth and Bruce have learned.

### Meg Meo, Vice President, Elizabeth Christian & Associates:

Meo has known Christian since their childhood growing up in Austin; lived with Christian's sister Susan in California; and became Christian's first employee when she opened her Austin firm.

**Q:** How has she changed?

**A:** Very little. She's always had strong leadership qualities, always been a real go-getter, taking the lead, been competitive.

**Q:** What's she like at work?

**A:** Family is very important to her, so she understands the importance of balancing work and family, and is flexible ... She likes people to "manage up."

**Q:** What would people be surprised to know?

**A:** She can paint the outside of a house... She's not afraid to try anything!

### Dixie Stanforth, 10-Year Neighbor; Kinesiology Professor, UT Austin

**Q:** Tell us about Elizabeth.

**A:** A really unique blend of personalities. She's somebody that you enjoy being around, has a great sense of humor and laughs easily. She also has a tremendous intensity that isn't often seen in people who enjoy life quite that much.

**Q:** What would surprise us?

**A:** She is a very cautious careful, sedate driver ... TOTALLY not a daredevil behind the wheel. It's that intensity...

**Q:** Is it true she's the Martha Stewart of Austin?

**A:** Their home's comfortable and at the same time elegant ... It seems like a celebration whenever she invites you over. She enjoys it and she wants you to enjoy it with her.

**Q:** What are they like together?

**A:** I don't think I've ever interacted with Bruce or Elizabeth that we aren't laughing at something. The laughter and the love of life, and the willingness to celebrate in both of them, is really a cool thing to see.

Elizabeth is a woman of strong views; she is a woman of tenacity.

— Carl Stuart