

Murfreesboro Diamond

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Attorney spreads her hometown roots from Arkansas to make a positive difference in the lives of others

By Christie Deaton

A hand-painted sign signals your entry into Delight, Arkansas. It boasts that this small town is the home of Glen Campbell. The painted guitars offer a clue to those who don't know that Glen Campbell is a country singer that had a string of hits during the 1970s and 80s, a country-themed television variety show, and, eventually, his own theatre in Branson.

A few hundred feet beyond the sign, the road curves sharply to the left, heading into town. For the thousands of people through the years that have stopped to take a picture of this sign, the background consists mainly of the edge of the Church of Christ and the Delight Cemetery. I've heard that one of the many pictures taken by tourists headed to the diamond mine or Lake Greeson was sent to a television show that had a segment about funny signs. First the sign was shown – “Welcome to Delight. Home of Glen Campbell.” – then the camera pulled away to show nothing but rows and rows of headstones. Cue the laugh track.

Of course, we laughed, too. We knew better. Camera tricks aside, once you go around the curve you enter the heart of Delight – the bank, the post office, Mom's Diner, the flower shop, and Pinky's Drive-In. There are several buildings with awnings extending over the sidewalk that hold businesses that have been there for years, supported loyally by the 300 or so residents of Delight. Everyone knows everybody in town and the surrounding community, and you are constantly greeted by welcoming smiles and waves.

Interspersed among the businesses are mowed lawns with beautiful flower beds and children's toys turning houses into homes. Turn right at the bank and you come to the city park and baseball field, where I spent countless summer nights cheering for my brother's Little League team.

On the other side of town is Delight Public School. Preschool through twelfth grade are on one campus. My mom started teaching there when I was one year old, and she retired at the end of the 2008 school year. Mrs. Jeanette Deaton was an institution at the school – first as an English teacher, then coordinating the Gifted and Talented Program, and finally as the school counselor. By the time that she retired, she was the school counselor to the grandchildren of some of her first students.

Mom was known as being tough, but fair. I remember going to school with her when I was around 4 years old and having one of her students asking if “mean old Mrs. Deaton” was as mean to me as she was to them. Mom overheard him and said that if he

would just do his homework, he wouldn't think that she was so mean. Several years later, I had Mom as a teacher several times. She was tough. But her students learned.

Becoming a lawyer, I was in school for a long time. I have had many, many teachers. Objectively, I had no teacher that was better than Mom. She was able to keep the interest of kids who were only in school until they were old enough to drop out, kids that were college bound, and those kids in-between.

My father Charles Deaton was also a teacher for many years. He taught agriculture at several high schools throughout Arkansas. Although I took several agriculture classes in high school, I never had the pleasure of having my father as a teacher. Before I was in high school and after sixteen years of teaching, my dad decided to find something that he would enjoy doing. Eventually, he went into sales, which he continues on a limited basis. Dad taught me to go for your passion in life. If you enjoy your job, it makes your whole life more rewarding.

My sister Tanya has joined the "family business" and teaches high school science at Arkadelphia High School. She is married to a business owner and youth minister named Joey, and they have two children. My brother Micah is a Baptist preacher and the pastor of a church in Redfield, Arkansas. He is married to Sheri, a family and consumer sciences teacher, and they have one child and one due in November.

When I was five, my family moved from downtown Delight to a small farm about six miles from town, but still within the Delight school district. Our farm was something like Old MacDonald's – we had a variety of animals from pigs to chickens to cows to rabbits. When my children ask, it is easier to tell them what animals we didn't have – no goats and no geese. We pretty much had the rest of the traditional farm animals covered. My parents still live on the same patch of land, although the number and variety of animals has waned over the years.

I attended school at Delight throughout elementary and high school. After I graduated high school, I attended the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. I graduated with a criminal justice degree in 1998. I thought that I wanted to be a criminal attorney, specifically a prosecutor or a public defender. I wanted to put people in jail that had committed horrible crimes or defend people that were too poor to afford an advocate against the power of the state.

I received my law degree from the university of Missouri-Columbia in 2001. While I was there, I had a chance to see some of what criminal law was like. I had an internship during the summer after my first year of law school at the Juvenile Office, the prosecution arm of the family court. I helped prepare documents for permanency hearings – the statutorily mandated hearings for the parents whose children were wards of the state because of abuse or neglect. The accounts in the files were heartwrenching. Every day, I would go home and mourn the lost childhood of way too many children. Later, I had an externship one semester at the local Public Defender's Office. By that time, I knew that criminal law was not what God wanted me to do.

After my second year of law school, I was hired as a law clerk for the summer by Korein Tillery. I was hooked on complex litigation by the end of the first week, especially the work that we do here. As silly and idealistic as it sounds, I just wanted to help people – people like my parents and the people that I grew up with. There are millions of people in this country who work very hard for the money that they make. They are not looking for a handout. They just want to be treated fairly. Class-actions level the playing field between them and big corporations whose main goal is to make money, even if it is at the expense of the little guy.

In 2001, I moved to St. Louis and then to Collinsville, Illinois. Bryan, who I married in 2003, was raised in Collinsville and Troy Illinois and knew the area quite well. We both love Collinsville as a warm community with the convenience of a large city nearby but without losing its small town appeal. It is a place where you want to know your neighbors because they are, as my parents would say, good “salt of the earth” Americans.

In August 2004, I became a mom to a beautiful little girl. In December 2006, a second beautiful little girl joined our family. Regan is now almost 4 and Natalie is 1 ½. Like most parents, I want things to be better for them. I want the world to be a healthier and altogether superior place for them and their children. I believe that the work that I do is making that a possibility.