



Here we have Daphne Pattison, a lady who knows she is incredibly lucky to be among us today. How could she have known in advance that one simple decision she made last year saved her life? But I get ahead of myself.

Daphne joined the Rotary Club of Houston in February of 2006. She was a member of three smaller Rotary Clubs in Mississippi before moving to Houston. She chose the RCH because she saw here a great opportunity for service to the community and a much wider range of opportunities than could be found in smaller clubs. Much to her great delight, she has found here exactly what she hoped to find! Continue reading to see what I mean.

Daphne is a criminal defense attorney who works with federal criminal and felony state criminal defense cases, with an emphasis on white collar crime. She knows that many people who find themselves in the criminal justice system have never been in trouble before, or are not in trouble at all, but are assisting family members. Most people in business or a profession never expect to need someone like her, but then a child chooses a wrong path, or the government sees things a little differently than they did..

Daphne strongly believes that her calling in life is to help people who are caught up in the legal system to be sure that 1) they are not wrongly convicted, and 2) if convicted, their punishment fits their crime. What does she see as one of her greatest accomplishments so far in life? She's saved the lives of three of her clients, either because they were found not guilty of a capital offense or they were spared the death penalty.

After completing law school, Daphne spent five years as a Navy JAG lawyer. (JAG = Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps). She then practiced civilian defense law in Mississippi for a number of years before the fateful morning of August 29, 2005, when a lady named Katrina came calling. Having secured the safety of her young daughter who evacuated with her father, Daphne and a friend settled into a beach house to watch the arrival of the storm, feeling secure in the knowledge that the house was very strong.

However, another person came urging them to retreat to the town's hospital. After some debate, they decided to go. After the storm's passage, they returned to the beach house, only to discover that absolutely nothing above ground level remained of the neighborhood. Can you imagine how that felt?

Having lost everything, Daphne and her daughter evacuated to Houston to stay with her parents and to begin putting their lives back together. Now, a little over a year later, they are settled into a home of their own, Daphne is well along the way of establishing her new legal practice here, and the emotional scars gradually are fading. If ever there was a person who fits the definition of "true grit", it is this young lady! Buy her lunch sometime and get her to tell you more of this story. You will be amazed.

Now some quotes that give you a glimpse into the character of this lady: What is most rewarding about her work? The opportunity to watch her clients – frequently fresh out of prison – get on their feet again and get connected to the resources that will help them start their lives again, hopefully in a better direction. So it should come as no surprise that the RCH's Fresh Start Committee has been a natural for her. How do people see her? "I'm a ray of sunshine." People see me as happy, upbeat, and optimistic. What is the greatest obstacle she has had to overcome? Succeeding as a female in a mostly male profession. (This from a person who had to rebuild her whole world from scratch after the storm.)

What fantasy does she hold about what she'd change about herself? "I satisfied with what life has given me." What do people need to change in order to get along with each other better? "People need to look within to find peace - with themselves and with other people – to forgive others for being different."

And what are people most unlikely to know about her? She owned an ancient Beechcraft Bonanza airplane for a couple of years and was learning to fly in it!

Finally, what she most wants to be remembered for is captured in the following poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson, which she keeps on her desk:

"Success"

To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
 And endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child,
 A garden patch, or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.
This is to have succeeded.

So find this lady – she's easy to spot – and get to know a bit about her. You'll be glad you did.