

‘God’s Blessing’ – Part 2 Life After Tennessee

Written by By Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
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PART TWO OF THREE

Where do you go after a whirlwind of activity and intense learning of five years comes to an end? Most would choose home, that one place of family and friends that you grow up with and where you are able to rest until the next step of your future presents itself. That was where Felicia Guliford went after her days in Tennessee.

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Gallup was where her parents were, Lawrence and Ruth – both teachers in the Gallup McKinley School District. Her dad taught Special Education and her mother Art, and both were active athletic supporters and church members. Her three brothers Joshua (now 34 and working for Molina Healthcare), Maurice (32 and a financial analyst for IHS) and Daniel (a floor manager for Santa Ana Star Casino) were all out of high school and pursuing their own dreams, but here was the place where Felicia had been born and raised and it was a comfort to her in so many ways.

She eventually got a job at Miyamura High School teaching Biology and Chemistry after substituting in the classroom for a while. The steadier position allowed her to wait patiently for an opening in medical school, and she became involved in coaching cross-country.

“It was a brand new school and the team consisted only of freshmen, sophomore, and juniors,” she said. “The team placed third in state both years.”

In July of 2010, two events occurred that would propel her to even further heights than she had scaled previously. One was the acceptance from UNM into their medical school, where she earned her medical degree and “white coat” on May 8. Even more important – her self-described “greatest honor” – was her marriage to Eric Taylor a week before school was scheduled to start back in 2010.

She had met Eric in Ford Canyon by chance. Taylor was coaching for Gallup Catholic at the time and both were practicing with their teams when a friend of Eric’s told him he should meet her. He didn’t see much of her for a while, but when they finally did get together, it was only a matter of a few months before they were ready for marriage.

Eric had come to Gallup in 2009 from Atlanta for a job opportunity and found two, one at Gallup Christian School and one at Gallup Catholic, where he worked with Angelo DiPaolo. He described Angelo as becoming a surrogate father to him – important to him because of the recent loss of his biological dad.

Following their marriage, the young couple settled in Albuquerque for Felicia’s post-graduate work and Eric coached at East Mountain and West Mesa High Schools. Born in Houston and living there until the age of 14, Eric had moved to Dallas with his family when his dad was

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transferred by the U.S. Navy as a Senior Chief Petty Officer, and then to Virginia, where his love and success of soccer really came to the forefront of his life.

His talent at that game sent him to Rochester College in Michigan, but after two years and an associate degree he left the frigid climes of the north to finish his education at Freed-Hardeman University in Tennessee with a B.A. in Communication. His first job was coaching a girls’ soccer team at Ohio Valley University in West Virginia. The Division II position was a “tough job” according to Taylor, but was also good experience.

Now married, the focus of this pair abruptly changed as they supported each other in their different avenues of life. Felicia was busy, and sometimes preoccupied, with her course work while Eric brought in the steadier income. Felicia continued receiving other honors, selected to the NM Coaches Association Athletic Hall of Fame in 2011, and being a nominee in 2014 for the Gold Humanism Honor Society.

Then there were the scholarships she received from UNM SOM Full Tuition Grant (2010-2015), American Indian Graduate Center Fellowship (2010-2015), Michael Berger Endowment (2010-2011), H.J. Holden Endowment (2010-2011), Margaret and Sidney Jaffe Endowment (2011-2012), Marie Hutton Endowment (2011-2012), Edmund and Thelma Evans Endowment (2012-2013), La Tierra Sagrada (2014), UNM SOM Alumni (2014), and the Dr. Anthony Martinez Memorial (2014).

But the greatest honor for the couple was the birth of their son Lake during Felicia’s third year of medical school. Past and almost gone from her memories of injuries and other hardships she had endured at U.T., this new member of their family rapidly became a new focus for them, or as Felicia so eloquently put it, “Lake is a reflection of our love for each other.”

All of the above is not the end of the story, though. Life continues with the latest challenges and accomplishments of this amazing couple.

The conclusion of this story will be in the next issue of Gallup Sun, covering what the couple is doing now and where they see their future going.