

# Lawyer, entrepreneur, full-time mom, Diane Anderson does it all!

By Amador Ledger Dispatch, March 7, 2008

On a bleak, rainy day in 1997, a Safeway courtesy clerk found herself struggling to push a line of carts through her store's parking lot. She was recently divorced, a single mom caring for two young daughters while coming to terms with being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and - after years of a comfortable lifestyle - suddenly broke and making \$6 an hour. Worse yet, the shopping carts weren't cooperating.

At that very moment, an elderly man she'd never met before approached her through the drizzle. He pointed his finger directly at her and warned, "If you don't go back to school, you'll be doing this for the rest of your life." The woman began to cry. There was no way that man could know that in just over a decade, that same clerk, Diane Anderson, would be gracing the cover of University of the Pacific's magazine for Eberhardt School of Business, praised as an outstanding mother, budding attorney and clever entrepreneur - in other words, the ultimate success story.

When Anderson made the decision to start her life over again by going back to college in the wake of her divorce, the odds weren't in her favor. Her daughters Jacquilyn and Nikki were 8 and 9 and she was barely making ends meet. She began taking night classes at the University of Phoenix, carefully managing to keep her daughters focused and engaged in positive things through sports, academics and extracurricular activities. "It was a tough balancing act at times," Anderson remembered. "I just did what I had to do, and I tried to always keep sights on what the goal was in the end. As far as my daughters go, I had a lot of help from other parents in regards to all the activities they were involved with. That's one thing I really love about Amador. It's such a small, wonderful, tight-knit community."

In 2000, after receiving a Bachelor of Science in business management, Anderson was accepted to University of the Pacific's Eberhardt School of Business. Anderson knew going full time through the master's program meant she wouldn't be able to work at Safeway. Fortunately, her father generously stepped in and offered to pay her bills while she completed the program.

The reprieve from stress over money helped and allowed her to spend more quality time with her daughters - but Anderson was still battling MS. A number of serious relapses left her with difficulty using her right arm, and eventually her legs. In her worst moments, she also had problems with her eyesight. "The difficult thing about having a disability that people can't physically see is that people don't understand your limitations," she explained. "You only have so much energy to get through the day, and if you're not careful you can exert it all at once and then have nothing left to get you through."

Nevertheless, Anderson earned her MBA in 2002. Her health steadily bounced back and, again with the help of her father, she decided to set her sights even higher and take on law school. Anderson was accepted into Pacific McGeorge School of Law that same year.

The balancing act played on - though Anderson could often be seen at her daughters' swim meets and school events, always with a book in her hand. "I guess the whole experience taught me to be immensely organized," she said. "I was constantly running and I had to manage a lot of things at once. But in the end it was worth it. Once you go through something like that, you feel like you can juggle almost anything."

Anderson passed the bar exam and became an attorney in 2006. Having moved into an office on North Main Street in Jackson, she's now successfully been practicing law with an emphasis in family law, dependency and wills and trusts. "Everyone who owns a house should have a trust," is her staple advice. "People have no idea how much money their family stands to lose if they don't." She also added that wills and trusts have been a particularly rewarding element of her practice because "it allows people to protect what they have for the ones they love."

With her career in full swing, some people suspected Anderson would calm down on her multi-tasking. However, as a business and marketing major in college, she never stops looking for an innovative product to sell. With the encouragement of former professors at UOP, Anderson and her friend, Tanya Berger King of Lone, are currently putting together a business model for healthy cookies. The cookies, which are essentially vegan but still pack a tasty punch, were the brainchild of King.

When Anderson suggested that her friend find a way to get them on the market, a partnership was born that combined both women's talents. The two are currently in the product-testing phase as they seek venture capital; and Anderson is confident the cookies, called "Ooh Soo Good," will be on store shelves in the next five years.

Of all the many accomplishments Anderson could boast of in the last decade, the two she seems most proud of are not hers, but those of her daughters. Jacquilyn, now 18, is a student at Claremont McKenna College, and Nikki, now 19, attends Harvard University. With a mother like Anderson, the two girls long ago learned the value of having a strong work ethic. As active members of the S Club in high school, they also learned the importance of giving back to the community.

Anderson is working harder than ever to give back in her spare time, doing fund-raising events with Soroptimist of Amador County, as well as volunteering her legal skills for the elderly at the Amador Senior Center. In the end, her ultimate goal is to help people. "These days it's not the first thing people think of when they hear the word 'lawyer,'" she admitted. "But there was a time not long ago when a career in law was really about making a positive difference in peoples' lives. That's what I want to do now. I think I'm on the right path."