



Dr. Claire Gilliam

By Cara Pridemore

For Dr. Claire Gilliam, a regular day may range from directing pediatric medical students at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) to organizing a school book fair for her kids.

"It's been a real blessing with the way my job worked out," Gilliam, a pediatrician at UMMC, said. "I have times where I can just be mom."

Gilliam is a native Clintonian, graduating Clinton High School in 2001.

"I was telling someone the other day that my class was the last class of students who went to all the school buildings," she said.

Her childhood was shaped by choir concerts, Dairy Queen runs and Saturday afternoons at Mississippi College football games, where her father worked on the football statistics team.

"I remember we would go up there, and they would have food in the press box," Gilliam said. "We loved going up there and getting to have free food, and then we would go down on the field and play around on the high jump mat. It was really not something that would typically be a family thing, but it was my family thing, and it was a lot of fun."

She continued the legacy, joining the statistics team during her own time at MC until the football program was terminated.

Gilliam's father was also an MC physics professor and her grandfather a chemistry professor. She graduated from MC in 2005 with a chemistry degree. Practicing medicine wasn't her initial plan, though, as she thought she'd pursue teaching. Her plans changed in sophomore year, when she took a medical physiology class and began toying with the idea of medical school.

"What really conflicted about how that would work was having a family," Gilliam said. "I had a desire to have a family and felt that was something that was important. But I also had this thought of, 'Should I go to medical school? Is this what God's calling me to do?'"

She decided to apply to UMMC and began right after college, graduating in 2009.

In her third year at UMMC, she rediscovered her passion for pediatrics.

"If you asked my parents when I was little, I would say I wanted to be a baby doctor," Gilliam said. "When I got to my pediatrics rotation, which was my last rotation of my third year, I was able to relax and let all my breath out. It just felt like home."

During her residency, Gilliam's personal life was also transformed when she met fellow resident, David Gilliam, who was married at the time.

"[He and his wife] had a baby July of our first year," she said. "Then, in the spring, his first wife passed away unexpectedly."

After this, the two become close.

"We were thrown together in a lot of different situations working to-

gether," Gilliam said.

They started dating and got married right after she completed her residency.

"People don't grow up dreaming and saying, 'I'm going to marry a widower,' but it's a really cool part of our story, and we definitely see God's hand in that," Gilliam said.

Today, they have a blended family of four, Kate (16), Caleb (11), Eleanor (8) and Maggie (5). The Gilliams moved back to Clinton when their oldest daughter, Kate, started kindergarten.

"Being a graduate of Clinton, I knew the schools were good, and we wanted our kids to be in a good school system," she said.

Gilliam serves as treasurer for two PTO boards and volunteers at book fairs, school hospitality events and the accelerated reader program.

"I love being involved in the schools," she said. "I told someone the other day that I think if for some reason I wasn't in the medical field, or if I needed to stop doing my job, I would probably substitute teach or something in the schools."

Gilliam is very passionate about her job at UMMC, though, caring for children and training medical students. Her work runs from Tuesday to Monday, with intervals of weeklong breaks. This allows her to balance her professional and family life.

Her mornings begin with an 8 a.m. informational meeting, followed by patient rounds with residents and medical students. She also organizes the lunchtime speaker schedule before working on documentation, notes and consultations for patients.

"Then, I go pick up my kids and go home and get supper on the table and do homework," Gilliam said. "When the kids are in bed, I still have notes to do, and I'll finish up my work that I didn't finish before I left to do nighttime routines."

Although her days stay full, she finds joy caring for her young patients all day and returning home to care for her own children at night.

Gilliam especially loves raising her family in the service-minded, close-knit Clinton, enjoying the walkability and friendliness of the town.

"Clinton fosters service, whether it be through the church or in the schools or through a community service," she said.

Her church community is particularly grounding for her family, and she sees the Lord's hand guiding all of their lives.

"I felt strongly that God gave me this interest and that he was calling me to be a doctor, and that, if he was calling me to be a mom as well, he would work it all out and that it would be fine," she said. "I'd be able to do both," she said.

To this day, she says she remains grateful for the way God has led her.



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