

TO INSPIRE A LOVE OF Learning

She sits at her office desk trying not to cry. Her left index finger pushes a silver ring up and down her thumb, a nervous tic known well by those close to her. Pausing to control the waver in her voice, she attempts to recall the emotions she felt on the day that changed her life.

Courtney Gibson, Ph.D., has known the uncertainty life can bring. Though she is a three time graduate of the department of agricultural education and communications and is now an associate professor in that same department, the journey hasn't been easy. Over the past decade, circumstances haven't played out the way she planned. This is not to say that they were in any way ruined, just unexpected.

"It took me a long time to realize that I'm not in control of everything and there's a bigger plan at play," Gibson said. "So when things don't happen the way that you think they should, know that it's happening for the greater good."

Gibson began her academic career at Texas Tech University in the fall of 2002. Originally enrolled as an agricultural business major due to a scholarship requirement, Gibson spontaneously changed her major to agricultural communications the day of freshman orientation.

"That was one of the best decisions I could have made," Gibson said. "At orientation, people were talking about

agricultural communications majors and I was like "That's what I need to do! I like to talk. I like to communicate. I like agriculture. The end."

Even with a new major in the works, one she was passionate about, Gibson still held onto her dream of physical therapy school. But as the years passed, so did that dream and as graduation neared, Gibson had no concrete plans. The uncertainty of her future loomed. During the fall semester of her senior year that all changed.

Cindy Akers, Ed.D., associate dean of academic and student programs for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, saw great potential in Gibson as a student who took pride in her work, stayed organized, and maintained her grades. As Gibson's academic advisor, Akers wanted Gibson to continue on in her education by earning a Master's degree and encouraged her to join in a research assistantship.

"She turned in great work, but always questioned it and when you see students like that in class, you realize quickly that those are ones that you do want to hire on for an assistantship because you see great potential," Akers said.

Gibson completed her GRE testing on an early Friday morning two weeks later in order to meet the application deadline. She graduated in December 2006 and began her role as a graduate student after a three week break.

Gibson met her husband, Bryan, her freshman year at



(Left): Jolie, a Jack Russell Terrier mix, keeps Gibson company while she grades students' design assignments at home. Jolie and her companion, Daisy Mae, would often snuggle in a blanket with Gibson as she worked on her papers during graduate school.

(Right): Gibson displays a decor piece that hangs in her office. Filling it are mementos from her teaching experience in Houston and education at Texas Tech, gifts from former students, souvenirs from study abroad trips and items that represent her love of family and interests in travel and reading.

Texas Tech. The two were married in April 2007. Though they had anticipated being alumni by that time; again, life threw them a curve ball.

"We got married in the middle of the semester on a Saturday which was not the plan at all. I took off Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and was back in class on Monday," Gibson said. "And then we waited two and a half weeks to go on our honeymoon because I had to wait until classes were over."

During their honeymoon, they learned that they would be moving to Houston as Bryan had been accepted to The University of Houston College of Optometry. This move brought about a new set of challenges, including a kink in the way of graduate school and finances. Relief came in the form of a teaching position at Harmony School of Innovation where Gibson taught third grade social studies, health and handwriting.

"I was 23. I was a newlywed. It was a crazy time in my life. We had just moved to a whole new city," Gibson said. "It was a big year of changes and craziness and finishing graduate school online."

As her master's degree was coming to an end in 2008, conversation about earning her doctoral degree began to surface. With three years of optometry school still in their future for her husband, Gibson put her dream on hold and continued to teach. The couple moved back to Lubbock after Bryan's graduation in 2011 and, for Gibson, a well-known uncertainty of the future began to creep back in. Though hesitant, she decided to earn her doctorate at the persistent encouragement of friends and family.

"A lot of people will tell you it's not a good idea to get all three degrees from the same university," Gibson said. "Everyone has their reasons, but for me it was just the right thing to do and it fit with what was going on in my life at the time. I honestly can't even imagine doing it any other way."

Due to her inner-city teaching experience, Gibson was asked to teach her first semester as a doctoral student and was later extended an offer to stay on as an instructor after graduation in 2014. Steve Frazee, Ph. D., department Chair for the Department of Agricultural Education and

Communications and a former teacher himself, credits this experience to the kind of professor Gibson is today.

"One of her attributes that's pretty obvious is her ability to teach in the classroom and I think that comes from her having taught in the Houston school system," Frazee said. "I think she learned a lot about teaching in that situation."

But Gibson's real desire was to become a professor at Texas Tech, to teach and encourage students in their potential, goals she had dedicated most of her life to. An opportunity presented itself months later, and it was announced that the department was looking to hire a new faculty member. After a lengthy and prescribed process of interviewing, Gibson received word in March of 2014 that she had been selected for the position. Twelve years in the making, Gibson's account of how she found out she was officially hired for her dream job causes her to tear up.

"My heart was pounding. I was scared the whole way, driving

white knuckled, about to cry," Gibson said. "He (Frazee) told me that I got the job. I couldn't believe it. I was overjoyed."

A dream of physical therapy school was replaced with a greater passion for people. Creativity and a natural ability to effectively communicate with others combined to form her career. A desire to further students' education blossomed from her own love of school.

"Dr. Gibson is a very good teacher in that she teaches more for a skill set rather than a grade," said Alexa Major, a senior agricultural communications major from Fowler, Colorado. "She wants us to succeed and is here to make the education about us." 



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