

Shannon Boy Skokos

Alma native and Miss Arkansas 1992 credits her parents, her teachers, her God and her husband for her ongoing commitment to compassion and philanthropy.



(Courtesy Photo/Shannon Boy Skokos)

“She always reminds me to never forget from where you have come, because the people you meet and the experiences encountered create the woven fiber through which you see the world.

— Ted Skokos

BECCA MARTIN-BROWN
SPECIAL TO NWA DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

This summer, as they do every year, Shannon Boy Skokos and husband Ted gave \$30,000 to the winner of the Miss Arkansas Pageant.

The Skokos Foundation also endowed a \$1 million scholarship fund in her hometown of Alma to support the high school’s Skokos Performing Arts Center and to provide academic scholarships for graduating seniors “who have exemplified a servant’s heart through community involvement and a clearly defined life mission.”

“Two organizations and the people associated therewith from Shannon’s childhood and early adult life that most profoundly impacted her, and for which she constantly sings their praises, are her high school in Alma and the Miss Arkansas Organization,” says Ted Skokos. “Accordingly, her greatest joy is found in giving back to them.”

But that philanthropic giving is not what Shannon considers her legacy.

“It is not how much you accomplish or earn that matters to God, but rather what you do with what He gave you,” she says. “When I think back on the individuals who made the greatest impact on my life — my parents, teachers, coaches, a dress shop owner, school children, a gym owner, my spouse, my pastor, friends and family — their impact on me did not come through expenditure of great riches, but rather through a wealth of encouragement, an investment of their time, a belief in a potential that I couldn’t see, a hand up when I needed it most, and a steadfast commitment to always be there if I needed them.

“What is the legacy I hope to leave from my life? That I loved with forgiveness and grace; that I connected with empathy and authenticity; that I served others with humility; and that I daily walked with my Heavenly Father in an effort to fulfill His will for my life and to glorify His Kingdom.”

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Skokos

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HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

It's been a journey around the world and back for the Alma native who first came to the attention of Arkansans as Miss Arkansas 1992.

Shannon Boy was a Governor's Scholar at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, graduating magna cum laude; earned her Juris Doctorate with high honors from the UALR William H. Bowen School of Law; and practiced as a trial lawyer for eight years in Arkansas and Colorado, specializing in employment and labor law. Now she's 53 years old, and her days are filled with charity work with kids, in the arts, with animals and in health care.

But it all began in a modest home with hardworking parents, she says, who had her just 15 months after they were married.

"My mom and daddy grew up in neighboring rural Oklahoma towns approximately 30 minutes apart by car," she starts the story. "My daddy did not graduate from college, but he was well educated by the school of hard knocks."

Shannon saw him working two and three jobs, "and my mom worked as many hours as she could while still cooking the meals, cleaning the house, and sewing our clothes," she recalls. "That vision of determination and commitment to family, although stressful for my parents at the time, is forever etched in my memory and serves as inspiration for me to never give up and never forget from where you have come."

"My mom had this unbelievable ability to make our home a place I wanted to be," she goes on. "It always smelled of Southern cooking, had a warm fireplace glowing, and was filled with music ranging from Dolly Parton to Amy Grant to even Elvis Presley."

"My parents were not wealthy, but they gave me riches far more valuable than any found in a dollar bill."

When she was growing up in the 1980s, Shannon says, Alma had a population of 2,875, one stoplight, and a Dairy Queen. The high school parking lot was unpaved and its classrooms had no air conditioning.

"It was a small rural school, but deeply focused on academics, athletics and the arts, in all of which I thrived," she says. "I was salutatorian of my class, All-District basketball player, All-State flute player, a 13-year student of dance, and recipient of leadership and academic awards. Not only was I surrounded with great friends in high school, but I was also surrounded with an extraordinary teaching staff and coaches."

Jerry Valentine, Alma High School principal from 1986 to 1991, uses the words "leader, charismatic and benevolent" to describe Shannon.

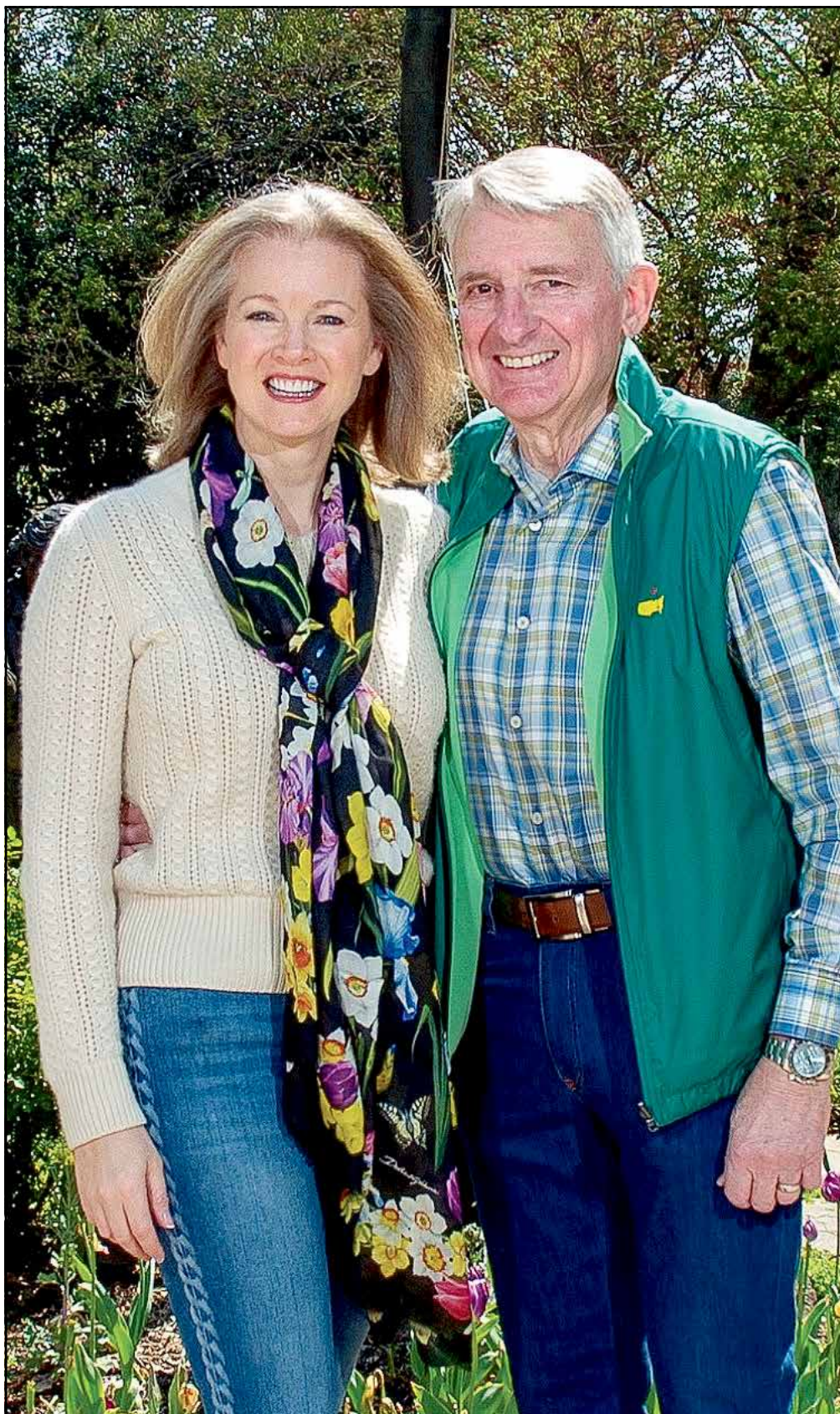
"I remember her as a very respectful, hard working student," he says. "I was convinced Shannon would be successful because of her work ethic, sense of responsibility, and dependability. Now, years later, she and her husband have impacted our town by their generous monetary donation to the Alma Education and Arts Foundation."

History teacher Loretta Rhoads helped encourage Shannon to portray Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in a dramatic skit at the National History Day Competition in Washington, D.C., her first effort at public speaking. Basketball coach John Grant opened the school gym early so she could practice her shot. And when she was a sophomore in college, a phone call from a dress shop owner named Randy Dimmitt from Russellville started her on her journey to Miss Arkansas.

'THERE SHE IS'

"Despite having undergraduate education paid for as a Governor's Scholar, I still needed funds to pay for law school," Shannon remembers. Dimmitt told her he would like to see her try for the Miss University of Arkansas title.

"I laughed and told him



Through their foundation, Ted and Shannon Boy Skokos have made major gifts to support the arts, presidential libraries, hospitals, shelters for women and children, and Christian ministries, and have endowed numerous academic scholarships. In 2009, the foundation made a \$10 million gift to the Dallas Center for the Performing Arts. (Courtesy Photo/Shannon Boy Skokos)

that I did not know how to walk in high heels across a stage in an evening gown and, moreover, I did not have money to purchase the clothes," she says. "He said that he would help with the clothes if I would consider competing. He told me that he saw something in me three years earlier when I walked into his shop to purchase a prom dress, and he believed I could one day win Miss Arkansas. I was incredibly flattered, but had little belief in his optimism."

Shannon was, however, hooked by the idea that the Miss America Organization was the single largest source of scholarships in the world for women. And a few weeks later, she "nervously walked across the stage as a contestant in the Miss University of Arkansas competition wearing a peach chiffon full-length flowing gown, not sure how to coordinate my hands and feet."

Shannon was named first runner-up, which came with a couple thousand dollars in scholarship money.

"Two weeks later, I competed for and won Miss Northwest Arkansas, received additional scholarship money, and began thinking about the reality that I would be competing in only a few months at the Miss Arkansas scholarship competition," she says.

It was not at but after the state pageant, where she finished fourth runner-up — earning a few thousand dollars more in scholarships — that Shannon learned a life lesson.

"I conjured up the notion that I needed a 'whole life makeover,' which was probably not unlike decisions made by many women along the way, but a poor one nonetheless," she says. She had to realize, she explains, that "the 'ideal' girl that walks on air as portrayed in the lyrics of 'There She Is, Miss America' wasn't a reflection of an authentic me."

In the spring of 1991, that "small-town country girl" won the local title of Miss Arkansas River and was subsequently named third runner-up at Miss Arkansas. She was sure that would be her last competition — until Dimmitt asked her to try one more time during her senior year of college. She won the state title

on July 18, 1992, along with a \$12,000 scholarship. Dimmitt died on Aug. 13 of that year.

"I have no idea the path my life would have taken but for Randy's persistence, but I am immensely grateful for his belief in me," she says.

MEETING HER MATCH

It was on March 29, 1999, that Shannon Boy's world changed in a way more profound than any pageant title. By then a practicing attorney, she was playing golf in a charity tournament benefiting the local Boys and Girls Club when she caught the eye of Ted Skokos, a fellow attorney in Little Rock.

"What captured my full attention was when she responded to another golfer with the most radiant authentic smile I had ever seen," Skokos remembers. "I knew immediately that she was genuine and caring — and that I had to find out who she was and get a date!"

"In the years that followed, Ted captured my heart with spontaneous bouquets of roses and love notes, long captivating conversations, and an eagerness to share the exhilarations of life," Shannon says.

"My first impression of Shannon when I met her on the Little Rock Country Club golf course in 1999 was that she was genuine, caring, and possessed a remarkable inner peace about her," Skokos says. "She has proven me right time and time again."

The couple were married in July 2001 in Aspen, Colo., in a wedding Shannon calls "nothing short of magical" — not to mention high profile, covered by Conde Nast's Bride's magazine. They settled in Dallas in 2004, and in 2008, the couple formed the Ted and Shannon Skokos Foundation, funded by the sale of one of Ted's venture capital companies.

Along the way, the world was their proverbial oyster. Shannon spent three years photographing animals in the Kruger National Park in South Africa, later publishing a coffee table book titled "Ask God's Creatures: and They Will Teach You." She traveled through Israel to photograph the journey of Jesus Christ. She de-

scribes visiting Havana, Cuba, where the "underground jazz nightclubs pulsed with rhythmic bongo slaps and trombone slides" while "police were perched atop buildings with sniper rifles and a watchful eye."

Then, in 2015, Ted Skokos was diagnosed with a mass in his pancreas. He needed extremely invasive surgery, with a chance he wouldn't survive the operation and only a 20-25% chance he'd be alive in five years if he did make it out of the hospital.

"I sat in the small waiting room pacing the floors and silently prayed for God to guide the hands and the minds of the surgeons and nurses and to give me a second chance at life with my husband," Shannon says. And when she learned the surgery was successful, "I promised God to not take this second chance at life for granted."

"My husband's health struggle emphasizes that you never know when life will throw you a curve ball," she says. "Ted's illness reminded us of the importance of faith, health and sharing life with those you love."

GIVING BACK

"Every morning and evening, after digging into God's Word, I pray, 'Father, I want to be a wife, daughter, step-mom, grandmother, and friend who loves with grace, connects with authenticity, serves with humility, and walks with You in order that Your will for my life may be fulfilled,'" Shannon Skokos says. "I firmly believe that everyone is either going through something difficult, has been through something difficult, or will go through something difficult that will cause them to deeply reflect on his or her life. When we allow ourselves the compassion to listen, we become empowered by the courage to act. That is what the Skokos Foundation seeks to do."

"Shannon and Ted provided the initial donation that launched the ministry I have led for the last 15 years," says Jim Denison, CEO of Denison Ministries in Dallas. "Last year, our Christian content was downloaded more than 92 million times around the world. Every person



Shannon Boy Skokos says her favorite memories of being Miss Arkansas 1992 "are kneeling down and being swarmed by hugs from children, writing return letters to the more than 50,000 letters received, and listening to young adults describe their aspirations and encouraging them to believe they could achieve them." (Courtesy Photo/Shannon Boy Skokos)

SELF-PORTRAIT

Shannon Boy Skokos

- **Date and place of birth:** Sept. 23, 1970, in Fort Smith
- **Best advice I ever received:** Don't prioritize your schedule; rather, schedule your priorities.
- **Something you may be surprised to learn about me:** My husband and I have fostered, cared for, and/or made "permanent inside-the-home family members" of more than 30 rescue cats in the last 20 years.
- **A self-indulgence of mine:** Pausing for the sunset and a daily morning walk.
- **Favorite line from a play:** "It is not what you do in life that matters, but with whom you do it with," from "Fly By Night."
- **When I want to relax:** I curl up on the sofa with my husband and cats to watch an inspirational "based on true events" movie.
- **A phrase that sums me up:** A friend recently called me a "beacon of serenity" because she says that I transmit an inner peace. Personally, I just try to wake up every day and live my life's motto: "to love with grace, connect with authenticity, serve with humility, and walk with my Savior in order to fulfill His will for my life."
- **Favorite Bible scripture/verse:** Luke 1:38: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled." (These are the inspiring words of Mary, who despite knowing the difficulties that lay ahead and the scorn she would endure for carrying a child out of wedlock, trusted in the angel's words spoken to her and fulfilled her purpose in giving birth to our Savior. She provides a magnificent example for all to follow in setting aside fears and doubts in order to trust and lead the life we are called to live.)

we reach is an extension of their investment in our ministry and their personal support and encouragement."

Denison says when he met Shannon at the church he pastored in Dallas, "I was immediately impressed by her amazing intellect, her commitment to Christ, and her personal sincerity. By the time I met her, she had already accomplished a great deal. But her initiative, commitment to personal and public excellence, and passion for service were obvious."

"She has a passion for people and animals in need that she never makes public," he adds. "Her ministry to at-risk children over the years and her compassion for abandoned and hurting animals are part of her daily life, though most do not see them in public."

Shannon admits everyday life is not the same globe-trotting adventure she and Ted enjoyed as newlyweds.

"Most of my volunteer work is with children at an emergency shelter, and the rest of the time it is board meetings," she says. "My fun time is usually spent at the theater. My relaxing time is spent curled up on the sofa with my husband and cats watching a movie. And my 'me' time is spent walking the neighborhood while listening to my Bible."

"I am beyond grateful to be doing life with Ted and the friends and family who have encouraged and lifted us up."

"Over the nearly 25 1/2 years that Shannon and I have been together, I have seen the small-town country girl with whom I fell in love embrace life and the opportunities to make a difference for others,"

says husband Ted. "She will no doubt leave a legacy of inspiration to future generations, commitment to fostering community involvement, tireless lifetime service to anyone who asks of her, and literally thousands of admirers and trusted friends, all of whom she genuinely cares for, prays for and loves."

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