

PROFILE

Debby Severs

FULL NAME: Deborah Severs Diamont
OCCUPATION: Mother, Part-time Weathercaster, Free-lance Actress
BIRTHPLACE: Raleigh
AGE: 34
FAMILY: Husband, David One Daughter, Ashley, 3
EDUCATION: Bachelor's, Master's degrees, UNC-CH
HOBBIES: Photography, Music

By NANCY DAMRON
 News Staff Writer

PILOT MOUNTAIN—If one is looking for a word that best describes Debby Severs, "versatile" is probably the one.

She sings, dances, acts and manages to combine these talents with a part-time job at an area television station, a husband and rearing an active 3-year-old, and is looking forward to the January birth of her second child.

It sort of leaves one breathless.

She was born in Raleigh, the oldest of Jim and Sally Severs' three children.

As a child, Severs recalled, the family moved often, because her father was a salesman for a road machinery company. When Debby was 4, the family settled in Waynesville, in southwest North Carolina, where they lived for 12 years.

Although living in a small mountain town where cultural opportunities were, at best, limited, her parents managed to expose her to a variety of experiences, starting her on the path to her career.

"I had wonderful, wonderful parents who were very loving and even though we weren't well off, they tried to give me every opportunity available while living in a small town that lacked cultural activities," Severs recalled during a recent interview.

The youngster busied herself with piano lessons and learned to play all the instruments in the school band, which she gave up in high school to focus on singing. At the age of 7, she landed her first leading role in a musical.

Severs described her home life and childhood as "average," noting that she and her younger brother and sister "had our share of bumps and bruises."

"We went to church, we were Southern Baptists. That allowed me to grow into my own Christian faith, but (her parents) set examples for me."

When Debby was 15, the family moved to Greensboro, causing her to undergo "culture shock" at the transition from a small town to a bustling metropolis.

"It was culture shock going from a small town school to the biggest city high school in the state," Severs said of entering Grimsley High School. Her senior class boasted more than 600 graduates, of which she ranked 13th.

Breaking into the ranks at the new school was not an easy chore "since that's the age when a young lady's on an emotional roller coaster and starting to date."

"Having to go through the peer-acceptance pressure made me quite independent, aggressive and a fighter, I guess, too. You have to prove yourself to be accepted by others," Severs noted.

"I was never popular, never a member of the in-crowd, but that didn't bother me. It's not the most important thing in life, is it?"

"Fortunately, I was pretty smart and took (Advanced Placement) classes and those kind of people were willing to accept a newcomer," she recalled, wincing with laughter at stereotyping her classmates.

After graduating from high school in 1973, Severs entered the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she envisioned herself becoming an opera singer. But soon, reality shot down those dreams.

"In high school, you have these big dreams that you're going to be famous. I wanted to be an opera singer. I loved singing in foreign languages and I loved singing arias and I had a very good teacher, Peggy Russell, who inspired me and spurred me on to bigger things, but when I got to college, well, it's a very humbling experience, isn't it?" Severs related with a chuckle.

She summed it up by saying that sopranos like herself were "a dime a dozen and I realized I wasn't that great."

"I was blessed with a very nice voice, but was not a powerful metropolitan opera singer-back-to-the-back-seats-in-the-house singer."

Thus, Severs opted to concentrate her musical talents on the teaching end of things, earning her bachelor's degree in music education and later, a master's in music conducting and teaching.

"I had enough background in music to tie it all together, enough to make me at least a good musician and singer and I understood the orchestra and theater history. It came together in my head."

Her college years were marked by two experiences that stand out in her mind.

"I had vocal problems," Severs explained. "I had nodules on my vocal chords, which is devastating for a singer, and I had to go on a complete vocal rest for three months. I realized then just how precious an instrument this is and I had better treat my God's gift well."

The other experience was much more positive, stemming from Severs being among the many students who worked their way through college.



"I didn't have a lot of social life. I had to pay my bills and have my own spending money, so I held down several jobs and worked very hard all the time. Consequently, I saw entering pageants as a quick way (to get scholarship money)," said Severs.

Thus, she entered and won the Miss Raleigh Pageant in 1977, qualifying her for the Miss North Carolina Pageant, where, as she put it, "I didn't do diddly-squat."

Severs' fortunes changed in 1978 when she again competed for the state title as Miss Thomasville and finished as a runner-up. "That was a really positive experience and helped develop me."

After graduating from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1977, Severs entered graduate school, working on her master's degree and holding down several jobs, including teaching kindergarten and voice lessons, working in the music library and with a local church. When she finished her work, she "panicked."

"I decided to get a real job, but I could not find a job in music."

That prompted Severs to move back to Greensboro with her parents and, after much searching, find a job as director of admissions and public relations at what is now Rutledge Business College, which she held for two years.

While there, she was asked by former East Surry High School guidance counselor Beulah Perkins to come and speak to students.

Also at East Surry was David Diamont, a Pilot Mountain resident who coached the football team. He's also a member of the state House of Representatives and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

"I caught his eye across a crowded gym," Severs recalled with a grin. "He had (Perkins) introduce us and got my phone number and the rest is history." The two married after a

four-year courtship.

Meanwhile, Severs said she went through much soul-searching and realized that her greatest desire was to "perform, somehow, in show business ... regardless of the fact that I didn't have a terrifically powerful voice."

She began auditioning for television newscasts and landed a job on PM Magazine in the WLOS-TV market in Asheville, Greenville (S.C.) and Spartanburg (S.C.).

"I loved it. It was an incredible experience. I'd never have that good fortune again. It was like getting a degree in broadcasting. I learned how to shoot and edit and how to write for television," Severs recalled.

"I met wonderful people, interesting characters and had a chance to impact on people's lives, but it was a 60- to 80-hour week."

Tired and burned out, Severs decided that she wanted to come home and find a job with a more normal schedule, noting that she and Diamont were beginning to get more serious in their relationship.

She landed a job as a weathercaster at WXII-TV in Winston-Salem and immediately went to school in Oklahoma City to study meteorology.

While weathercasters are often the most disliked of television personalities (because they don't always get the forecasts right),

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Favorite Book:

Favorite Food:

Favorite Movie:

Favorite Song:

The Bible

Chocolate ice cream

"The Sound of Music"

"Send in the Clowns"

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Severs said she takes it all in stride.

"People say things, but most do it out of love or friendship. They don't mean harm or malice by what they say."

Severs is still calling the weather shots on a part-time basis, but has begun exploring other performing vehicles.

"I'm here again, assessing what I really want to do with my life. I enjoy performing. My forte is acting in commercials and film work. I've finally found what I do best and I'm doing a lot of that."

She hosts "The Home Show," broadcast in Roanoke, Va., and has hosted other syndicated programs. In addition, Severs has appeared in numerous theater productions in Surry County and surrounding areas.

Her most exciting role was as Monica Schaeffer in "A Stoning in Fulham County," an NBC Movie of the Week production.

"It was the chance of a lifetime. A lot of people can't say they've had the chance to do that," said Severs.

She and Diamont make their home in Pilot Mountain, where, Severs admitted, "I feel like I'm forever cleaning up the kitchen. When I'm not working at my business, which is trying to make opportunities for commercials, I'm one of these mothers that's forever mothering and cleaning and never accomplishing anything."

Admittedly, the home life gets a little tougher when Diamont is attending legislative sessions, which has left his wife with much sympathy and admiration for single parents. And, family vacations are out due to summer lawmaking terms and school.

"We never, ever have a family vacation," Severs said, "and once again this year we won't because he'll start football practice when he gets home."