

Westside Stories

HEATHER WAGNER REED



By Forrest Preece



Heather Wagner Reed with her client Gloria Gaynor. Remember Gloria's hit song "I Will Survive" from the disco era?

One thing that I have come to love about writing these columns for the last 16 years: finding out how people's early lives and gene pools affected their careers. Case in point, Heather Wagner Reed. This brilliant, energetic and multitasking woman now runs Juice Consulting, a public relations firm specializing in the entertainment industry and other creative sectors.

After hearing about her background, I agree that she comes by it "natural," as they say in Texas. Music has always been a big part of her life. Growing up in Pennsylvania, she absorbed a lot of polka tunes. Her mother's side of the family came from Poland and the ethnic music they played in her grandmother's home was a big part of her upbringing. They didn't just play tunes around the house — her uncle had a polka band that performed all around that part of the country. On her father's side, her grandfather, an opera singer who sang in five languages, went to Juillard and joined the US Navy Choir. Heather says that once during her career, she mentioned her grandfather and an older colleague blurted out, "Your grandfather was Lawrence Singer! He's legendary in the Navy Choir!"

With those kinds of genes percolating in her system, it's no wonder that by the seventh grade, Heather found out she had a talent for performing and went on to do musical theater and acting. Entertainment, broadcasting, writing promotion, all the stops on her career path built on each other and led to her career in public relations, being a behind-the-scenes player. (While writing this column, I kept hearing that Dr. Seuss pronunciation in my head: "Oh the places you will go...")

Broadcasting? Yes, she did that in spades. While enrolled at the University of Georgia, Heather took on many roles at 90.5 FM (WUGG), the campus radio station, starting from the time she was a 17-year-old freshman. Right off the

bat, she became the station's promotions director. At night she was the jazz disk jockey and she often did news anchor duty. After that experience, she knew that she wanted to get into the entertainment industry. "That was a career direction I wanted to stay with," she says. "I loved that station and all that on-air time gave me a lot of self-confidence."

After college, she snagged a prized internship with Coca-Cola. For a while, she was part of a team that had to arrive at 6:30 a.m., comb through a stack of newspapers and clip all the articles they could find mentioning Coke products, so the top executives could read them in a hurry. By 8 a.m., they had copies of the articles organized in notebooks for perusing. With a perspective of 20-plus years under her belt, Heather laughs now about how she was so impressed when she would step into the elevator and be standing beside the CEO or other top corporate officers on her way to deliver the press clips.

Now for some fast forwarding through her career stops. In 1995, she landed a job at Disneyland Paris. She was thrown into French language immersion and soon she was able to speak the language well enough to help handle the press launch for the opening of the theme park's Space Mountain, also while working in the park's popular "Le Sports Bar" by night.

Then, while she was dating a man from the Netherlands, she moved to that country and found a job with Nymrod, one of that country's top universities, where she had the assignment of promoting their MBA program and handling its alumni relations worldwide.

With Heather heading the promotional team, Nymrod was named one of the top MBA programs in the world in a number of international rankings. This was followed by a stint as marketing director for SoundArtist, a dot com company that launched a computer-based platform to help music composers connect with record labels and A&R scouts.

After that, Heather moved on to Universal Music Holland. She was recruited by the chief executive officer who hired her and placed her on their international marketing team. When the company issued a record, it was their assignment to create strategic promotional plans and roll them out to help sales of the music in places from Japan and the Philippines to Canada and Mexico. Heather says that the toughest market to crack for most of their songs was the United States. American artists were doing great in Europe, but taking songs west across the Atlantic to the States was tougher.

Then came her break of all breaks. While attending a conference in Atlanta, where Mathew Knowles, Beyoncé's father, was speaking, a friend arranged an introduction. It seems that Mathew was looking for someone with international experience in music promotion. They clicked, he wanted her on his team, and Heather knew it was time to come home to the USA. Soon she was in Houston with Mathew's entertainment management company working on what she calls the "baby acts" aka "teen acts" including Beyoncé's sister Solange.

On New Year's Day 2003, Heather decided to go into the office. "I didn't know many people in Houston, I had nothing else happening and I thought I might as well clean up some projects." As luck would have it, Mathew showed up in the office later that day and was impressed that she was putting in that kind of overtime. Soon he decided to give her Beyoncé's account. That was when the singer was breaking

off on her own from Destiny's Child, her original group.

From 2002 until 2007, Heather was a key player on Beyoncé's team. She was the Houston-based product manager who oversaw an extensive operation that was the organizational foundation for the world-famous entertainer's career. Just a note — for anyone who thinks that being on the staff for a top-flight entertainer is all glamour and two-martini lunches at ritzy restaurants, please revise that notion. In an average day, Heather would field 500 emails. By the end of the week, she would have filtered out 25 opportunities that Beyoncé could consider. Just having the bandwidth to absorb that much information and then prioritize it is remarkable.

When asked about some of the people she was interacting with during this eventful time, she rattled off names like Oprah Winfrey, Robin Williams, Justin Timberlake, P. Diddy, Steve Martin, Latoya Jackson, Sarah McLachlan, Larry King, and Sean Combs. She says that when she went to the Grammys, the backstage area held a universe of celebrities. Speaking of famous people, Heather enjoys talking about the time she had

gotten back to the office from a UK tour with Beyoncé, who was next heading to Ireland. While she was plowing through her voice mails, she came upon one from Irish native Bono, complete with his cell phone number, inviting Beyoncé to come have dinner with him and his kids, who wanted to see her. "I still have that phone number in my Rolodex!"

But that was then. In 2007, Heather decided that she wanted to be in charge of her own destiny and start her own public relations and entertainment industry promotions business, Juice Consulting. She derives a lot of joy from running her own company. Handling diverse accounts and bringing a level of passion to her causes fulfills her. She represents a number of nonprofits besides entertainment figures. Black Fret, Austin Music Foundation, Swan Songs, Art Alliance Austin, Big Medium and Texas Cultural Trust are among her current and older clients. Her company is now also branching out into the tech and innovation industry with clients like Mass Challenge, Impact Hub Austin, Notley Ventures, Sputnik and many others.

Black Fret has been a

client for the past four years. This organization has around 400 members who pay \$1500 annually to attend private concerts and parties. The money that the group brings in is apportioned out to musicians in Austin to use on their own behalf for the creation of new music. Some may use the funds for recording sessions and others may apply the money to defraying the expenses of touring. The Black Fret Ball this past Dec. 9 for which Juice Consulting handled the press, attracted an all-star crowd from around the city.

One of her longer-term entertainment clients is Gloria Gaynor, who some West Austin News readers will recognize from the disco era. A few years ago, Juice Consulting did the national campaign for the 35th anniversary of "I Will Survive," the anthem that played in discos from Los Angeles to Manhattan. Heather met Gloria when the singer performed with the Houston Symphony and Heather was doing their public relations. That turned out to be a nice relationship that has now lasted almost ten years.

It's been quite a ride for Heather. Thinking about her life and her successes, she says, "Curiosity is what drives me."



Heather Wagner Reed takes a minute to relax at Impact Hub Austin, where she offices.

PHOTO BY WEST CLARE

Lessons in Cheer



By Paige Alam

Watching our youngest daughter and her friends fly through the air, perform seemingly impossible flexible positioning while being held up by three teammates, and then flip around for a grueling, fast-paced, two-and-a-half minute routine leave me speechless. Quincy is passionate about her

Oklahoma and achieved most everything they wanted to at the competition, but I can assure you the experience is about more than winning.

We watched our girls take care of each other and themselves. We watched them respect their team and others in the competition. The girls lined the mat to cheer for another team from Austin, so they would know they are not alone. Sometimes, thanks to a coach

in prayer in the middle of a stressful competition. I could not ask for more life lessons about perseverance, great sportsmanship, good role modeling from older girls, endless positivity from cheer coaches, a team mom, a gym manager and other parents, and the vulnerability our daughters have in putting themselves all out there on the mat.

The competitions will continue and I will happily be on the sidelines, enjoying the beautiful values that are helping shape young girls who cannot

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more

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