



NINETY YEARS

Four Generations - Artesia True

by Staci Guy

I've known Anna (Sims) Byers most of my life and played sports either with or against her for the majority of our younger years. We are both Artesia Bulldogs through and through. Perhaps that's why interviewing her for this story ended up feeling more like I was chatting away the afternoon with an old friend than it did actual work. (But shhh! Don't tell my boss!)

Having been a writer of some sort for many years, I have heard and shared countless life-stories. One thing that never gets old, however, is entering an interview thinking I know just about all there is to know about someone, only to be surprised to learn how utterly wrong that notion was. That's exactly what happened when I sat down for a ~~chat session~~ interview with Anna.

"I remember when I was young, I was carrying kind of a heavy burden at one point, and I remember asking my dad, 'Why me?' Anna recalled. "I'll never forget what he said, because it has become my life motto. He told me, 'To whom much is given, much is expected.' So that's how I live."

She elaborated, "I believe that if God gives you gifts, He expects you to use them to further His kingdom. I feel like I've been really blessed and given a lot by God and I feel like it's important to use those gifts to further His kingdom and for Artesia's success."

Knowing about her competitive side,

it came as no surprise to hear her talk about helping an entire community to succeed. She loves her hometown and there's no denying that fact. But she also thrives on success, whether it's hers or someone else's. The proof can be found in her high school and collegiate level softball championships, in her years as an honor student and in her career in the family insurance business. She's the type that will succeed at just about anything she sets out to accomplish.

She was born and raised in Artesia, graduating from Artesia High School in 1996. "Artesia was a great place to grow up," she contends, "I always knew I'd come back here. I thought I'd be back here at least to raise a family."

While Artesia proved to be a great place to grow up, she said she still had "a lot of learning to do" after high school, so she set out for Simpson College, a private Methodist university in Iowa, where she excelled in both the classroom and on the softball field. "It was a great town with good people and I loved it there," she shared.

After receiving a degree in accounting, she took a job in Dallas with Deloitte and Touche, an accounting firm with clients and offices all over the world. "It was such a crazy time," she recalled. "I thought I would like it because I got to travel so much but I worked

about 85 hours a week and was on the road all the time." Having a number of old high school friends nearby helped, but it didn't take away from the fact that she had little time for a personal life. "My sister was going to be a senior in high school at the time and I was ready for a change of pace, so I decided to come home," she admitted.

Her decision to move home led to a defining moment in her life and upon reflection, she later came appreciate her mother's insight. "My mom told me, 'You can come home but you can't work for us.' I was like, 'Are you kidding me?'" What her mother told her next, however, made perfect sense. "She said, 'You liked Artesia as a kid, but you may not love it as an adult. If



PHOTO LEFT: Anna Byers Photo by Devon Rae Photography

PHOTO RIGHT: Anna Byers, left, is the fourth generation to join her family's insurance business, along with her father, Gary Sims, mother, Sara Sims, and grandmother, Charlene Ward. Anna's great-grandfather, J.S. Ward, started the business in 1925.

you come to work for us and you feel like you don't like it here, you'll feel obligated, like you can't leave.' ”

Her mother's plan was for Byers to find work and live in Artesia for a while and make sure she was going to like it well enough to stay. Honoring her mother's wishes, she took a job in the tax department of Yates Petroleum Corporation. After about a year and a half, she returned to her mother and declared, "I think I'm ready. I like it here and I want to stay."

Surprisingly, she was not allowed to just walk in the doors of J.S. Ward & Son and claim her office. There was a process. "I had to interview with my grandmother (Charlene Ward) before I got the job," she noted. "She asked me about my motives and things like, 'Do you plan on working 8 to 5 or just showing up whenever you want?' It was a real interview; she wanted to make sure my intentions were right." Needless to say, she got the job!

Again, her expectations were a far cry from reality when she finally claimed her position in the family business. She quickly learned that while her mom might have been the "enforcer" at home, her dad proved to be the more intense one at the office. "It's been interesting to have that relationship with my dad that I never really saw at home," she confided.

Her family might have high expectations of her, but she's quick to point out their supportive side as well. "They are more supportive of me than I ever thought they would be. They would probably never have moved into Carlsbad and Roswell if not for me," she pointed out.

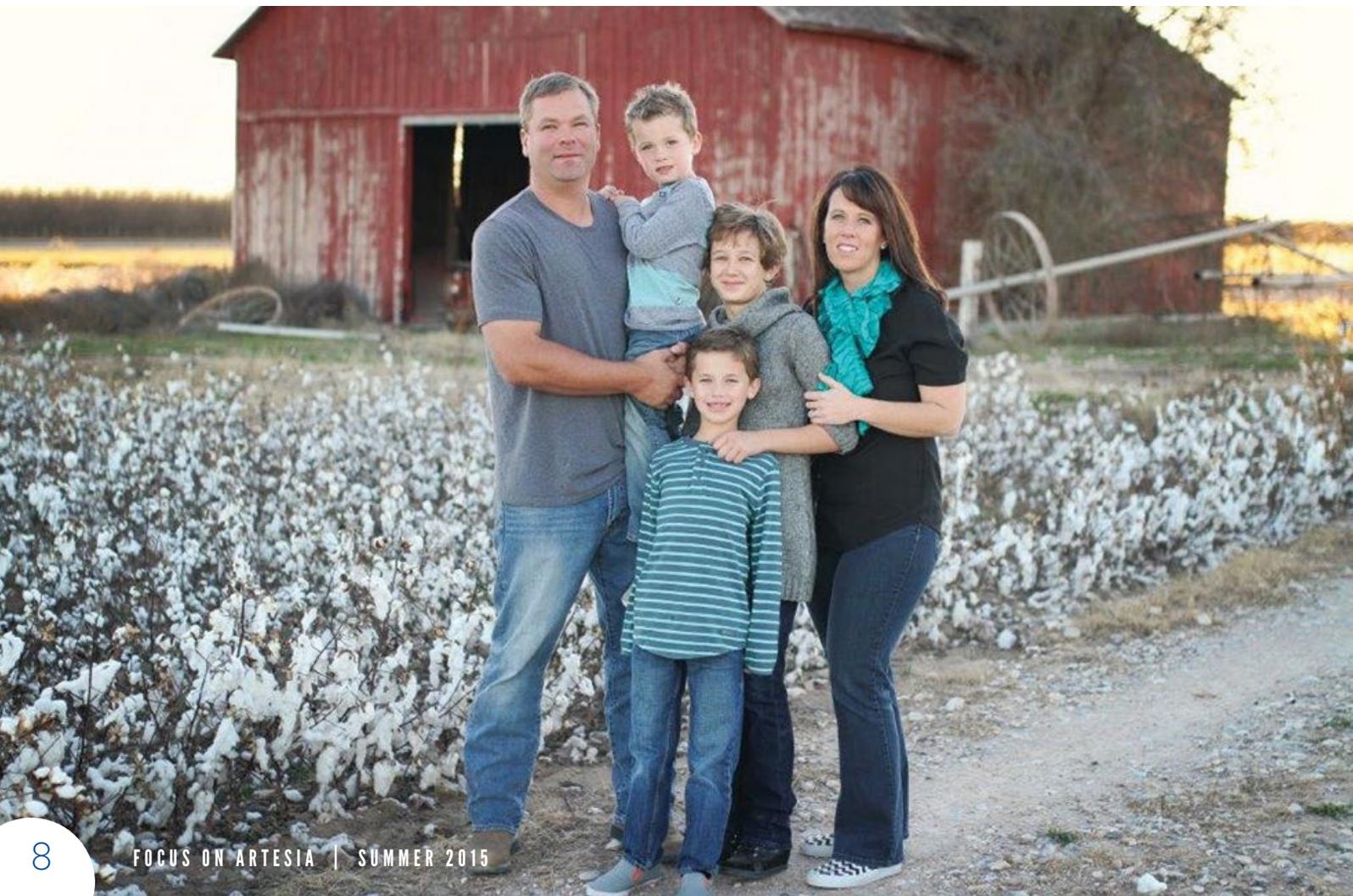
It took several years, but she eventually felt as though she had earned the respect of others and began to implement her own ideas into the fabric of the company, such as additional offices in neighboring cities, a more lenient dress code and a lighter work atmosphere. "We've made a lot of changes," she revealed. "This was not a very fun place to work when

I started here but things have changed and it's definitely getting better!"

Outside of work, she continues giving back to the community and striving for success. She serves on the Artesia Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, the Artesia General Hospital Board of Directors and a subcommittee of the Economic Development Committee. A proud mother, she can also be found coaching her son's sports teams and volunteering with Hermosa Elementary School's Parent Teacher Organization.

"I just love Artesia and I love that we help raise each other's kids," she gushed. "We really are a one-of-a-kind place." She went on to say, "We all have baggage but we seem to look past that and help each other out a lot and want good for everyone. I like that we can see the greater good and we're in it for Artesia's success and not just our own success." ■

PHOTO: Pictured with Anna is her family, husband, Markey, and children Beau, Jack and Taylor.



J.S. Ward & Son, Inc. has been serving the insurance needs of Artesia, Eddy County and the Pecos Valley area since 1925 as a fourth generation, family-owned independent insurance agency. The company offers both personal and business insurance.

HISTORY

1925 – J.S. Ward (affectionately called Granddaddy Fritz) founded the agency. It was originally located at the corner of First and Main Streets in Artesia in conjunction with Clyde Guy's Service Station.

1946 – The son of J.S. Ward, E.H. Ward, joined the agency. It was at this time that the agency adopted its current name, J.S. Ward & Son, Inc.

1964 – John Knight joined the agency as a sales representative.

1975 – E.H. Ward passed away, so his wife, Charlene M. Ward, began filling the shoes of her deceased husband. On the office wall hangs Mr. Ward's Policy No. 8 written for Charles R. Martin, who was Mrs. Ward's father. Also this year, Gary Sims, E.H. and Charlene Ward's son-in-law and husband to Sara Ward Sims, joined the agency as a sales representative.

1987 – The agency adopted its first in-house computer system.

2000 – The Ward Building burned in an electrical fire.

2004 – Anna Sims Byers, daughter of Gary and Sara Ward Sims, moved home to join the family insurance agency. Also this year, a new building was constructed at the corner of Fourth and Main Streets.

2005 – The agency celebrated 80 years in business, and Gary Sims celebrated 30 years with the agency.

2010 – J.S. Ward & Son opened a Carlsbad location.

2011 – J.S. Ward & Son opened a location in Roswell.

2014 – Longtime Artesia resident Ronnie Letcher joined the agency.

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