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LaDonna Gatlin and Jackson Brown
photo by Leah Ratliff

A Different Song to Sing

By Emily Foshee

FOLLOWING YOUR HEART and the plan you know God has for you is the foundation upon which Frisco resident LaDonna Gatlin has built her life.

"The decisions we make in our life change our lives forever, and my passion is to inspire people through my public speaking and using my life experiences as examples to help them make wise choices for their lives," said Ms. Gatlin, the only girl in the famous Gatlin Brothers clan.

Ms. Gatlin's life demonstrates that passion. She was enjoying incredible success as part of the famous Gatlin Family when, in 1976, she experienced her defining moment.

"I fell in love and wanted to get married," said Ms. Gatlin.

So, in 1976, Ms. Gatlin said goodbye to the Gatlin Boys and a career in country music.

"My brothers went on to produce hit records...I went on to produce two kids!" Ms. Gatlin said. "My brothers got

famous, and I got stretch marks!" she continued in her comfortable, humorous way.

Ms. Gatlin has been married to Tim Johnson for 30 years and her husband's career brought them to Frisco in 1997 when he accepted a position with Willowbend Church. Currently, he helps Ms. Gatlin manage her busy public speaking career.

LaDonna and Tim have two adult children, Annie and Caleb, and two grandchildren. Their daughter, Annie, will graduate from Texas Women's University with a degree in early childhood development/education and plans to teach kindergarten through fourth grade in Frisco. Caleb and his wife live in Lindale, Texas, where he is completing his Bachelors degree at Tyler Junior College.

LaDonna and Tim recently purchased a home in Frisco Lakes, a newly developed adult community on the shores of Lake Lewisville. Ms. Gatlin's parents have

purchased a home also and will live across the street.

"My folks moved to Frisco three years ago due to some health issues," explained Ms. Gatlin. "I always knew I wanted my parents to live close to me, and this was the perfect time to make that transition."

The home Ms. Gatlin and her husband are building will be completed in November, and her parent's home will be finished in December, just in time for their 60th wedding anniversary.

"I hope to throw my parents a 60th anniversary party at the Frisco Lakes amenity center," said Ms. Gatlin. "I just know my parents will be very happy spending their senior years here," she added. "And I'll be happier knowing they're here."

About ten years ago Ms. Gatlin began making public speaking engagements and it evolved into a full time career. Her speeches are punctuated with music, down home country humor and wisdom.

"Tune Up Your Life," one of Ms. Gatlin's keynote speeches, is her personal story. In it, she shares the seven key principles that helped her take a giant leap of faith and "sing a different song" than her brothers. The seven principles, following the "doe re me" musical scale, are:

- DO Do the right thing
- Re Realize your potential
- Ml Mind your manners
- FA Failure can become fertilizer
- SO Solutions begin with me
- LA Laugh!
- Ti Time is valuable...
And that will bring us back to
- DO We end where began, by doing the right thing.

In addition, Ms. Gatlin has written two articles depicting the strength of forgiveness for the "Chicken Soup for the Soul" book series.

"That's what I'm all about now," Ms. Gatlin continues. "I want to empower others to find their own voice and 'sing the song' they were born to sing."

Emily Foshee is a freelance writer living in Frisco.