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*Sarah Claunch in her office
photo by Nick Young*

an education I needed one also. I was so scared at 34 to be going back to college, but I could not have had a better experience. It gave me the confidence to go on to law school," said Sarah.

Sarah earned an associate of arts degree from Collin in 1992 and graduated cum laude with a major in history and minors in government and English from Texas Woman's University in 1994. She attended law school at Texas Wesleyan University, and in 1998 she earned her J.D. Today, she is an attorney at Burke & Associates, P. C.

"I decided that if I was going to expect my children to have an education, I needed one also."

Sarah says her father is her hero. Education played a big role in his life, and before he retired he had 50 years of teaching experience. He earned his bachelor's degree when Sarah was a baby and his master's degree when she was in middle school. The letter he wrote his daughter upon his graduation is tucked away in her safety deposit box, but the words "you have to set goals in life and when you reach that goal, set another..." are deeply engrained in her mind.

"Like Daddy's letter said, I just kept setting goals. My Mom and Dad were so helpful; I couldn't have done it without them. The day I graduated from Collin and walked across the stage I felt like I was on top of the world. It was such an accomplishment at that age. The professors encouraged me to pursue a bachelor's degree, so I transferred to Texas Woman's University," said Sarah.

Today, Sarah is president elect of

The Right Age for Education

By Heather Darrow

MORE THAN 12 YEARS AGO, a few words of wisdom completely changed Sarah Claunch's life. At 34 years old, she envisioned an insurmountable hill of education; weighted down with the fact that she would be 44 by the time she achieved her dream career. She was sure she was too old to take on the challenge. With pragmatic nonchalance, her friend said, "So what? You will be 44 anyway." In an instant her perspective shifted. Today, she has

literally set the educational bar for her daughter and son as a practicing lawyer in her hometown, Frisco.

A Collin County Community College District (Collin) graduate, Sarah was faced with her husband's death in 1984. She opened a Hallmark Card shop with her parents to support her two young children but learned that retail was not the career she wanted.

"In 1989, I decided that if I was going to expect my children to have

the FISD Education Foundation and is excited to be in a position to give back to the community.

“The Foundation gives a lot of matching scholarships to Collin, and I am proud of that. It is an untapped resource, in Frisco especially.” Continues Sarah, “I had no problem transferring every class to TWU. It is a fraction of the cost of a university, but the classes are just as hard. I don’t think we, as a community, know what Collin does for the county or the state” Sarah was determined that both of her children would receive a college education and, like their mother, that they would begin their college experience at the college.

Collin graduate Allison Claunch earned a Bachelor of Science degree with honors in Interdisciplinary Studies from Texas A&M University-Commerce in 2004. She is currently teaching fourth grade at Boals Elementary School in Frisco.

According to Allison, one half of her high school class came back to Frisco and attended Collin after one year of college away from home because the change was too much for them.

“I can’t imagine going to a campus with 20,000 people right out of high school. You leave Collin with zero debt, and I didn’t have to take out loans until A&M Commerce. From talking with friends who attended universities for the first two years, I discovered that I got the same education, but it was more personal. My professors always knew who I was,” said Allison.

As a new teacher, Allison recently had the revelation that she has come full circle with her education.

During her first semester at Collin, Allison took a course with Rodney Boyd, professor of Humanities, who introduced her to teaching skills that she now employs with her own students.

“He would crack jokes, and it made us listen. He wasn’t just up there

lecturing. He was incredibly intelligent and knew a lot of fascinating facts about everything. It is important to be on the students’ level and not be



Allison Claunch at Boals Elementary

photo by Nick Young

“I love my job and can’t imagine doing anything else, but you can’t be a teacher without a degree.”

condescending because you achieve cooperative learning,” said Allison.

Like her teachers, Allison recognizes the value in a quality education.

“I love my job and can’t imagine doing anything else, but you can’t be a teacher without a degree,” she said.

Her brother, Philip, shares her sentiment regarding edification.

“You can’t do anything in this day and age, except maybe flip burgers, without a college degree. If you want to work in a corporate environment

or have a professional job, you have to have a degree. It is almost like what a high school degree was 20 or 30 years ago,” he said.

Also a Collin graduate, Philip earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Historical Studies from The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) and is a few semesters away from earning his Bachelor of Science Business Administration degree from UTD. He plans to apply to law school in March, become a lawyer and practice with his mother in Frisco.

“You are taught by professors with doctorates, not grad students, at Collin. It made me feel more comfortable that I could trust what they taught. With the smaller classes it make it easier to get through because you can go and talk to the teacher instead of going through a teaching assistant and then a grad student and then finally talking to the professor,” he said.

Philip remembers coming home from school to his Mother’s smile and recalls how she was always there to help

with homework. After the schoolwork was completed, he and his sister would flop down on the couch, flip on the TV and turn the volume down low so their mother could study.

A bit of good, no-nonsense advice taught the Claunch family that any age is a good age for education, and education impacts individuals, family members and the community.

“I don’t think Allison and I would have gone to college if my Mother hadn’t gone to school. My Mom raised a family, made it through law school, passed the bar and is a successful lawyer, and she did it with everything against her. I don’t know how she did it; I can hardly work and go to school. My Mother has been an inspiration to me,” said Philip.

Heather Darrow writes for Collin County Community College District.