

Sunday Brunch

SECTION

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BEST OF ALL WORLDS

Ehrman combines nursing, missionary volunteering into rewarding life

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In addition to being a wife, a mother of five home-schooled children, and a missionary volunteer, Lori Ehrman is also a surgical nurse at Hunt Regional Medical Center

The thread that knits all of these roles together is love, she points out.

Ehrman was born and reared in Long Island, N.Y. "I grew up poor, but didn't know it — everything was good. We lived in a little house, a bungalow, on the water, and it was not until junior high school that I knew we were poor. There were the differences in clothing and in the cars that were dropping kids off at school. I hadn't ever seen a Mercedes before," she added laughing.

"The benefit was I was good in school — they couldn't teach me fast enough — and some place along the line I realized that education was the key to where I was going to go in life."

Raised a Catholic, she had a great devotion to St. Bernadette of Lourdes and at one time even considered becoming a nun.

"But once the world opened up, I lost my religious vocation," she said. "I went to church, but the world around me was just so loud, and it's hard to find that 'quiet' space."

Ehrman attended New York University on a scholarship, majoring in French language and international politics with a goal of becoming an attorney for the United Nations. NYU had a study-abroad program, and during her junior year she attended classes at the



CAROL FERGUSON / HERALD-BANNER

Hunt Regional Medical Center in Greenville plays a big part in the lives of the women in Lori Ehrman's family. From left are Anna, Erin, Nora and their mother, Lori. Three are already hospital employees, and the youngest, Anna, hopes to work there in the future.

Sorbonne, which is one of the campus schools of the University of Paris.

Paris, the city of romance, was also where she met her future husband, Scott, who was a Marine guarding the U.S. consulate there. When they decided to marry, they settled on Texas as their future home.

Ehrman had never been to Texas, but Scott, whose father's work had taken him to a number of U.S. states, had once lived here.

"He told me, 'In Texas, opportunity abounds,' and so we moved here in February 1991," she said.

She smilingly describes her husband as "a force to be reckoned with. He's the perpetual Boy Scout with all those good Boy Scout qualities — 'Do the right thing!'"

"He became a Garland police officer, and I started working for EDS in Plano in the legal department, although I was still bent on law school," she said. "Then the children came

along and changed the plan.

"I was faith-challenged here, which was a good thing for me — it got me into studying the teachings of the church."

The couple's work schedules were beginning to tell on them, however. "I'd get to work about 6 a.m. and drive home at 2 p.m.," she said. "Then he would leave at 2:40 p.m. and work till 11 p.m. We did this for about a year, and I used to cry all the while driving to work and back home from work. I wanted to be with my kids."

Deciding that they were short-changing their children, Ehrman quit her job, saying they would economize ... "I can thrift-shop anything."

"We moved to an old house that my in-laws had in Garland ... got chickens, learned to butcher meat, make our own cheese and yogurt. This was definitely not Long Island. We 'did Texas,' or what I thought Texas was supposed to be."

She also began what she

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SUNDAY BRUNCH

Ehrman finds her calling with career in nursing as 'extension with love'

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calls her journey of home-schooling her children. Asked about the challenge of teaching five at one time, she said, "We did home-schooling around a table, with each child learning at their own level and pace, even using the same subject matter. When I taught history, for example, I didn't change the information for each child; they got a different 'picture' based on their maturity level."

By February of 2001, the family had moved to Farmersville. When the 9/11 terrorist attack came, "My husband called me at home and said 'Get on the TV.'"

Having come from New York, the couple found the emotional impact of the news pictures in that city particularly moving.

"Scott had just retired from the Marine Corps, but he said 'I have to do something,' and on the way home he stopped at the Texas National Guard and enlisted in the Army.

"The first time he was deployed was within the country — to Oregon for a year guarding some sensitive site. Then he was home

for 11 months, and in 2004 he was deployed to Afghanistan."

In 2005, Ehrman was walking on her treadmill and watching TV when she saw a program on EWTN network asking for persons to come to Lourdes, France, to do volunteer service for a few weeks at the shrine of the Virgin Mary. (Those unfamiliar with the story of Lourdes may remember the Twentieth Century-Fox film telling the story of the French peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous, who in 1858 is believed to have seen 18 visions of the Virgin Mary, whom she described only as "the beautiful lady," in a grotto at Lourdes. Today approximately five million pilgrims and tourists visit the shrine each year.)

"The only qualifications for volunteers were that you be 'human and of good will,'" she said. The next time her husband was able to phone her, she told him of her interest in volunteering. He was very supportive, and said "When I get home, you can go."

After his return to the states

and to his job with the Garland PD, Ehrman made her first trip to Lourdes in October 2005. People come to Lourdes for healing — psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and/or physically, she said. They speak many languages, "...but you can convey a lot to them with a smile," added Ehrman who can also communicate well in French, Italian and Spanish.

"I'm a housewife, and there I'm seeing debilitating physical conditions and I have no idea what they are. I wanted to know more and help, but I lacked medical knowledge."

When she returned home she did research into the availability of local medical training, and enrolled in Collin College in McKinney

"By the third week of school, I was learning exactly what I did at Lourdes — working with people at a hospital."

Ehrman had discovered her calling.

"Nursing seems like a natural extension of being a wife and a mother — it's an extension with

love," she said..

"The two years of nurses' training are very rigorous, kind of like boot camp. The second year I got hired at Hunt Regional Medical Center as a nurse 'extern' — someone who has finished the first year of training and will get an RN degree next year. They pair you with a nurse who trains you how to be a nurse on a hospital floor. You work in all departments in the hospital — ER, ICU, telemetry, surgical, medical, wound care."

She looks on her nursing career as a kind of mission — whether it be in Greenville as an RN on the hospital's fourth-floor or in caring for pilgrims at Lourdes. She returns to France for three weeks of volunteer nursing each summer, and this year will be her 11th visit.

The children have also volunteered, and she has brought all of them along in pairs except her youngest son. "I'm very thrifty and I save every penny for air fare," she said.

During her few weeks away from home, both her husband

and her mother, who lives with them, keep an eye on the family's needs.

Their children, who now range in age from 24 to 14, include Nora who also works at the hospital as a personal care assistant; Eric who is a plumber ("What a blessing beyond compare, having a plumber in the family," she jokes); Erin who currently works at the hospital in food service and plans to go into nursing; Anna, whose goal is to be a triple-threat paramedic/firefighter/police officer/ all in one; and Carlton, now a Life Scout with plans to eventually join his brother in the plumbing business.

The entire family has a strong service ethic, whether it be in police work, the military, Scouting, nursing or volunteer work.

"Lourdes has transformed our family," she said. "Not just one month a year — every day we see the world and our community as a place that needs to be helped, and we actively attempt to help."