

A VISION REALIZED

CALS Alumna Dr. Marion Flowers reflects on her time at MSU

By Sarah Buckleitner

EVERY YEAR, STUDENTS ENTER the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences carrying dreams of making the world a better place. With the assistance of excellent mentors and a rigorous education within the college, many students achieve that goal through successful careers within their chosen fields.

Dr. Marion Harris Flowers, 2008 Biochemistry graduate from MSU and recipient of the R.C. and Sophie E. Paige Endowed Scholarship, the Minor S. and Helen D. Gray Scholarship, and the Dr. Will. D. Carpenter Endowed Scholarship, is now able to reflect on the route she took to accomplishing her own dream of becoming a doctor, and what it means to have achieved her goals.

Since graduating from MSU, Dr. Flowers went on to earn her Doctor of Optometry Degree from Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, Tennessee, and now provides eye care through the Shelby County school district to children aged 4-18.

"The best part of my job is providing eye care to children who don't otherwise receive the care they need. I also love that I'm taking care of something people hold near and dear to their hearts: their vision," she said.

Dr. Flowers works in a mobile optometry setting in Shelby County, Tennessee, where she travels between schools to assess each child's vision. During her time not spent within the school district, she works in a private practice with patients of all ages, where she performs routine eye exams, manages ocular diseases like glaucoma, and treats urgent conditions, such as infections and inflammations of the eye.

While she loves her job, she didn't come into MSU immediately knowing that she wanted to be an optometrist.

"I knew I wanted to be a doctor, but optometry was just one of the options," she said.

Dr. Flowers eventually narrowed her focus to the specific study of optometry with her strong mentors within the CALS department there to help every step of the way.

"When I changed my major from biological sciences to biochemistry and molecular biology, then department head Dr. Boyle made the transition very easy. I can recall a conversation we had regarding my plans for medical school, and I remember how direct and honest he was with me. I still to this day remember every word he said, and I am so appreciative of his advice. After Dr. Boyle retired, Drs. Scott Willard and Kenneth Willeford made sure I was on the right track for graduation and that I was academically prepared for optometry school admission," explained Dr. Flowers.

It is not just the people she recalls fondly. "The student union and drill field were my two favorite places on campus. The union offered a place where I could catch up with my friends and grab a bite to eat, or just find a quiet place to relax. And I love the drill field because it's simply beautiful. No matter how good or bad class was on a particular day, I could come to the drill field and feel a sense of freedom," she said.

Flowers attributes some of her success as an optometrist to the support of the university, both educationally and financially.

"MSU supported me by providing a curriculum that prepared me for optometry

school, and simultaneously helping to fund my education via scholarships. The MSU career center was also a great resource. They helped with the mock interview I did in preparation for optometry school admissions. I ended up being awarded a scholarship to help with the cost of attendance—with one of its requirements being a good interview—so I feel that mock interview really paid off," Dr. Flowers commented.

Throughout her time at the university, Dr. Flowers was passionate about giving back. As a CALS ambassador, she helped spread the word about the college by planning events and participating in recruitment activities such as high school days, where ambassadors visited high schools and spoke to the students about Mississippi State University and CALS.

"I always enjoyed our ambassador meetings," Dr. Flowers said. "There were great team building games and wonderful food. And I enjoyed our recruiting events because I was able to share with others how much I love Mississippi State University."

If she had to offer one piece of advice for current students looking to go into the medical field, Dr. Flowers said it would be to never give up.

"No matter what happens, never give up on your dream. It's going to be tough and sometimes you may feel like taking an easier route. I remember crying several times and questioning my decision. However, I always encouraged myself by remembering two things: anything worth having is never easily obtained, and the harder you work for something the more you will appreciate it. They both held true." ❖

