

# More than Meets the Eye

A Look into Vanessa Murphree

The Alabama native grew up in Oneonta. Oneonta is a small town of about 5,000 people an hour north on Birmingham nestled between the city and Huntsville. One of her favorite childhood memories includes frequent trips to the Horton Mill Covered Bridge.

“I remember beautiful scenery. There’s this place at the end of the Appalachian Mountains, the Horton Mill Covered Bridge, that I used to go to with my family. It’s one of the highest in the country above water. We’d go from the bank from home to go to the bridge,” Murphree said, reminiscing about one of her favorite outings. She went on to talk about another fond memory of her grandfather’s quarry.

Her 10-year career began as simple as any other – in yearbook, where she learned how to put it together manually. Since she had experience in the field, she decided to continue pursuing public relations in college. She went onto receive her undergrad from the University of Alabama. There she met the person that has inspired her the most, Dr. David Sloan. “He was the one who encouraged me into getting my Ph.D.,” Murphree said.

She has worked at Tulane and New Orleans. At the American Society of Reproductive Medicine, Murphree rewrote and edited articles from doctors, profiled physicians and wrote patient education booklets. “The booklets I made didn’t just go there. They would be used all over. They’d be used in other cities across the country, as well,” she explained.

Deciding that it was time to make a change, she turned towards teaching. “I wanted to take a plunge to making a change. It was scary, but I wanted to push myself to go into a better career,” Murphree said. In 2001, she started her teaching career in New Orleans. From there,

Murphree went to the University of South Alabama in 2005. She needed a change to advance further in her career, so she taught private school.

During that time, Hurricane Katrina had hit. “Katrina redefined things,” Murphree said. There were layoffs in her previous home, New Orleans, that she’d just missed by moving to Alabama. Sadly, her friends weren’t so lucky. “The layoffs during that time were scary. I had friends who had issues with finding jobs,” she stated. To have moved right before a hurricane as devastating as Katrina had been, she had many worries. “Have you heard of buyer’s remorse? With everything happening and then Katrina, it was stressful and difficult. I said I was going to do it and I do it. I keep my commitments,” Murphree continued. Weathering through the storm, she stayed firm and triumphed.

In 2012, she came to the University of Southern Mississippi, where she still teaches today. She has two homes, one in Hattiesburg, MS and the other in New Orleans, LA. Sugar, a 6-year-old Chihuahua mix, is her guardian against any intruders. Previously, she did have another dog companion, Bella, for 15 years who passed. Unfortunately, Murphree experienced a break-in at her New Orleans home that prompted her to get Sugar. Her nephew has a Chihuahua who shares the same name, Sugar. They refer to her Chihuahua as Big Sugar and her nephew’s Chihuahua as Little Sugar.

Murphree has a love for music and culture. One of her dreams had been to travel. Four years ago, she was able to make that dream into reality. For the past four years, she has been planning trips and traveling to different places around the world. “I thought I wouldn’t be able to do it, but I worked hard and am responsible with money. So, I decided to start traveling,” she

started, “I went to the Greek Isles. I went with a friend and was shown Scotland and Venice, Italy.”

In the future, she doesn’t plan to leave USM. “My dream right now is to retire,” She informed. USM provides her with a great job, great benefits and a great retirement plan.