

## attorney spotlight

BY ELISE MICHEL

Born and raised in Mamou, La.—the self-proclaimed Cajun music capital of the world—Jamie Fontenot's path to her career in law was anything but conventional.

Fontenot's father, an attorney, introduced her to the world of law. On her eighth grade spring break, she accompanied him to court in Ville Platte, the parish seat of Evangeline Parish in which Mamou is located. Fontenot said everyone at the courthouse spoke French until court started. That day, her father merely confirmed a few simple divorces, but Fontenot said she was enthralled. "It wasn't much, but I was hooked," she said.

Despite her father having a general practice as a lawyer, both of Fontenot's parents attempted to dissuade her from going to law school and practicing law. Nevertheless, once she earned a degree in psychology from Northwestern State University, Fontenot began her first attempt at law school at the LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center. After being academically dismissed from LSU, Fontenot obtained her paralegal degree before attending Southern University Law Center. "I owe an enormous debt of gratitude [to Southern University Law Center] for allowing me a second chance to fulfill my dream of being an attorney," Fontenot said.

Fontenot worked as an associate to Audrey McCain for almost five years before becoming a solo practitioner of family law. For Fontenot, the most rewarding experience she has had was a reversal of a custody case in which Fontenot represented a mother who had lost custody. This was Fontenot's first and only time representing an appellant, and she "obsessed about that case for the entire nine-month wait," she said.

In Fontenot's opinion, there is much more at stake than just money in family law, and it can be emotionally wrenching. "I have had days when I fought back tears, moments when my heart raced so fast it ached and times when my stomach churned to the point I was almost ill," she said.

## Interview with Jamie Fontenot



Jamie Fontenot

Fontenot is chairperson of the Baton Rouge Bar Association's Family Law Section, which handles pro bono cases and sponsors a biannual blood drive. "The section is mainly about the camaraderie, which I find is very helpful in such a trying area of law," she said.

Fontenot expects to remain a litigator for the next five to 10 years, but after that she said she may move toward mediation, teaching or even another area of law. She hopes to "find something...that is not quite as acrimonious."

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