

# Gary Massey

From FARMHOUSE

STORY BY Cindy Kalinoski

to COURT HOUSE



From his time spent on a farm as a kid, Gary learned the importance of hard work and helping others.

Attorney Gary Massey is a very busy man. As a husband and father, this native Tennessean spends a lot of time with his family, helping coach his kids' sports teams (basketball, softball, and soccer), and also enjoys swimming and shooting. As a lawyer, he is well known as a successful and sympathetic victims' advocate. As a minister, he delivers heartfelt and moving sermons to his congregation at the Mountain Creek Church of Christ. Despite all of these time-consuming commitments, however, Gary has no desire to change his life. He has always felt driven to help people, and he doesn't mind the hard work it takes to do it. Whether he's in the courtroom, doing research, or clearing land at home, he has built a life that matches his values, one that brings him the satisfaction of doing what he's meant to do.

Gary's path has been largely directed by his childhood, spent on a farm in a small

town outside Chattanooga. Farming has been in his family's blood for decades, from his sharecropper grandfather to the grandfather who refused to leave his farm during the Great Depression to Gary's own parents. As for Gary himself, he used to rise before the sun to bottle-feed calves, go to school, and return to feed them again at dusk. After school while the rest of his friends were on the playground, he would get in his father's truck and head home for chores. They worked the farm six days a week, and Gary remembers having to feed the cattle on Sundays as well. He says, "Now I work seven days a week, but that is nothing new in my family." He appreciates that although it can be difficult to stand in front of a judge and jury, "at least it's not cold or raining."

In one of his most formative moments while growing up, Gary witnessed the collapse of his father's lumber yard during the recession of the 1970s. Gary recalls, "I

watched my father cut wood and do any work he could find to provide for our family. I've never forgotten what that was like, and to this day I have a heart for people who struggle." Meanwhile, Gary studied hard, earning a scholarship to college. His parents sold cattle to pay for his room and board. Gary continued to apply himself and was awarded a full scholarship to law school at the Cumberland School of Law. Together, he and his wife Michelle covered their living expenses with her working in a hospital laboratory and Gary filling in at law firms and in church pulpits.

When Gary thinks of his childhood now, he observes, "My upbringing was all about doing things the right way and taking care of people when something came up. People would pull together and help." If a neighbor's tree fell or there was a fire, he would go along with his family to help out, and that urge has never disappeared for him. It is what compelled Gary to leave a

lucrative job with a law firm that defended large corporations and insurance companies. He found that he was often pitted against people who had been injured or taken advantage of—or both—and who were represented by less-than-stellar lawyers. The larger companies could easily afford top-quality representation, so it was like David versus Goliath, only David lacked even a slingshot. To Gary, it felt wrong.

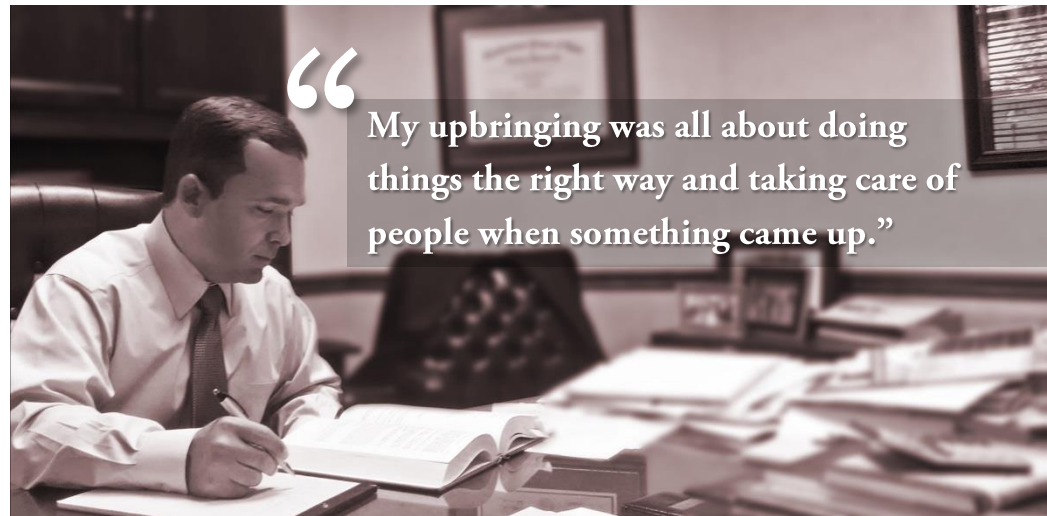
“I want to help everyday people who can’t help themselves without the assistance of a skilled attorney,” he says. “I realized I needed to be on the other side.” He has never regretted the switch.

Gary has had multiple standout cases, but one he recalls with particular feeling is the case of a woman, with three sons in their 60s, who was living in a nursing home. “The sons would visit her, but being southern gentlemen, they never considered checking her body to determine whether she was being treated properly,” he says. “Several people in the nursing home who weren’t responsible for their mother’s care told them they should get a lawyer. At the time, they had no idea why they would need one.”

The problem was bedsores, several of them, and they weren’t new. One had gotten so bad that you could see their mother’s prosthetic hip through the hole in her skin. The nursing home claimed they had explained the problems sufficiently, but what they had in fact given the sons was a lot of official-sounding jargon about their mother’s care. The truth was that the family didn’t understand what they were hearing from the staff and didn’t even know what questions to ask.

The sons first realized how serious things were when the sores became so infected that their mother had to go to the emergency room. The doctor there took them aside. He informed them, “Your mother is not going back to that facility.” When the sons asked why, the doctor showed them the bedsores that they hadn’t known to check for and that had existed for months. They were horrified.

The sons called Gary, and immediately he advised them to move their mother to a better facility. After she was transferred, she



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received good care. Her wounds began to heal, and she was beginning to regain some of her mobility. But then, other medical problems accelerated.

“Unfortunately,” Gary says, “by the time they came to me, their mother was within a couple of months of death. But she was now being cared for properly, so they had that peace of mind. We filed suit against the nursing home and brought them to justice, bringing the problems out into the light.”

The experience had one unexpected consequence as well: it led Gary to write *Choosing the Right Nursing Home For Your Loved Ones*, which he offers for free. The booklet teaches people how to evaluate a facility, where problems might arise, and how to check on a loved one’s care. Gary says, “I could see those sons felt guilty for not knowing how to monitor their mother’s care. With this guide, people can learn what to look for before the problems get to that point.”

Another case Gary handled was on behalf of a woman whose apartment had been flooded after a drain pipe was left disconnected. He describes the situation: “She was swept off her feet by the water and suffered a severe knee injury.” The first lawyer the woman contacted took the doctor’s deposition incorrectly; because of that, he realized he was going to lose the case, so he dropped her as a client. Another lawyer was unable to make any headway either. Then the case came to Gary, who retook the doctor’s deposition and got the woman a very positive result from the case.

He says, “That’s the kind of thing we take pride in—giving a quality of representation that a lot of injured people have found difficult to find.”

When he’s not working or with his wife and children, Gary loves to volunteer in the community. His newest involvement is serving on the Board of Directors for the Tennessee Children’s Home. “I’ve had a soft place in my heart for the home since I was a child,” he explains. An older gentleman from his church, volunteered at the home and took Gary there for visits when he was a child to help him understand how blessed he was for having a loving family. He never forgot about the home and the children who receive help there. “I have had such a wonderful family and have three great kids of my own. I really hurt for children who don’t have the same blessings. I want to do anything I can to help people who haven’t been as blessed as I have.”

Ever true to his roots, Gary still farms as well, although on a much smaller scale. These days, he loves to raise vegetables. He says the great challenge is to time the ripening of his tomatoes, corn, and okra to get the perfect summer meal. It takes him back to his mother’s table, where he learned the positive values that continue to drive his life.