

KIMBERLY HAMILTON

A MOM WHO DOUBLES AS A PRIVATE EYE

■ BY TERI SAYLOR

One day, a few years ago, Kimberly Hamilton was on her way to coach her daughter's volleyball practice when she found herself trapped in a cul de sac in a high drug section of Alamance County, in the heart of North Carolina.

"Four men got out of a truck, boxed me in and wouldn't let me leave. I had my weapon in my hand," she said. "They started walking toward my car. Then a woman in the neighborhood called the police, who came and arrested them."

And just like that, Hamilton, a private investigator, had another story to add to her collection of tales from her office, which doubles as the front seat of her car. Later, at the volleyball practice, she had to run laps as punishment for being tardy.

Hamilton, 48, a former stay-at-home mom, is now a single working mom to five kids ranging in age from 10 to 28. Originally from Chicago, she lives in Graham, where she raised her kids, coaching their baseball, volleyball and softball teams, and managing Female Agents, her private investigation firm. She works a territory, reaching west to Greensboro and east to Durham and always dreamed of a career in law enforcement. About 17 years ago, she picked up the phone, called a local private investigator and told him she wanted him to teach her everything he knew about doing investigations.

"In order to become a PI in North Carolina, you have to work 3,000 hours alongside another PI. They call it a sponsorship," she said. "So he took me on and he trained me."

Most private investigators start their careers in law enforcement, but Hamilton reckons she did it backwards. After going through training and getting her PI license, she took basic law enforcement training through the Burlington Police Department and gave up her investigator's license in 2004, when she joined the Alamance County Sheriff's Department as a sworn law enforcement officer. It didn't take long for her to realize a career as a deputy wasn't for her, so after two years on the force, she regained her investigator's license, started her firm, and never looked back.

On an unusually warm morning in March, Hamilton sat in a Graham coffee shop, her

back to a brick interior wall, eyes on the door. A habit of maintaining constant vigilance comes along with her job, and now it is second nature. A petite blonde woman, smartly attired with a professional hairstyle, along with a warm nature and bubbly personality is a disarming contrast to a reporter's naive perception of the ruffled, hard-boiled, cigar-chomping, coffee-stained gruff male characters in Hollywood private eye movies and on TV.

"You don't think, typically, an investigator is going to be a female, and people tend to trust women a little more," she said. "You know, I once followed a cheating husband into a bar and had my purse camera sitting right on the bar and my subject came up and hit on me. They don't even think about it."

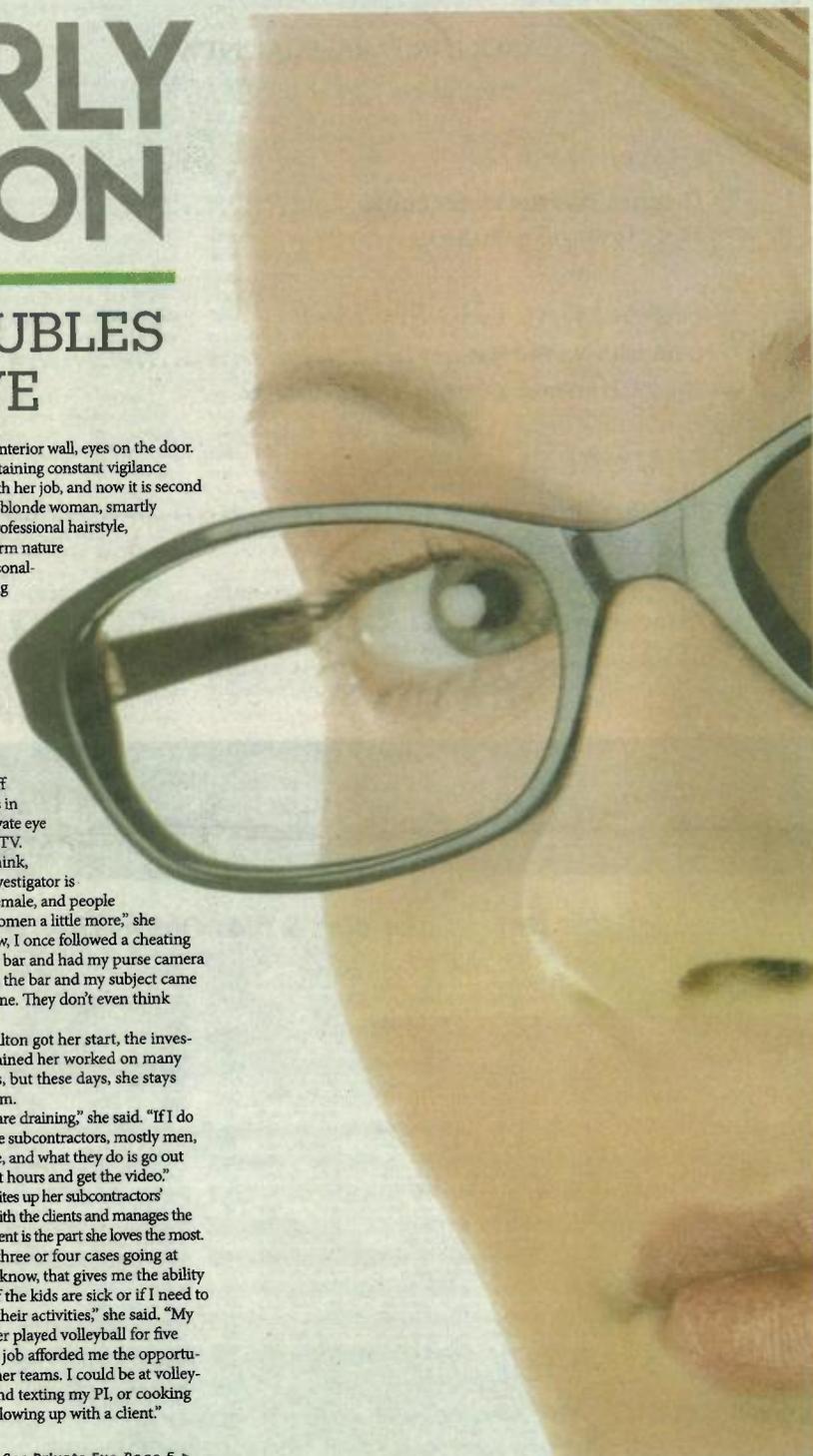
When Hamilton got her start, the investigator who trained her worked on many domestic cases, but these days, she stays away from them.

"Domestics are draining," she said. "If I do take them, I use subcontractors, mostly men, for surveillance, and what they do is go out and sit for eight hours and get the video."

Hamilton writes up her subcontractors' reports, deals with the clients and manages the case. Management is the part she loves the most.

"I can have three or four cases going at once, and you know, that gives me the ability to stay home if the kids are sick or if I need to participate in their activities," she said. "My fourth daughter played volleyball for five years, and this job afforded me the opportunity to coach her teams. I could be at volleyball practice and texting my PI, or cooking dinner and following up with a client."

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The job is intense, but Naomi Nation has learned to relax



Naomi Nation

Naomi Nation fondly recalls the classes she took when she earned her associate degree in legal secretary studies at Jefferson State Junior College in Birmingham, Alabama.

"I spent many hours on shorthand and learning to properly file documents," she says.

"These are courses I'm sure no longer exist."

Today, Nation is the executive secretary to Ninth Judicial Circuit Solicitor Scarlett Wilson in South Carolina. This is the third solicitor she has worked with in the Ninth Judicial Circuit. Her office handles criminal prosecutions in Berkeley and Charleston counties, the site of recent high profile cases, and this is the most challenging aspect of her job.

"Dealing with high-profile matters is when your confidentiality button goes into full gear," she says. "Discovery issues can sometimes keep you awake at night, and it becomes a balancing act with defendants, victims, families, the media and the community."

Nation grew up in Alden, Alabama, now called Graysville, located near Birmingham. She and her sister were raised by their grandparents and both learned early on that having a job was not an option; it was a requirement for life. She now lives in Charleston with her husband of 34 years.

CPN: What led you to a career as a paralegal?

NN: My desire to be independent led me to a career as a paralegal. I was anxious to earn my own money and to have my own place, so I took the fast track and started working as soon as I graduated

from junior college. The early 1980s were booming with opportunities for legal secretaries, so that was my start. After moving to Charleston with my husband Melvin and our two sons, I obtained employment with Thomas Morrison, a sole practitioner. It was just the two of us. Working with Mr. Morrison was the best on-the-job paralegal training. Through continuing legal education and sitting through several certification exams, I officially earned the title of paralegal.

CPN: What inspires you to get up and go to work each morning?

NN: Another chance to enjoy life and experience or learn something new. A bonus is I enjoy my bosses and my co-workers. Each day in the Solicitor's Office brings something different.

CPN: What is your favorite activity to de-stress?

NN: Dancing is one of my favorite ways to de-stress. If there is a line dance somewhere, I am running to it. I also de-stress by relaxing with a glass of wine in my sunroom. Most days, the sunroom is my first stop when I get home from an eight- or 10-hour day at the office.

CPN: What advice would you give a friend who may be interested in becoming a paralegal?

NN: Be ready to think outside the box and learn new skills. Learn the basics but remain open to technology, and for me, that was a hard one. Our laws are constantly changing and legal careers are constantly restructuring. Consider all angles of the legal arena; not just a position in a law firm. Paralegals, legal assistants, paraprofessionals, whatever name or title, we are changing. Never stop studying. Go beyond what is required in performance and education. Most importantly, learn to separate the job from your personal life. When at work, work; when at home, chill.

CPN: If you could have dinner with three famous people, either living or dead, who would they be and why?

NN: I would love to sit down and have dinner with Jesus Christ. He was such a minimalist. I want to get confirmation that life really is not as complicated as we make it. I will pass on dining with Denzel Washington because my husband will be reading this article. Instead, I would sit down with Marilyn Monroe, just because she is legendary and to find out a few beauty secrets. Any story involving the Kennedy family is intriguing to me, so I would definitely ask questions about J.F.K. and Bobby.

Last but not least, my grandmother, Rebecca Williams. She is famous to me. I would like to have dinner with her because she passed so soon, before I was able to apologize for a few things. There are also a few recipes I never got a chance to record. I would like her to experience the person I have become. She would be proud.

CPN: If money were no object, where would you like to travel and why?

NN: This one is easy—Paris. If possible I would travel by cruise ship. Paris is where my spirit lives. I love wine, cheese, the outdoors, entertaining family, friends and simple, uncomplicated living.

Teri Saylor

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