MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Getting to Know
Twyla Sketchley

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE PRACTICE OF SPECIAL NEEDS PLANNING?
In law school, I took the first elder law class offered by my law school - The University of Montana in 1999. I loved the class and realized I had a passion and calling for advocating for vulnerable adults, at that time specifically elders. When I started my practice, I focused purely elder law, but as my practice grew, I began dealing with a broader range of issues that impacted vulnerable adults of all ages and abilities. I found there was little focus on advocacy for all vulnerable adults to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation. I found information about planning for families with individuals with developmental disabilities or younger individuals who suffered catastrophic illness or injury leading to lifelong care needs were limited to creating special needs trusts for personal injury settlement proceeds or in estate planning. Questions of transitioning from one phase of life to another or from one caregiver or residence to another were left largely to trial and error of family members and friends. Out of a need to serve my clients better, I began to find answers for these questions and many more to create a practice devoted to special needs.

HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK TO PEOPLE WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH IT?

My elevator speech: I use the law to help families, friends, and communities care for loved ones who need help and support to remain safe, healthy, active, and valued within their communities regardless of where they live or the care they need.

WHAT'S SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT MIGHT SURPRISE OTHERS?

I grew up as the daughter of a ranch hand. I know how to castrate bulls, grow just about anything, and drive a combine (well the old fashion kind before they got GPS and A/C in the cabs.

WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU THE MOST?

My great aunt that I was named for, Twyla Walz, and my grandmother, Lorraine Williams. My grandmother was a single mother when that was something her community gossiped about. She cared for my great grandmother when she was dying of breast cancer, my great grandfather when he was in his 90s and likely suffering from dementia, and her brother's wife when her brother's wife was dying of breast cancer. My great aunt Twyla was a schoolteacher and managed my great uncle's business in the evening and on weekends. Both were born before women had the right to vote or the right to their own bank accounts. They taught me resilience, compassion, kindness, and strength. They both encouraged me to get an education.

WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL WAY TO SPEND A SATURDAY?

On a day with beautiful weather, my perfect Saturday is hiking with my husband and grandkids or working in my garden, encouraging my plants to grow and my grandkids to get their hands in the dirt. On a day with not great weather, my perfect Saturday is sewing and reading a good book.

WHAT IS A PODCAST OR BOOK THAT YOU RECOMMEND TO OTHERS?

The Checklist Manifesto and *Being Mortal*, both by Dr. Atul Gawande.