

# Kirsten Svennungsen

## Graceful Ingenuity

By Katherine Johnson

Photo by Valerie McIntyre



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While attending Carroll College in Helena, Montana, Kirsten Svennungsen studied psychology and equine therapy in the anthrozoology program. In the program, she worked closely with youth girls 10-12 years old, veterans with PTSD, and people on the autistic spectrum. The program helped and worked with others with confidence building and incorporated life skills with group and individual riding lessons. In 2011, Kirsten graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and a three-month old daughter.

This defining moment in her life would be the lead factor in her 7-year journey. In order to provide for her daughter and herself, Kirsten first worked as a sterilization technician in a dentist office and then advanced to a chairside assistant; however, most of her income went towards their basic needs and childcare. "This was a very motivating season for me. I loved helping patients, but also knew I desired an expanded

role in providing patient care." After about a year as a dental assistant, Kirsten came to the conclusion that the best and fastest way to have the job security that supported her and her daughter, and allowed her to follow her dreams, would come from pursuing a nursing degree. "I wanted to figure out how I could continue to work in a profession where I could help people- because I love that- and also be able to provide better for our needs." She decided that nursing would be the perfect fit for what she needed and what she wanted, "There is so much you can do!"

After making this decision, Kirsten earned prerequisite science credits at Helena College of Technology, applied for the Accelerated Nursing Program at Montana State University and was accepted! Becoming a student in the Accelerated Nursing Program meant she was able to begin nursing classes right away because she already had a degree in Psychology and did not need the math and science prerequisites. "Getting into [the Accelerated] BSN program was the biggest academic honor of my life. It was really hard to get in and provided a huge opportunity." Kirsten's daughter was fifteen months old when they packed up and moved to the MSU Bozeman campus extension in Great Falls. The program averaged 21 credits per semester and required all the clinical hours of a 4-year program. At Benefis Kirsten, alongside 15 classmates, gained hands-on experience with patients throughout the hospital. She started the Bachelor of Science Nursing program in May 2013 and finished in August 2014. In September 2014, she started working at Benefis Plastic Surgery and Dermatology as a Registered Nurse. She was intrigued with the blend of science and art of dermatology and greatly enjoyed assisting patients achieve improved skin health and appearance.

A new goal began in August 2015 with her acceptance into Gonzaga University's Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program which would ultimately afford her the opportunity to expand her role in dermatology as an independent provider.

In October 2015, she was offered her dream job in Kalispell at Dermatology Associates Laser and Cosmetic Center. Over the next three years, Kirsten continued as a full time Family Nurse Practitioner student through Gonzaga University while working at Dermatology Associates. Kirsten's day began with working a full shift, coming home to care for her daughter and attend her classes. Gonzaga has a blended nursing program, meaning that she was able to take her classes online and at night, and drive to Spokane a few times a semester to take her tests. She would study, go to bed, go to work, and do the whole thing over again for the first 18 months of the program. To



Biking Going to the Sun



Kirsten Svennungsen has faced many challenges over the last 7 years. She has attended 3 different colleges to become a nurse- 2 of which are incredibly difficult to be admitted to; and, she has driven countless hours between Kalispell, Spokane, and the four locations across Montana for her clinical hours. At the very least, one can describe her as someone who has shown amazing and graceful ingenuity in order to provide for her and her daughter; and someone with phenomenal work ethic. She is incredibly grateful to all who have helped and supported her during this long process, “It’s definitely not the easiest route to go back to school and follow your dreams but I’m sure glad I didn’t give up.” MW

complete clinical hours, each nursing student is responsible for finding hospitals with preceptors; during this time, she was supervised by a physician or Family Nurse Practitioner while she diagnosed and treated patients in general care for all ages. Unable to complete her family practice clinical hours in the Flathead Valley, Kirsten had to drive as far as 3 hours away from Kalispell in order to finish over 680 clinical hours within the final 18 months of the program. It was not unusual for her to make the 3-hour drive(each way), work her hours and return home in the same day.

Born and raised in Shelby, Kirsten felt fortunate to complete her clinical hours in Shelby, Cut Bank, Valier and Polson, Montana. “It was definitely challenging, expensive and a lot of driving,” she laughs. “But it was also very humbling and a tremendous honor to care for such amazing people in Montana. All of my preceptors were very kind and generous,” she says smiling; to Kirsten, they are her heroes. “Without them I could not have completed my program.” In November 2018, Kirsten Svennungsen passed her Family Nurse Practitioner Boards.

“I am so grateful for the generous support of my wonderful family, friends, medical preceptors and Dermatology Associates employers Dr. Tom and Lori George.” As an RN in Dermatology, Kirsten focuses on maximizing the health, appearance and educates patients about caring for their skin. As an FNP, she is now an independent health care provider who can diagnose and treat people from infancy to geriatrics. Rather than stopping at just one nursing program, Kirsten has constantly improved her skills over the years, making herself a more qualified health care provider and giving her the ability to help more people.

