



Brittany DeMarco-Furman

"Normal is a Dryer Setting"

BY JENNA CAPUTO | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TARA WILEY PHOTOGRAPHY

Most kids normally don't say, "When I grow up, I want to be a funeral home director." Brittany DeMarco-Furman didn't either, despite her family being in the business since her great-grandfather started it in 1921. But like her favorite saying, "Normal is a dryer setting," she knows that nothing is ever really "normal."

Growing up in Glenville NY, Brittany and her sister, Taylor, would often open the doors for the guests during calling hours at their family business, Glenville Funeral Home, but when it came to fetching their father in the morgue they would rock, paper, shoot who would tell him it was time for dinner! Brittany reflects back, "We were super girly little girls, so we were kind of embarrassed of being the daughters of a mortician back then." Despite her reluctance of the profession, she was always in awe of her father. "I remember how refined and special my father's presence was in the funeral home. He had a compassionate aura about him that I hoped to one day attain. Looking back on those days – how hard my dad and mom worked to build the business we have today – it is inspiring and empowering."

But their family life wasn't all about the business. Sometimes it was about... reptiles! Her dad is an avid collector of a few scaled and slimy creatures: bearded dragons, snakes, oh my! For the last 6 years, the

family has hilariously documented on social media the dysfunction that takes place when their father takes the reptiles out of the cages." The mystery of the red tail boa disappearing for 2 years and then returning is a classic story for many people," Brittany laughs.

Besides their reptile-ribbing, Brittany's family also enjoyed many travels together over the years, often as motor home road trips that usually resulted in crazy stories and hitting *something* along the way, whether it be a curb, tree, bird or toll booth. "We are literally just like the family out of a *National Lampoon Family Vacation* movie!" she jokes. One memorable trip was at Yellow Stone National Park. "I got too close to the buffalo and they started chasing me, and my dad was having trouble unlocking the car door... the fear was REAL!" says Brittany.

Another engraved memory was the Everglades swamp boat tour. "My dad gallivanted away from the group (per usual) and found a fisherman and asked if he could take one of his fish (like a weirdo!). Anyway, my dad was found a few meters away trying to get the alligators' attention with the fish for a better 'experience.' Sure enough, the alligatorssss have their attention on my dad, and he was so close to the group that the tour guide panicked and told everyone to run away. He was SO MAD at my father for putting the entire group in danger!"



Photo by Matt Ramos

Brittany graduated from Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School, dancing competitively all through school, then danced on the college dance team and even performed in the NFL Pro Bowl Halftime Show in Hawaii three times. She has always loved entertaining – singing, dancing, theater and doing anything she can to brighten someone's day. "I'm the person that will completely embarrass myself to make someone smile," she says. "Especially if they are having a bad day. Life's too short to not smile, always!" She loved performing so much, at one point, she hoped to work as a character at Disney, preferably Ariel. But she also wanted a career and was always cynical about how short a dance career can last and didn't want to have to "retire" by the time she was 34. She graduated University at Albany with a degree in business and public relations, then interned with an event coordinator in Saratoga as well as at Town Square Media in Schenectady before working in advertising.

Thinking her personality was too "big" for a sensitive profession, working in the family business never was an option in her mind until she came home about five years ago and was able to help a grieving family. She listened to the widow's stories about his wife and added some of the information as special touches to the day – like having her favorite music playing and surprising him with a white orchid, his wife's favorite flower. "Every time I see a white orchid, I think of his wife and the feeling I had when I knew I made a difference," she says. "It was then when I was mature enough to realize the impact a funeral director can make, and my 'big' personality brought light to someone's darkest day. People always scratch their heads as to why I would choose such a profession. I then describe to them the rewarding experience I receive each and every time I celebrate and honor a life; the memories I am transported to, the life lessons and stories shared with me; and the constant reminder that life is precious and a beautiful, unique journey!"

She graduated with her Mortuary Science degree in 2017 from Hudson Valley Community College, completed her residency at the family firm and successfully passed the National Boards and NYS Funeral Law exam. Now she is a fourth-generation funeral director in her family, and being a young woman, she is proving that being a funeral professional is not only for men! Brittany proudly is carrying on the legacy her great-grandfather started 100 years ago. Her energy and passion shine in all that she does, and she stays active within the community as well. As part of the business, she is a member of the NYS Funeral Directors Association and the Capital Region Chamber. She is also a member of the Glenville Rotary and is currently working on developing the funeral home's Longevity Program and the 518 Nurse Honor Guard, which was inspired by a family she served last year. In her down time, she often finds herself writing for the funeral home's blog and in *American Funeral Director* magazine. She hopes to one day write a memoir as well. "There is something very beautiful about leaving your mark on the world through words," she says.

Still tapping into her love of dance, she spends free time taking pure barre classes, hanging out in Saratoga at the lake or racetrack and just being outdoors either in the garden or finding a new adventure.

Adventures still run in the family, including her bachelorette party last year when she went with her mom, pregnant sister and girlfriends to New York City. They had a blast, especially at the Coney Island Mermaid Parade where they all dressed as sea creatures and mermaids – the glitter and makeup were overwhelming! Brittany uneasily woke up the next morning to a phone call from her mother – her sister's water broke at 5 AM and the baby's birth certificate was going to read New York City. "My adorable nephew crashed



Photos by Matt Ramos Photography

my bachelorette party, born an entire month early, and forever will be the best souvenir ever – New York Nick!” she exclaims.

Brittany met her husband, Dan Furman, five years earlier on Travers Day at Saratoga Racetrack. They were married on Lake George. It was a beautiful ceremony filled with lots of entertainment and surprises, including their four-legged fur-child, Cesar, who stole the show! The newlyweds are not short of unforgettable moments. Not being much of a cook, Brittany doesn’t often use the oven. So as a joke during their engagement photoshoot, they took a picture of a pair of her heels in the stove and promptly forgot all about them until a month later when a weird smell wafted around them as she was preheating the oven. Whoops!

When not accidentally cooking her shoes, Dan and Brittany also like to travel whenever they can get away, always on the hunt for new destinations to eat and explore. Boston and Lake Placid are their favorite day trips, but they have traveled all around, including exotic destinations like St. Lucia, Greece, Italy and the Island of Malta.

Dan is well known in the car business; he is not involved in the family business. But the rest of the family still is. Brittany and her dad, Michael, work together while Donna, her mom, takes care of the books, Taylor works as the office manager, Nicholas (her nephew) serves the very important role as the office baby and cutest ham in the world, and Michael Mason, her co-worker and brother she never had, keeps the family in check and is irreplaceable in the business and family. In addition to the reptiles and Cesar, her family pets consist of Belle, and just recently they lost Foxy – both beloved Pomeranians. Foxy was the family “diva” and traveled to 48 states in either the motor home or by airplane. She had a (fake) Coach bag that she always jumped in when it was time to go “bye-bye.”

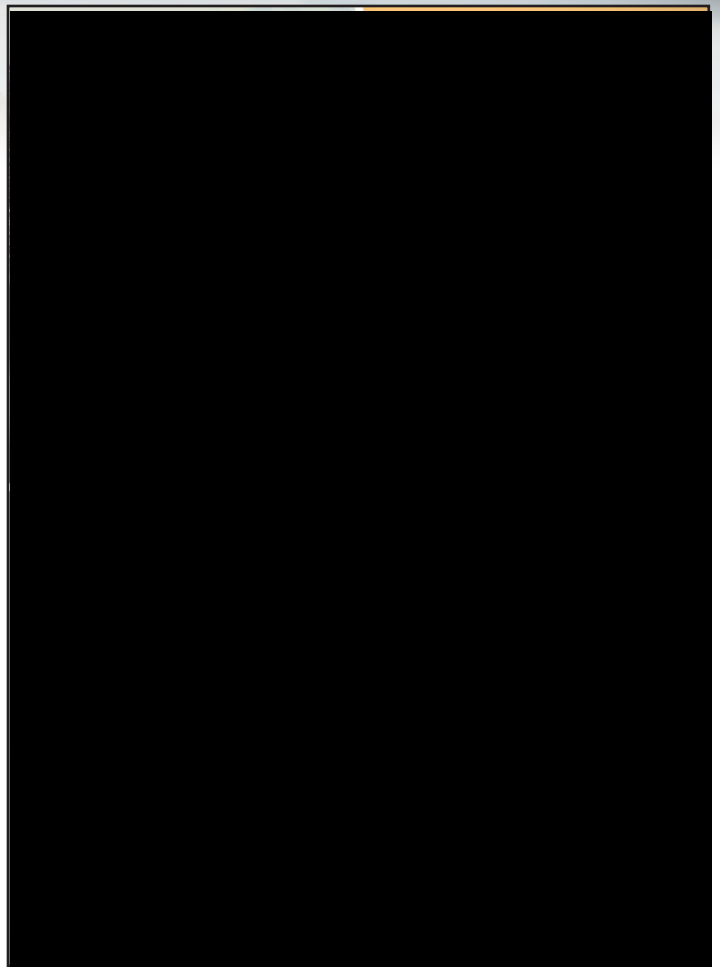




Photo by T.R. Laz

Recently, Brittany has been busy organizing the "Bring Back Magic" event, a free social-distancing fundraising event that raised money for Glenville's Animal Protective Foundation, Things of My Very Own, Inc. and the Regional Foodbank of Northeastern New York's Backpack program for Scotia-Glenville. The event was a social distancing drive with over 50 magical characters, dancers and acrobats. Visitors listened to DJ'd Disney hits, and each child received a souvenir bag, concession food for free and a professional photo with mermaids in the backdrop. About 1,250 children came through the event with their families, and within four hours, the DeMarco family raised over \$3,600 from cash and change donations. All proceeds were split evenly three ways between each organization.

They had only 16 days to put everything together, and with the help of 80 volunteers and 15 businesses, they were able to make it a magical day for the kids. "It was amazing," says Brittany. "The kids and parents were blown away, as was I. Everyone there had a smile on their face – it truly was magical!" They are already discussing making this an annual event.

Brittany is so grateful to be surrounded by her family and to be able to give back to the community she loves every day, while doing work she is truly passionate about. She reminds us all to live our best life, remembering that "normal" is not really a thing.

"Surround yourself with true friends. Life is a roller coaster. Family is forever, but friends are the family you choose. And I am blessed to call my community family!" ■