

Monica Howard Douglas '90 and her family pose with a sweet but very tired cub who thoroughly enjoyed all the pets and attention he received. He was ready for his nap by this point.

Monica Howard Douglas '90 Takes the Path Less Traveled



Monica Howard Douglas '90 has always been competitive, but her drive to win is undeniably balanced with her desire to be a team player. The senior vice president and general counsel for Coca-Cola credits her experience at Mary Institute and many people on her journey to her new role, and continues to seek ways to give back to her community and help others.

Growing up, Douglas spent a lot of time with her attorney father, visiting his office and watching him litigate in courtrooms. She and her siblings, **Ray Howard '89** and **Heather Howard Simpson '93**, were strongly encouraged by their parents to study either law or medicine. "As I learned more about the contributions you can make to the community and society through a law degree, I got more excited about it," she said. She planned to be a public interest lawyer, working with children or young adults. Student loans directed her career choice. She clerked for the Honorable Damon Keith on the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Detroit, which she says

was the most wonderful year of her legal career. "It's amazing to be up close and personal to how the legal judicial system works." She learned much from Judge Keith, a champion of civil rights who had decided several landmark cases.

When her clerkship ended, she spent time in a law firm and then at Equifax, the credit reporting company. She questioned her chosen field and considered returning to school to seek a new path. "The jobs I had were either unfulfilling or I was unable to find my passion or reason for being in those roles," she said. Then she saw an available

Some of Monica Howard Douglas '90 Mary Institute Accomplishments

position at Coca-Cola, a dream job working in sports and entertainment. "It was a truly phenomenal job that came at just the right time." She applied and was hired, and her first negotiation was with her hometown baseball team: the St. Louis Cardinals. Just because she's a Cardinals fan doesn't mean it was easy: the negotiation was contentious and full of debate. Then she tackled an Olympics deal, and a Star Wars and Disney promotional package. She was in heaven, and her success kicked off her career at Coca-Cola.

Opportunity knocked from an unlikely, and less than appealing, source. Was she interested in moving to the warehouse juice side of Coca-Cola's business? She had met Jennifer Aniston and worked with LeBron James and his team, so transferring to this new line didn't spark excitement. "Everything in me said 'no,'" she said, "but then I talked to some of my mentors and got a really great piece of advice that I have relied on ever since: always take the path less traveled."

By taking these new leaps, Douglas developed unique skill sets that offered leverage for better positions later. The juice business provided her with valuable experience in supply chain, marketing, and manufacturing. She credits the job she had grudgingly accepted with setting the trajectory of her career. "The next time an opportunity came open it was a leadership role. A new, external woman came in who didn't know anything about the company; she reorganized and created this leadership role that was supply chain and operations. My name kept surfacing as someone who had the experience but I was very junior," Douglas said. Despite her junior status, she earned a trial run for the role. Douglas spent the next eight months building relationships and learning the business, preparing herself for the job she wanted. She earned the position and was firmly on the leadership track.

Douglas credits her mentors and other leaders with helping her find her way, and she recognizes the power of developing talent. The most gratifying part of her work today is "watching people grow into their full potential and unlocking doors to make sure that happens." After 17 years at Coca-Cola, she still enjoys working for a company that is connected to the community and

>> continued on page 18



Varsity Basketball MVP and First Team All Conference in 11th grade



Monica Howard Douglas '90



Varsity Basketball and Track all four years and Captain of Track Team in 10th grade



Varsity Field Hockey Captain, Team Missouri All-Star, and Second Team All State in 12th grade

01. The 1990 MI yearbook includes this image with the caption "Senior and star player Monica Howard takes the ball down the court."

02. Douglas' parents included this photo of her in action on the basketball court in their senior yearbook ad.

03. Senior photo of Monica Howard Douglas '90.

04. The 1990 MI yearbook includes this image with the caption "Monica Howard, our all star team player, leading the M.I. gators to another victory."

>> continued from page 17

01. While living in South Africa, Peyton (6) and Blake (4) became fully immersed in the culture and began to believe they were South African. In this picture, they tried to create their own African headdress after visiting a South African tribal village.

02. Amongst their many travels throughout Southern Africa, the family is pictured here at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa.

doing good, and that espouses values aligned with her own. She appreciates the platform to be able to accomplish goals she set when she was in school.

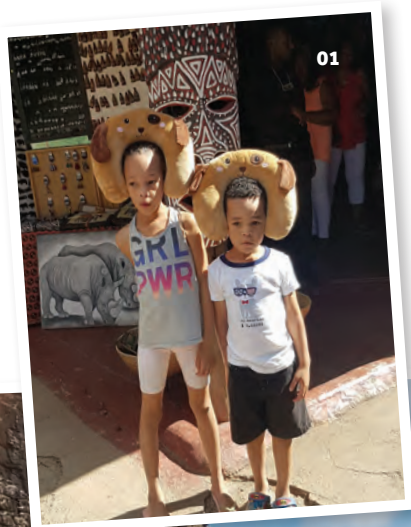
Mentorship happens outside of Douglas' office, too. Having grown up in a family that stressed the importance of giving back, she weaves this mission into her life. "I can't remember a time when we weren't involved in charitable work. That's who I am and how I operate. My passion has always been children, and I know I can make a difference there and impact change." She serves on the board of Cool Girls, an organization that works with girls from underserved communities from middle school through senior year to prepare them for life and college. The program addresses issues, helps participants through the college process, and partners with their schools to ensure success. "It's right up my alley," said Douglas. "I have been on the board long enough to see girls matriculate through the program and it's amazing to watch them grow and celebrate their success." She's also on the board of Junior Achievement USA, another organization focused on children and teens, helping them develop business, entrepreneurial, and life skills.

Douglas was one of four Black students to graduate with the Class of 1990 and she was taught by an all-white faculty and administration

during her 14-year tenure at the school. This lack of diversity impacted her experience at MI in such a profound way that she has made the pursuit of fairness, diversity, equity, and inclusion a part of her professional and personal purpose. She remembers hesitantly delivering her senior speech about the challenges of being a Black student at a predominantly white institution. Her classmates and teachers were very surprised but supportive and she wished she had the courage to speak up sooner.

While Douglas was reluctant to address the issues of racial bias during her school years, her parents consistently and persistently advocated for her and the rest of the Black students at MI and CDS. She feels so blessed and proud to have had the advocacy and involvement of her parents to protect, support, and guide her through those years. She vividly recalls seeing her father at the school on an almost monthly basis—barging in the headmaster's office, pulling teachers from classrooms, and showing up uninvited to the faculty meetings—in an effort to highlight and demand redress for issues of racial bias and stereotypes the students were experiencing and to push for more diversity amongst the faculty, student body, and administration. Douglas felt embarrassed at the time, as her father had gained a reputation as a troublemaker and she also noticed that he seemed to be the only parent engaging on these sensitive racial issues. Today, she understands the importance of his advocacy and she channels that courage and determination displayed by her father into her own efforts to push for change. She is happy to see the progress that MICDS has made in diversifying its student body, faculty, and curriculum, and she recognizes there is much more work to be done.

Besides her career and her non-profit work, Douglas stays busy raising two children with her husband, Derek, and explaining to colleagues on Zoom calls that the snoring they're hearing is Hudson, the family's overweight Boston Terrier-ish pandemic puppy. "He has snored his way through every call," she laughed. Hudson fits perfectly in the chaotic Douglas family, "no matter how many obedience schools we send him to, he does his own thing." Her nine-year-old son, Blake, and 11-year-old daughter, Peyton, have large personalities and they "got all the extremes of both of us. We are a wild house; there is always activity and drama and chaos." She is proud of her children, from Blake's intense curiosity whenever he hears a new accent on her business calls to



“Because of the class size and engagement of the teachers, I learned how to be a leader and how to use my voice effectively...learning how to network, build those relationships, form the friendships, and relate to the teachers is a skill I still use.”

MONICA HOWARD DOUGLAS '90

Peyton's work to overcome learning differences at a college prep school that reminds Douglas of Mary Institute. "Watching her has been inspiring to the rest of us," she said.

In her spare time, Douglas plays golf and runs, and reads voraciously in several different genres. She's a wine enthusiast, an interest stoked by four years in South Africa where wine was affordable, good, and a way of life. And she plays poker. Really, really competitive poker. When Douglas was at the law firm, she tried to find a way to connect with her colleagues. "All the movies are true," she said. "It's a grind for young associates, and it's a difficult introduction to being a lawyer." Some of the big influencers at her firm were poker players, so Douglas taught herself to play and invited herself to a game. After she won she was invited again—the other players wanted to win their money back. Ever competitive, she eventually entered a year-long game with monthly competitions where winners collect points. She earned enough points to enter the World Series of Poker and credits her work as a lawyer in building her poker face.

There's no poker face when Douglas talks about her time at Mary Institute. Her eyes light up as she fondly remembers May Day and Lessons and Carols. "I can still sing the hymns that we all memorized and knew so well," she said. She has been trying to make the famous Mary I yellow rolls known and loved by her fellow alumnae. She also recalls the day in her junior year when she and her classmates were allowed to attend classes on the CDS campus. "We used to sneak

before we were allowed," she confessed. She spoke of the excitement leading up to that day, and then feeling important as they walked over and sat in that first class with boys.

Douglas credits Mary Institute for equipping her for everything that was to come. "MI was harder than college in a lot of ways," she said. Gym class and athletics were her outlet, and she relished the freedom to run around and exercise during and after school. She still reminds herself to take time to move during intense days at work. The three-season athlete played field hockey and basketball and ran track. She said, "I learned so much through high school sports that I utilize today, such as how to collaborate, how to lead but still be on a team, how to play a role that is effective and impactful while trying to work as a team. I'm really competitive naturally which is why I competed in so many sports, but I learned how to harness that in a productive way, how to deal with wins and losses, and how to take direction from a coach who knows more than you do."

Douglas' professional life is unpredictable, and she loves it. "You have no idea what you're walking into every day," she said. "It sounds like making and selling soda is a very simple proposition but because we are one of the most recognized brands and in every country but two, you can imagine the issues that surface and the characters we deal with." She also enjoys the challenge of working with people from around the world and, when there isn't a pandemic, traveling.

Mary Institute ensured that Douglas was not only prepared for college, but for her career. "I learned how to tackle really complicated situations, how to organize my thoughts and my writing, how to be persuasive," she said. "Because of the class size and engagement of the teachers, I learned how to be a leader and how to use my voice effectively. I learned to work across a lot of different groups. I was different from a lot of the students at Mary I, so learning how to network, build those relationships, form the friendships, and relate to the teachers is a skill I still use."

From the teachers who made difficult subjects relatable and showed infinite patience and kindness, to the relationships that taught her how to lead and to work in a team, Mary I gave Douglas the tools she needs to make a difference in the world today, and it's clear she's making quite an impact.



01. Blake (9), Hudson (1), and Peyton (11), awaiting carpool for school.

02. Raymond Howard '89 and Heather Howard Simpson '92.

03. Heather Howard Simpson '92 and Monica Howard Douglas '90.