

*In 2014, the Southern Chapter of NJAMFT initiated a scholarship essay contest with The College of New Jersey MFT program. It is based on academic proficiency and a demonstrated ability in clinical application of systems theory. The project is an effort to support and encourage MFT students, as well as to encourage new therapists to connect with NJAMFT as new members.*

*Applicants are asked to focus on their skills, life experiences and the qualities they bring to their therapeutic practice. Debby Deroian earned this award in 2014, and has become an excellent liaison between her fellow students and the NJAMFT.*

Debby writes: When I entered my very first graduate school class two years ago, I looked around the room and saw so many young people. "Kids" as I thought of them, who had just completed their undergraduate work and were now going for their Masters Degrees. I remember feeling envious and wishing that I had the knowledge and insight back in my early 20's to know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I remember feeling that their youth was going to be such an advantage, as they did not have families and so many other obligations to juggle along with their schooling. But as I have gotten further in to my classes and studies of the counseling profession, I realize that my age is not a liability at all, but rather a great asset.



I believe going back to school and making this career change in my 40's will only be a great benefit to me. I have had so many life experiences at this stage, both good and bad, that I know will help me be an effective therapist and specifically an effective Marriage and Family therapist. For example, having been through a painful divorce and having to deal with my heartbreak, while being thrust in to the role of single mother to two young children through no choice of my own, were extremely painful experiences. But through this painful and tough process, these struggles led me to extreme growth and self-awareness, as well as gaining self-confidence about myself that I never had before.

Family therapy is so interesting and relevant to me with my recent remarriage and now experiencing so many of the challenges that blended families face; I would love to take my own trials and lessons to help other families. I believe that all these life experiences will allow me to help other couples and families to come out the other side of their own pain and become healthier, happier people in the end. I also believe I possess many qualities and skills that will help me be an effective therapist. For example, my journey has taught me more empathy and understanding for what other people are going through, as well as the realism that life is not black and white and no one deserves judgment. After spending years in jobs that have been completely unfulfilling, I am so excited to be working towards a career where I will enjoy going to work every day and even more importantly, a career where I can make a difference in people's lives.

I am so proud of all I have already accomplished in my schooling; maintaining a near perfect 4.0 GPA, being awarded two merit scholarships, all while successfully juggling a full time job and a demanding family life.

I'm so happy to be a member of the South Jersey chapter of the New Jersey Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. I know my membership will continue to provide me many opportunities for continued education and assistance in my future career. Thank you to the South Board for nominating me for the member profile!