



DISTRICT 84 TOASTMASTERS

SERVING CENTRAL AND NORTHERN FLORIDA

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Synergy



Beyond the Expected:

**A BOBBY BLACKMON
LOVE STORY**

Story by Debby Kerr-Henry | Page 5

A man wearing a black cowboy hat, a bright yellow short-sleeved button-down shirt, blue jeans, and a large silver belt buckle stands in front of a wall with a colorful abstract mural. He is smiling and has his hands in his pockets. The mural features bold, diagonal stripes in yellow, red, blue, and green. The background wall is made of horizontal wooden planks.

Beyond the Expected:

A BOBBY BLACKMON LOVE STORY

**Story and Photography by
Debby Kerr-Henry**

One might not guess that Bobby Blackmon owns three pairs of cowboy boots, and now a hat; but that's part of Bobby's story. To live so fully, one must love that which goes beyond the expected. Bobby loves all kinds of music, including jazz, rap, rock n' roll, and even country western.

This story started with a list of robust accomplishments (see Page 8). But the list is just a mere piece of this story. I wasn't sure what this story would be, as so much has already been written about Bobby Blackmon. But I knew it wasn't the list.

I sort of met Bobby at the D84 conference in 2019. I attended as a newly rejoined Toastmaster after a 30-year hiatus. I looked forward to watching a Table Topics contest for the first time. That year Bobby served as the contest master; and it wasn't until halfway through—when I wondered how he could do such a masterful job without notes and still remember the order and names of all contestants—that I noticed his auditory dependence on his iPhone. And that was when I realized Bobby couldn't see. I was fascinated with Bobby's abilities, but even more so with his powerful presence.

Later, coincidentally, Bobby sat across from me at dinner, but we had little opportunity to talk. Regardless, I knew I wanted to get to know this Toastmaster. So, a few months later, I reached out and asked if I could interview him for a project I was working on. Since then, Bobby ranks as one of my all-time favorite people.

A Bit of the Backstory

Bobby suddenly lost his sight at age five from cataracts and glaucoma, treatable conditions today, but not so much in the late '70s. His life changed in an instant, setting him on an unexpected path from the one his young mind had imagined while riding his Big Wheel around the grounds of Morning Star Baptist Church near his grandmother's home. Undoubtedly, he would grow up to be a professional football player, a Marine, and make a lasting contribution to his world. But all that faded overnight.

Bobby used to be angry over the unwelcome hand he had been dealt. At age 7 he wondered, "How am I going to accomplish my goals and dreams when I can't see?" But the more pressing question he asked was, "Why?

Why did I have to lose my eyesight?"

Bobby is a reflective soul, seeking clarity to questions such as How? and Why?, and so, by young adulthood, he had already landed in a place of peace and acceptance. Growing up in a domestic violent home, Bobby believes that losing his sight helped him to find his way.

“How am I going to accomplish my goals and dreams when I can't see?”

Bobby Blackmon, DTM

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Bobby loves to be outdoors, and often creates uplifting content with nature as the backdrop. Bobby believes in trying, knowing that sometimes things work out and sometimes they don't. But the important thing lies in the trying.

Beyond the Expected

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**Struggle has a way
of bringing forth
new strength.**

Bobby Blackmon, DTM

Mind Vision

“Do you ever get mad at God?” someone once asked Bobby while riding on a bus. “No,” Bobby said. “When I was younger I did, but when I got older, I understood that it kept me from a life that wouldn’t have been good for me. I was prone to violence. I loved to fight. It was my way of proving I was as good as everyone else. Because I couldn’t see, I (instead) got lost in books and my imagination. It saved me.”

In addition to his faith, Bobby believes in the power of choice and lives by what he has coined as “mind vision,” a philosophy that doesn’t need eyesight to view life positively.

“It is our choice how we see ourselves,” Bobby said. “It is our choice how we decide to take our life as it is. You have to play the hand that you’re dealt. We all have to do that. And whether it’s a bad hand or good hand, really depends on how we think about it. It depends on our mind vision.”

“Walking this path of understanding has not been and still is not always easy, but over time and many experiences, I have come to know that with the right attitude, struggle has a way of bringing forth new strength, and therefore should not always immediately be shied away from.” *Mind Vision*, page 5

The Gambler

These days, in addition to Toastmasters, Bobby loves to read, write, and work out; and he loves most kinds of music, including country western. The first album he owned was Kenny Rogers’

1978 *The Gambler*, with his favorite song being the title song. We both laughed at that admission. But it’s kind of suiting. “The Gambler” tells of a man on a train bound for nowhere who meets a gambler who senses the man is down on his luck by the look in his eyes. The gambler proceeds to give the man advice about how to play the hand he’s dealt.

He said, "Son, I've made a life
Out of readin' people's faces
Knowin' what the cards were
By the way they held their eyes

And his face lost all expression
Said, "If you're gonna play the game, boy
You gotta learn to play it right

You've got to know when to hold 'em
Know when to fold 'em
Know when to walk away
And know when to run

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Bobby resides in Tallahassee where he is an active member of four clubs: Early Bird, We Can Speak-Podemos Hablar, Uptown, and Transformation. Bobby proudly displays his three DTM plaques on the steps of our state capitol.



Beyond the Expected

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Bobby presenting “Turning your passion into your power” at a demonstration meeting at the City of Tallahassee. Photo by Ramdeo Seepaul.

And that’s just what Bobby has done. He has run the good race despite being visually impaired. And in the process, he has lived a life much deeper than even Kenny Rogers’ baritone voice. In addition to being the author of *Seeds to Unfolding* and *Mind Vision*, Bobby is also a songwriter, singer, choreographer, poet, and motivational and inspirational speaker. “A man who is blind can be blessed with clear vision that sees not only far and wide but also at great depth,” Bobby says in *Mind Vision*. You can learn more about Bobby at: wclackmon.com.

Love of Toastmasters

As for Toastmasters, Bobby joined April 1, 2016, and has loved every bit of his accomplished journey. Even after just completing his third DTM award last month, he reflected on how he never dreamed he could even achieve one DTM, much less three. But his story truly has nothing to do with his list of accomplishments, but everything to do with living life to its absolute fullest by doing what he loves to do—empowering people through his love of speaking.

Thank you, Bobby Blackmon, for your “beyond the expected” service to District 84, but most importantly, for being who you are. Your stellar example continues to make a lasting contribution to your world. That piece of your young boy’s vision is still on target. ■

Bobby’s Accomplishments:

- 1 Only Toastmaster in District 84 to complete all 11 paths since the roll-out of Pathways. He accomplished this in 3 years 8 months.
- 2 Completed 2 DTMs in 2020 (one in the Legacy Program and one in Pathways).
- 3 Finished a third DTM in January of this year.
- 4 Completed the following educational awards: 2017–2018: 3; 2018–2019: 6; 2019–2020:22; 2020– 2021:22 and 2021–present: 19
- 5 Volunteers at Gavel Clubs (a Toastmaster community outreach often offered in prisons) and Driven by Destiny, a women’s club at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Bobby understands how a person can develop a mindset that lands them in prison, and thus he has a heart for taking Toastmasters to people behind bars, empowering them to find their voice and build life-applicable skills.
- 6 Served as Area and Division Director, and currently serving as Club Coach/Mentor Chair.
- 7 Served as Club Coach, Club Sponsor and Club Mentor numerous times.
- 8 Focused on community building by planning and leading Division H’s float in the Tallahassee Winter Parade and the inaugural Jeopardy events in Division H and District 84.
- 9 Semifinalist at the 2017 World Champion of Public Speaking held at Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- 10 Division H Mr. Inspiration



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