The Shrader Family: NC State University’s Family of the Year
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I am not a traditional student, and my family isn’t very typical either. But that doesn’t stop them from being one of the most supportive and enthusiastic families North Carolina State University has ever seen. Family of the Year doesn’t even begin to describe them, but I have to start somewhere. They support me and my goals in every way they are able – and they do it wearing red.

I will be almost thirty years old when I graduate from NCSU next May. I’m not the oldest co-ed on campus, but there are quite a few years that separate me from the majority of my peers. It certainly isn’t how I intended to do things. I graduated from high school early and had big plans to go to college and start my adult life. These plans changed, like many do. I started my life, but I did it by becoming a mom.

Many years later, I am fulfilling my dream of finishing school, but I’m not doing it alone. I am now married to a wonderful man, Sam, and have three beautiful children, Cameryn (10), Carson (8), and Joanna (4). Deciding to go back to school was a hard decision for me. I would need to juggle my academic and work responsibilities with the needs of my family. I wasn’t sure if I could do it, but Sam encouraged me to make the leap and vowed to help pick up my slack.

Choosing what school to attend was the easy part. Of course it would be NC State. It was the only school that I applied to. As application periods starting closing, however, I began to get nervous. What if I didn’t get in? What if I wasn’t good enough? My husband
wasn’t worried, though. He was, and still remains, my biggest fan. On Christmas morning, months before my admission decision would be sent out, he gave me a present - a bright red NSCU shirt and matching cup. I gave him a look that said ‘what if I didn’t get in?’ “You will,” he assured me. “I know you will.” He has supported me from the first mention of college and continues to do so. He is determined to make sure I don’t miss out on anything during my time at NCSU, be it academic or social, and has encouraged me to take on leadership roles.

It isn’t just my husband in my corner, though - my kids couldn’t be prouder. When I broke the news of my acceptance, my house erupted in cheers! They immediately asked for red and white gear. The day I graduated from community college, they all surprised me at dinner by taking off their dress clothes to reveal their NCSU shirts underneath. They passed out stickers and taught everyone in the restaurant how to do the wolf ears. My youngest daughter learned (and began constantly chanting) the Red and White song in one week. They cheer on NC State in any sporting event, quarrel with their classmates about who is the best school in North Carolina, and the oldest two have already planned to attend (NCSU class of 2028 and 2030!). Whether we are exploring
campus, eating Howling Cow ice cream in Talley, celebrating at Packapalooza, or going to a football game, they love taking in all the sights of NCSU. This semester they can be found on campus with me many afternoons, checking out “all the cool chairs” in DH Hill or riding on the Wolfline.

What I haven’t said yet, is that before I had even thought about going back to school, my family wore purple and gold. My husband was raised in Greenville and he, along with six out of his seven siblings and in-laws, attended ECU, where his father is a professor. When I was accepted to NCSU, however, he became just as much a part of the Wolfpack Nation as I did! My husband proudly wears his NC State shirt to games, cheers for them in the stands, and tries his best to follow the singing (the four-year-old is definitely better). When his family questioned his change of allegiance (he attended ECU, but graduated from a smaller school), he proudly tells them that NCSU has contributed immensely to my life, and therefore his. He talks about NCSU’s academic excellence and commitment to their students and lets them know he is now a State fan for life!

It isn’t all fun, though.

There is a lot of sacrifice that comes with the path I’ve chosen to take – and not just on my part. I didn’t quite realize just how much time I would be giving up with my children when I was considering attending college. I am reminded quickly of my naivety when my youngest climbs in my lap and asks why I am always working on the computer. Or when I miss a great catch at my son’s baseball game
because my head was down reading through an accounting textbook. It is worth it, though, when I hear them tell me how proud they are of me - my oldest daughter especially. She understands how hard her dad and I are working to make this happen and that it is temporary and necessary. She tries so hard to let me know she loves me and supports me, whether it’s a special treat in my backpack or a sweet note left next to me when I fall asleep doing homework. I couldn’t do this without her, without each of them, behind me and cheering me on. They are why I keep going. They are truly the family of the year.