



GORDON KING/Yakima Herald-Republic

Jennifer Apitz stands with her son, Davis, as she talks with Superior Court Judge Jim Lust after being sworn in as a lawyer on Thursday.

Mother, Daughter, Lawyer

Single mom Jennifer Apitz credits her family for getting her through the tough times

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Being a single mom doesn't mean giving up the dream of a career. But it took seven years, a leap of faith, lots of hard work and family help for Jennifer Apitz to become a lawyer.

Holding up her right hand in the Yakima County Courthouse, the 27-year-old took the attorney's oath on Thursday. It was a big day for her, but in her heart the ceremony belonged to her family.

"It is relief and joy, absolutely," her mother, Pat Alvord, said proudly.

Five-year-old Davis Apitz, his eyes glued to his mother, watched as she was sworn in.

Nervous about being singled out from the 10 other people, she was given the oath by a former family lawyer, Superior Court Judge James Lust.

"I will fight for the repressed," she recited. "I will be ethical and honest." Those words mean a lot to her.

"It says all the good things

Continued from Page 1A

lawyers are supposed to be," she explained later. "Lawyers are getting a bad reputation. There is a lot of good and power there in the system. ... There's a real responsibility."

The Selah High School graduate knows something of responsibility.

After a year at Central Washington University, Apitz took a year off to have her son. Going back to school seemed an improbability, but she jumped in.

"If I would have sat down and did a budget and thought about everything it would take," she said, "I would have been too afraid."

She started back to school, received grants and student loans, hired baby sitters, took her son to day care and pushed on day by day — without child support.

It's like diving off a high board, she said. The more you think about the jump, the less likely you will jump.

Working and studying between classes while Davis was in day care, Apitz was determined to be home for dinner and bedtime for her son. Although she did not have much of a social life, she did have Davis.

She graduated from Central Washington University and Seattle University Law School with honors.

But she admitted she was lucky to have such a good support system in her family.

"I'd pick up the phone and say, 'I can't do this anymore,' and they'd say, 'Yes you can,' she explained.

Alvord jokingly said her daughter spends a great deal of

energy convincing herself and others that her family had a lot to do with her accomplishments.

"She has been the most fiercely independent child I've had," said the mother of four. "It's a relief. She had hit several different (obstacles) that could have stopped this day."

Culminating her worries was the fear that she'd fail the state bar exam, which must be passed in order to practice law.

She likened the exam to childbirth — the sense of anticipation, terror, and tears after it was over.

But she passed the test her first time, on Oct. 1. The first person she called was her mother.

On Thursday, she was modest about her accomplishments.

"We all have our cross to bear," she said, watching her son out of the corner of her eye. "I went to school with a lot of single moms."

Davis catches her attention as he balances on a silver footrest in the jury box.

"Mom look, no hands," he says, with an apple in one hand. She laughs.

"I did not plan on getting this far," she continued. "I don't know what to do with myself. Bills still come no matter what."

"And my school loans are frightening," she said, laughing. Alvord said she feels satisfaction for her daughter now that the struggle is almost over. Now all she needs is a job.

Apitz said she knows it will work out, because it always does. "I wanted to do something where I had control of my destiny, and being a professional was one way to do that," she said.

LAWYER/Son at Her Side