

From basketball enthusiast to music lover: Natalie Hall is a real renaissance woman

Denver Zoo General Manager Natalie Hall claims that if you want to know what she is like, all you need to do is watch the TV drama, *Gilmore Girls*. This show centers on the relationship between a thirty-something single mother and her teen daughter living in a small fictional town in Connecticut. The WB series explores family, friendship, generational divides and social class. She believes that the show writers got most of their dialogue from listening to Natalie and her 15-year-old daughter, Megan, interact.

Unlike the drama series, Natalie also has a son – Derek, who’s an 18-year-old constantly on the go as he finishes his senior year. Like many teenagers, he has a car, a girlfriend and sings in the school’s choir as well as plays lacrosse. After graduation, he plans to attend the University of Northern Colorado and major in music. Natalie jokingly said that she would probably see her son more often after he goes to college, as he’ll probably come home to have her do his laundry.



The family lives in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, a 22,000-acre master-planned community located 12 miles south of Denver. An older brother, who also has two children the same age as Natalie’s, lives nearby. The cousins even attend the same school. Her mother and other three brothers still live in Billings, Montana, where she

was born. She’s the youngest and the only girl in the family. “I should have been spoiled, but I wasn’t. I was pretty much ignored according to my mother,” she said. “She was tired from raising my brothers, I think.” However, Natalie remains close to her mother, still exchanging phone calls once or twice a day. She even counts her mother as one of her heroes. “She’s knows the answers to every question that I ask,” Natalie said. “Plus, she raised me and my brothers during a time when my father was not supportive.”





Never a “girly girl”

Even though Natalie considered herself a tomboy while growing up, one of her favorite toys was a Raggedy Ann doll. Her brother’s dog ended up eating the doll and destroying it. She laughingly claimed she needed therapy and that this incident was probably one of the reasons she’s not a “girly girl.” Even today, she would prefer to stay home with her brothers and watch football rather than go shopping with her sisters-in-laws.

Growing up, she played basketball. She stopped playing when she became engaged her senior year. But her love for the sport continues. A really great evening for Natalie would be to attend a basketball game to watch her favorite team, the LA Lakers, who has a string of championships that has scarcely been rivaled in the history of American sports. She would prefer watch them play on their home court, the Staples Center. One of her favorite books was written by the coach of the LA Lakers. In the book, *Sacred Hoops*:

Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior, Phil Jackson provides an inside look at the higher wisdom of teamwork. Filled with stories about Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Toni Kukoc and other members of the Chicago Bulls, *Sacred Hoops* reveals how Jackson directs his players to act with a clear mind; to respect the enemy and be aggressive without anger or violence; to live in the moment and stay calmly focused in the midst of chaos, so that the "me" becomes the servant of the "we."

Natalie believes this book is just not for sports fans, but that all CEOs should read this inspiring memoir and learn how to manage people.



If she could have lunch with anyone, Natalie would like to have lunch with Phil Jackson, too. “I’d love to pick his brain. He’s an amazing man,” she added. She would also like to dine with her dad, who died when she was a youngster. She jokingly added that she would just be happy to have lunch period, as she normally doesn’t get a chance to eat during work hours! And it was a surprise admission from someone that loves food. “If you put something in front of me, I’ll eat it!” Her favorite meals include cheese pizza, macaroni and cheese, ham and cheese sandwiches. “It’s all about the cheese!” she

said. Other favorites include sushi and Mexican dishes. However, there’s one food item she doesn’t eat – carrots. Natalie admitted that if she was on a desert island without food except for carrots, she would eat the dreaded veggie.

Family, dogs and music – some of Natalie’s passions

Natalie is also passionate about music and it’s definitely something she can’t live without. Her favorite entertainer is Martin Sexton, whose music is a mix of folk, jazz, blues, gospel and rock. People claim Sexton's songs inspire them to change, quit their job, go cross-country, follow their dreams, etc. Natalie said she like his vocal range, his lyrics . . . he’s just a good performer. “He’s so awesome!” she added.

While she loves music, Natalie doesn’t think she’s very musical and wishes she could play the banjo.

Her love of music may have started when she worked at Sam Goody, a popular music store in the late 1980s and early 90s. After working at the local movie theater, Natalie went to work as a sales clerk at the music store. She worked her way up to manager. She was then promoted to mall manager and was responsible for the highest volume stores in the Denver area. Later, she became the district sales supervisor to the Denver area. When the music chain was bought by another company, she left to work at a couple of retail clothing chains. She realized that she made a colossal mistake when she went to work at one company, and while job hunting on monster.com, she discovered the job at the Kibongi Gift Shop at the Denver Zoo. Natalie considers starting to work for KM Concessions as a high point in the last five years.

Since Natalie loves managing people, she believes she may have the ideal job. “It’s rewarding to see the young people that I hire grow and gain confidence while working at their first job,” she said. If she wasn’t working in retail, she would like to either pursue a career in real estate as she has a real estate license with a few years of experience or to work as an editor as she enjoys writing and proofreading.



When she’s not working, Natalie enjoys spending time with her kids. Megan shares her mother’s love of watching DVDs featuring family friendly television programming, such as the *Gilmore Girls* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and favorite movies, such as *Dirty Dancing* and *When Harry Met Sally*. And Natalie loves to sit and listen to her son Derek perform pieces on his guitar or practicing songs for the current musical he is in.



She also enjoys reading. One of her favorite books is the suspenseful thriller, *Thunderhead*, by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. The tale describes the search for Quivira, the legendary Anasazi Indian City of Gold, by a female heroine and her helpers, a handsome journalist and a leathery old cowboy.

With Megan competing on a competition soccer team, Natalie also spends a lot of time watching her play soccer. She attends her son's musical performances and athletic games, too. "It's all about my kids," she said.

The family dogs are an important part of Natalie's life. Charlie is a daschund, which is that extreme-looking dog with very long bodies, tails, ears and muzzles, but very short legs. Natalie said that she thinks Charlie looks and acts like her because he's stubborn and thinks he is the best. Gunner, a cock-a-poo, joined the family after Natalie stole him from her brother. She was in Billings visiting her family and went to visit her brother and his family and saw that they didn't have the time to properly take care of their dog, so she told her brother that she was taking the dog with her back to Denver. "I feel like I rescued him," she said, "and I'm sure my brother's family is happier."



Natalie with her brothers

after Megan graduates from high school. They plan to enjoy the island's lush vegetation, a product of its mild climate and frequent, but soft rainfall to appreciate her heritage as she has a few Irish ancestors.

Few people know that Natalie has a daisy tattoo on her lower back. She said the choice of location was the only place that doesn't age.

Natalie said that probably the craziest thing that she has ever done was to get engaged at age 16. While the marriage didn't work, she did have two wonderful children that make her life today complete.

While she's a single mom, Natalie laughingly shared that her perfect husband would be Justin Timberlake, who is an American pop singer, songwriter, record producer, dancer and actor. He came to fame as one of the lead singers of pop boy band 'N Sync.

Natalie describes herself as happy person, but she does get angry, especially when she gets bad service in retail operations.

Natalie shared that she hasn't been east of the Mississippi, except to attend a couple of trade shows. She looks forward to traveling to Ireland

