

Houston Zoo Retail GM Kathy Masid: A California girl turned reluctant Texan

B-o-r-i-n-g is how Houston Zoo General Manager Kathy Masid describes herself. She claims all she does is work and spend time with her family. So what's boring about that?

She has a job that she enjoys, and a family that she loves.

Kathy grew up in Eagle Rock, a suburb of Los Angeles, which she said was like a small town. For example, when she went to Catholic schools, she had some of the same nuns as teachers that her mother did as well as her brother and sister. She laughingly said that she had to live up to their expectations.

An expectation that was probably not hard for the self-proclaimed girly-girl. Kathy said, "I was not a tomboy. I don't like being dirty, and I still don't!" Her favorite toys as a youngster were dolls that came from Europe, which her great aunt gave to her.

Kathy described herself as a shy kid who was never in trouble as she didn't want to call attention to herself.

Her work background is varied. Her first job at age 11 was working in a

local Chinese restaurant where she earned \$1 a hour, but got a bowl of rice as a bonus. Both her brother and sister worked there too. After 3 ½ years, she had enough, and when her boss yelled at her, she finished her shift and quit. Even at that young age, she knew she had to finish what she started.

After high school graduation, she went to work at a Los Angeles-area bank where she met her husband, Dario, who also worked for the same bank. She continued working for the bank for the next 15 years while her husband went to work for a water park in food operations. He now works in the financial industry.

After leaving the bank, she opened a craft store with her mother. The store closed when she moved kicking and screaming to Houston after her husband accepted a job managing an area water park.

The zoo isn't Kathy's first venture in the entertainment industry. "When my husband was managing the food operations at a water park in the Houston area, he recruited me to work for a weekend - that job lasted 4 ½ years," she shared. Then she worked for various other retail stores. Kathy has been in the Houston area for 17 years.

Kathy has been at the Houston Zoo for almost seven years. She finds her current job as General Manager very rewarding be-



Her three daughters, (from left) Melissa, Jessica and Lindsay, are Kathy's pride and joy.



Kathy describes herself as the Mother Hubbard with her grandkids. The oldest is a girl, and the rest are boys.

cause SSA is family orientated. "It's a corporation that's big business, but is operated as a family business which cares about individuals." She added she likes working at the zoo. "It's like being part of a family, not only the SSA family, but also the zoo family, too," she said.

Kathy's family

Kathy and her husband, Dario, have three daughters, Melissa (27), Jessica (25) and Lindsay (22) and five grandchildren, all under the age of seven. "It's going to be great to have the grandchildren grow up together as my daughters didn't have the opportunity to see their California cousins all that often," she said.

When she has free time, she enjoys doing things with her family. She

loves to bake and decorate cakes. She's also a talented painter. Kathy claims she's not that artistic, but if she sees a design, she can paint it.

"I'm a home-body," she said, "My favorite holiday is the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas. It's all about family." However, family-time also includes quiet time with her husband. They both like to get away from it all by taking short drives around the Texas countryside or to the Gulf coast.

She may seem to be an easy-going individual, but Kathy has definite opinions about food. "I will not eat peas or anything that has mayonnaise in it," Kathy said. Her favorite foods are Mexican and fresh fruit. She shared that she was

I survived Hurricane Ike

When Hurricane Ike was threatening the Texas coast in September 2008, Kathy was in Las Vegas at a trade show. She said she stayed up all night to watch the Weather Channel and the storm's progress. "I was a nervous wreck, but I was able to get a flight home and join my family," she said. Hurricane Ike was the third most destructive hurricane to ever make landfall in the United States. Luckily, the storm system moved rapidly and did not linger over Houston, but many were impacted.

She shared that their house was the only one on their street that did not suffer any structural damage. Other damage included a destroyed fence and many fallen 150-foot pine trees. The family spent 18 days without power. Kathy said, "You don't realize how much you depend on electricity until you are without it."

"I would rather go through an earthquake than a hurricane. With an earthquake, it lasts around 30 seconds, and then it's gone. But with a hurricane, you spend time listening to the weather forecasters telling you about the coming storm and you panic, and stay panicked not knowing where to go to get away from the hurricane," added Kathy.

a fruit snob. "The fruit in Texas isn't as good as the fruit in California. When I was growing up, we would pick fresh fruit off the trees in our yard," she added.

She claims she's a California girl through and through.

With her life revolving around work and family, Kathy said she doesn't read much, but when she does, it's usually a book that's inspiring -- One that helps you be a better person. She's also not a big television watcher. "I have to be home to see a TV show," she laughingly said.

While commuting to her job, Kathy likes to listen to country music. She shared that she doesn't have a favorite performer. "If I don't like the song or the group, I change the station," she explains.

If she had a choice to travel to any destination, Kathy said, she would go home to California to see her mom and her family. "I'm the baby of the family and have an older brother and sister," she said. When asked about heroes, Kathy quickly said that her hero is her mother. She explains that her parents divorced when she was young.

“My mother had to turn her life around and make a living to support her children. She never spoke badly about my father. She made the best of everything. There’s nothing that stops her even now. She’s my best friend,” Kathy said.

Evidence of this close-knit family is also apparent when Kathy was asked if she was in the hospital, who she would like in the hospital bed next to her. Kathy promptly replied, “My sister! She’s an uplifting person, who laughs and giggles. She makes me feel good.”

When asked what

her perfect job would be, Kathy quickly replied, “I’m working it. I love what I do. There’s never been a day that I’ve regretted taking this job.” Before she had the job, she wasn’t sure about taking a job to work at a zoo.

When she was driving to her interview, she said she was asking herself why am I doing this as she wasn’t sure she would like working in a zoo gift shop. But her talents and skills must have been impressive as she was quickly offered the job. She remained on the job even though her first day at work was one of the zoo’s annual

free days.

Fortunately, this enthusiastic homebody was selected to manage the zoo’s gift shop, and is now the General Manager for the SSA retail operations at the zoo.

One of her job highlights included the time when zoo staff brought the baby elephant to visit her while she was working early one morning in the gift shop re-connecting computers that had been disconnected when Hurricane Ike blew through Houston. “How cool is that,” Kathy said.

Kathy claims she would never do

anything wild or hold a political office. “I’m a behind-the-scenes person. I don’t like the lime-light. I want everything to shine and be the best,” she said. However, she does wish she had the ability to stand up in front of groups and talk.

While Kathy may seem to be a low-key person, she said she does get angry when people don’t use common sense. “Everything can be done, if you stop and think about it,” she said.

Kathy may think she’s boring, but it seems like she also likes to laugh and have fun while going through life.



Kathy celebrated her 50th birthday in July 2007 with her family. Her husband, Dario, is behind her. Her mother and sister flew in to surprise her, her mother and sister are behind her to the right. Also attending the party were her three daughters and grandchildren as well as her son-in-law Jeff (Lindsay’s husband) and his parents.