

Opinion

The fabric of Bertie County since 1832

# A little bit about me ...

My name is Tonza Ruffin, and welcome to my new column, SouthernMomJD.

I am a single mother, daughter, and attorney living in Bertie County, a small community in Eastern North Carolina. Growing up I moved back and forth between the Bronx and Bertie County, so my personality is a little bit city and a little bit country (although I prefer the term southern).

After being back in Bertie County for more than 15 years, I have finally embraced all things southern! Just thinking about that makes me laugh because when I left Bertie, as a young adult, I vowed never to return. Now, here I am, sitting in my southern home, feeling extremely thankful.

My mother, who absolutely would rather be nowhere else besides New York City, convinced me to return. She was adamant that the area needed more attorneys who were dedicated to the people in the community.

As a single mother of two girls, I could not ignore the fact that my "village" was in Bertie County and I needed them if I was going to have any shot at raising halfway sane little girls while trying to develop my career as a litigator. So, after graduating from Georgia State University College of Law I threw everything I owned, including my two little girls, in a U-haul, and moved back "down south," as my northern cousins said.

Over the past 16 years I have evolved into the complicated human being that I am today. Fortunately, I am pretty excited about who I am! One more little girl has been added to my pack, and, we are all on a constant journey of love, peace, understanding, and joy as we navigate through this great blessing called "life". I am excited to be sharing my journey with you! I hope you enjoy!

A few facts about me:

My name is Tonza D. Ruffin.

I am the oldest of three children raised by my mother.

I am a single mother of three girls ages 27, 18, and 9.

I graduated from East Carolina University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a minor in Women's Studies.

I graduated from Georgia State University College of Law with a Juris Doctorate degree.

I have been practicing law in the state of North Carolina since 2000.

I am the owner of the Ruffin Law Firm in Windsor.

Prior to going to law school, I dreamed of being a Women's Studies Professor but life made it such that I became a litigator.

I am passionate about education and capital punishment.

I currently serve on the KIPP ENC Board of Directors.

I currently serve on the Center for Death Penalty Litigation Board of Directors.

I love to travel. Some of the places I have visited:

- France
- Italy
- England
- Greece
- Hawaii (I learned to surf there)
- Bermuda
- St. Maarten
- Puerto Rico
- Jamaica
- Mexico
- Various places throughout the United States of America

I love to write and began my SouthernMomJD blog in 2016. Check it out at [www.southernmomjd.com](http://www.southernmomjd.com).

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Email Letters To: [twhite@ncweeklies.com](mailto:twhite@ncweeklies.com)  
 Mail Letters to: P.O. Box 69,  
 Windsor, NC 27983



# The cost of children listening...

On any given, normal day, one would hope that as a parent, one's children are listening.

Not only does one hope they are listening, one desires that they obey.

Getting a 16-year-old to obey is much like getting a 5-year-old to obey. You tell them what you want them to do. Then you repeat it, and then tell them again.

By the time you request them to do the task you've asked them for the 19th time. One must use all the self-control one has not to scream, threaten and pull one's hair out.

This kind of parental behavior does not set the best example.

I can think of only one time, when by the time my oldest teen had finally done what I had asked him to do, I regretted it wholly the entire next day.

A few weekends ago, the day started innocently enough. He went mudding in his Jeep before work.

As he was leaving for his job, his dad asked him to wash the Jeep before the next day, which

was Saturday.

And I reminded him, again, for the millionth time, to take his laundry, neatly folded in a basket, upstairs and put it away.

The answer is always the same: "I will."

That night after work, he, surprisingly, obediently, washed the Jeep.

He then came home and immediately flopped onto the couch.

"I asked you to put your laundry away," I nagged.

"I will," he said.

"NOW," I emphasized.

With a moan of reluctance, he got up and said loudly, "OK!"

I came to regret this conversation.

I did not discover until the next day, that while washing his Jeep, unbeknownst to him, he was stepping all the while in a mess of motor oil someone had dumped in the car wash.

Granted, it was at night.

When he came home - if he had just stayed on the couch - we might have caught it in time.

He might have taken his shoes off had I not been so hasty in my desire for obedience.

But... Every... Single... Step... left a mark of grease on the hardwood floors, the stairs and eventually, the off-white carpet in his room.

Had it been a crime scene, there would have been blood everywhere.

I could trace his every move by the designs of how the grease played out across the floors.

It has been years since I had to pull out the Resolve cleaner to clean up messes made by children or pets.

Now, I had one of the biggest messes on my hands, and it was going to take more than Resolve to resolve.

It took me most of the next day to get the stains out of the carpet - while he was at work, not realizing what my insistence on his obeying had cost me.

My only saving grace was that the laundry basket was still full of neatly folded clothes.

Had he obeyed me entirely, I would have had to replace the carpet.

The lesson I learned through this whole process, beside what best cleans greasy carpet, is that while listening and obeying are important - paying attention is another thing entirely.

*Deborah Griffin is a Staff Writer for the Bertie Ledger-Advance and the Martin County Enterprise & Weekly Herald. She can be reached at [dgriffin@ncweeklies.com](mailto:dgriffin@ncweeklies.com)*



DEBORAH GRIFFIN  
 Farmlife  
 Wife

It is said that the cat chooses you, not the other way around. The cat in my life has chosen to trash even the slimmest of chances that we might have become friends.

I definitely did not choose the cat that lives at our house. My wife, Sharon, discovered a kitten outside her office. He was near death, so she brought him home and back to health.

The black spots against his mostly white fur are not arranged in a way that inspires cuteness. His green eyes are dull and demanding. His crackly meow sounds like he might be a heavy smoker.

Sharon assumed he would remain smallish. She thought his sickly start to life would leave him stunted. Now he's just a big, ugly cat that does not respect my role as head of household.

I'm not a cat hater. I have known scads of cats during my life and have bonded with a good number of them. Some may have been standoffish, but we at least achieved a reasonable level of

mutual respect.

I have tried doing that with this cat, but he rubs up to me only when he wants food. Still, I have endeavored to recognize and build upon any positive aspects of his presence and personality.

He's an outside cat-a definite positive. I was beginning to appreciate his rugged nature, which stems from what must have been a harrowing existence before he knew us.

He will come inside to eat now and then, but he prefers the outdoors. There have even been nights when temperatures dipped into single digits, and the cat resisted our best efforts to bring him inside. It could have something to do with catching squirrels off guard.

If cats are born killers, this one has graduated to serial. The lifeless gifts on the doormat almost always are missing their heads.

Opening the back door to see a headless adult squirrel sprawled on the mat is quite startling. Downright shocking is walking into the master bathroom to find the head of a rabbit neatly displayed on the bath rug.

Sharon and our three daughters clearly are this cat's chosen keepers. They can pick him up and

stroke his ears and rub his belly, and for them he will be a ragdoll. And he will purr and look over at me as if to say, "See how easy that can be?"

I have never fallen for that one, but I did pet his head during a recent visit indoors. Reaching out with a gesture of open fellowship, if not outright friendship, I rubbed behind his ears for a solid 25 or 30 seconds.

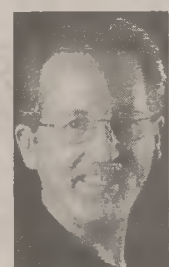
He closed his eyes and purred, and I thought we had made a genuine connection. When I stopped, he opened his eyes, flattened his ears, and connected his tiny switchblade with my left index finger.

Sharon and the girls would characterize the wound as a slight scratch, but the relationship has been slashed to the bone.

As I write this, I'm sharing Goldfish crackers with our loyal little dog, Max. He asked me to mention how, whenever the cat does come inside, he bullies our honest and trustworthy canine, and steals his bed.

Max and I may have a few minor disagreements of our own, but on one thing we agree completely: This is not our cat.

Contact Mark Rutledge at [mrutledge@reflector.com](mailto:mrutledge@reflector.com).



MARK RUTLEDGE  
 Today in  
 North Carolina

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Kyle Stephens  
 Group Publisher  
[kstephens@ncweeklies.com](mailto:kstephens@ncweeklies.com)

Leslie Beachboard  
 Staff Writer  
[lbeachboard@ncweeklies.com](mailto:lbeachboard@ncweeklies.com)

Michelle Leicester  
 Creative Services  
[mleicester@ncweeklies.com](mailto:mleicester@ncweeklies.com)

Thadd White  
 Editor  
[twhite@ncweeklies.com](mailto:twhite@ncweeklies.com)

Deborah Griffin  
 Staff Writer  
[dgriffin@ncweeklies.com](mailto:dgriffin@ncweeklies.com)

Jessica Mobley  
 Advertising Manager  
[jmobley@ncweeklies.com](mailto:jmobley@ncweeklies.com)

Jim Green  
 Sports Editor  
[jgreen@ncweeklies.com](mailto:jgreen@ncweeklies.com)

Lanny Hiday  
 Copy Editor  
[bertienews@ncweeklies.com](mailto:bertienews@ncweeklies.com)

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 ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE BERTIE LEDGER-ADVANCE, P.O. Box 69, WINDSOR, NC 27983.

CONTACT Us:  
 BERTIE LEDGER-ADVANCE, P.O. Box 69, WINDSOR, NC 27983. PHONE: (252) 794-3185 FAX: (252) 794-2835