

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Emily Ellis:

Performer Finds Her Calling Working CAP Cases

BY MARY BACON, ESQ.

Emily Ellis was born into a large Italian family, and Sunday dinners were a cherished tradition. Her grandmother's house was always bustling with aunts, uncles, cousins, and more pasta than anyone could possibly eat. Her family embodied the saying "La famiglia è tutto"—family is everything.

Ellis's father was a lawyer, and her mother was an entrepreneur, Parent Teacher Organization president, "mom-ager," and full-time mother to five. While neither parent was an artist, they both had a deep love for the arts, fostering a home filled with music, dance, and theater.

"The arts have always been woven into my family's culture," Ellis recalls. "I had the opportunity to try everything—violin, trumpet, piano, tap, ballet, jazz, and musical theatre."

By elementary school, she had already identified her greatest passions – family, the arts, and celebrations.

Ellis attended St. Viator's Catholic School alongside her siblings and cousins, where being part of a small school meant she could explore a variety of activities—student government, honors society, forensics, Math Olympiads, and cheerleading, to name a few. But it was theater where she felt most at home, losing herself in the magic of the stage. She performed in high school and community

theater productions of "Annie," "Little Shop of Horrors," "The Secret Garden," and "Brigadoon," among others, solidifying her love for performing.

While many of her friends went on to Bishop Gorman High School, Ellis took a different path, attending the Las Vegas Academy of the Performing Arts. The specialized arts-focused environment was a perfect fit. Her talent also ran in the family, making her a natural choice as a backup singer when her sister's band, fresh off signing a record deal with Sony and Columbia, needed someone. That experience hooked her—singing, dancing, performing—she loved it all. Determined to pursue her dreams, she began teaching tap, ballet, and jazz to children while honing her own musical skills.

Soon after, Sony formed a girl group, and Ellis auditioned—and made the cut. As a member of C's or Better, she danced in the same studios where Britney Spears trained and even graduated early to accommodate her time traveling with her mom between Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Though the band ultimately broke up, the experience left an indelible mark.

"Fulfilling that dream was a testament to my mother's love and dedication to her children," Ellis said. "She would, and still would, do anything to help her children achieve their dreams."

Ellis went on to earn a double major in theater and dance from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. After graduation, she immersed herself in the arts,



choreographing musicals for Signature Productions and Green Valley and Palo Verde high schools while also performing as a medieval princess—a dancing role—at Tournament of Kings at the Excalibur. Her passion for dance, combined with the entrepreneurial spirit she inherited from her mother, led her to purchase a dance studio, where she taught full-time while continuing her own education. Though dance was fulfilling, her heart still longed for music.

Determined to pursue her passion, Ellis started an emo-rock band called The Valentine, with her mother stepping in as her ever-supportive “mom-ager.” The band performed in Vegas, Los Angeles, and across the U.S., gaining momentum as the band played show after show. But after being exposed to the law through working at her father’s law firm, she found herself drawn in a new direction—law school.

Still, Ellis didn’t leave music behind just yet. The summer before starting at University of LaVerne College of Law, The Valentine landed a spot on the Warped Tour, sharing the stage with Avenged Sevenfold, Yellowcard, Bad Religion and other emo-punk icons.

“I looked the part, too,” she said. “Half my head was shaved, the other half was long, I wore all black, with combat boots.”

Her law school experience was anything but conventional.

“I’d spend all day in class, then come home and read my casebooks in the studio while the rest of the band recorded their parts,” she said.

It wasn’t the traditional approach to balancing law school, but it worked for Ellis.

By the time Ellis graduated from law school, The Valentine had signed with a Japanese record label and released their album, “Today It Begins,” through Grizz Rhythms. The band was gearing up for a tour across Japan when disaster struck—a tsunami forced it to cancel. With the tour off the table, Ellis returned to Las Vegas, where she clerked in federal court for several years before finding a law firm that truly felt like home.

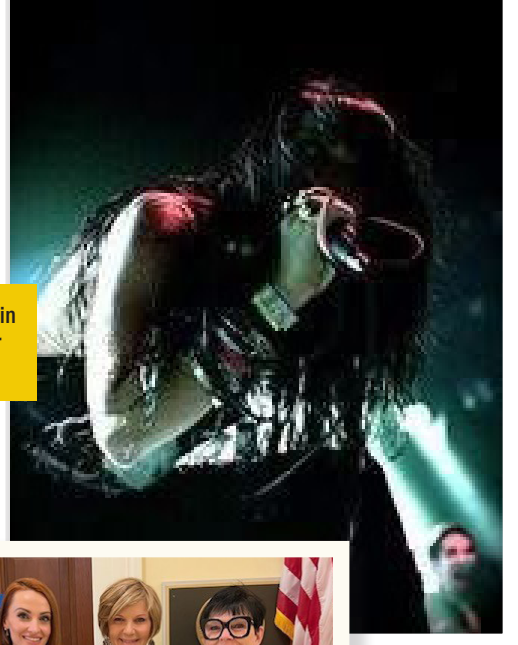
Today, Ellis is a shareholder at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, where she also serves as the firm’s pro bono partner. She dedicates half her time to complex civil litigation and the other half to coordinating Brownstein’s firm-wide pro bono efforts and engaging in pro bono matters for those most vulnerable in our community.

“CAP cases mean the most to me – I love being able to have a positive impact in the lives of my clients,” she said. “I always have at least one CAP case.”

Outside the office, Ellis is a busy mom of two and an active member of her community. When she isn’t training for a triathlon, she is an active board member for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and Green Our Planet, and she is excited to be one of the newest board members for the Nevada Ballet Theatre.

And if you ever run into Ellis, be sure to ask about her appearance on TLC’s “Say Yes to the Dress”—or the time a Las Vegas radio station asked her to write and perform a parody of Eminem’s “The Real Slim Shady” as Christina Aguilera. The song took off, even making its way onto European radio stations, earning her the title of one of Las Vegas’s “most intriguing people.”

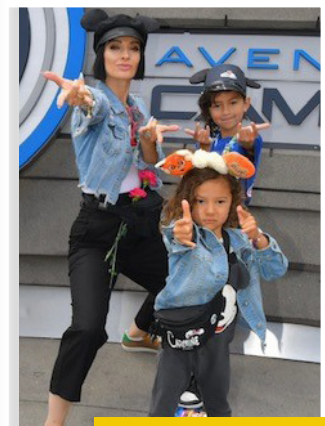
Emily Ellis performs in Los Angeles with her band, The Valentine.



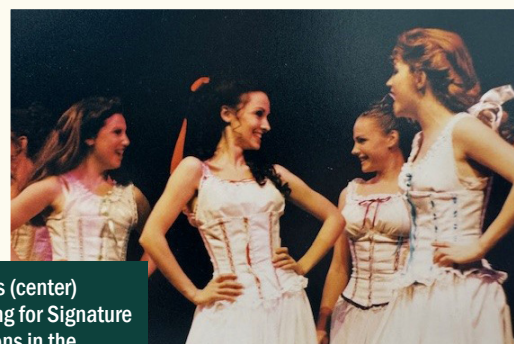
Emily Ellis (second from left), along with her mother (far right), meet with U.S. Rep. Susie Lee (D-Nevada) and Dan Hammer during the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation's March on the Hill in Washington, D.C.



Emily Ellis with her sons Oliver and Carmine.



Emily Ellis and her sons enjoy a visit to Disneyland.



Emily Ellis (center) performing for Signature Productions in the musical “Brigadoon.”