

# Brockovich more than movie

By Eric Adler  
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## Real story goes beyond the big screen

Talk to Frank Pattee, the real-life dad of the real-life Erin Brockovich, and he'll tell you nearly everything in the Julia Roberts' movie "Erin Brockovich" is true.

His daughter did wear flashy clothes. She is twice-divorced. And, as the movie depicts, she did, without any legal training, sign 600 plaintiffs in a case against the California utility PE&G, leading to the largest direct-action settlement in U.S. history: \$333 million.

But moviegoers also might be interested to know that not everything in the movie is true.

"Years ago I was Miss Wichita," says Roberts, playing Brockovich, "I thought it meant I was gonna do something important with my life."

Sorry, but Brockovich wasn't Miss Wichita. In California, she was named Miss Pacific Coast. As for Wichita, well, Brockovich (who grew up as Erin Pattee) is actually from Lawrence, Kan.

She's a 1978 graduate of Lawrence High School and, for a very short time,

attended Kansas State University.

"It was one semester. She majored in partying," said her dad, a former industrial engineer who retired after 20 years with the U.S. Department of Transportation. Brockovich's mom, B.J. Pattee, was the onetime head of the University of Kansas Alumni Association's magazine.

Although both of Brockovich's parents graduated from KU, their daughter had other interests.

"It was pretty obvious," Pattee said. "Based on her grades and what was going on, college wasn't for her."

Brockovich headed to Dallas in 1979 to attend Miss Wade's Fashion Merchandising School and graduated with an associate's degree.

"From there she went to the West Coast," her dad said. "Her older brother was living out there and working there. She was living with him."

Brockovich is the youngest of four children. Her older brother, Frank Jr.,

52, lives in Topcka, Kan., working as a distributor for Oroweat Baking Co. Her older sister, Jodie Knight, 50, is a former Joffrey ballerina, teaching and living on a horse ranch in Silver City, N.M. Her brother Tom died of an asthma attack in 1994 at age 38.

While in California, Brockovich met her first husband, restaurant manager Shawn Brown. They married in 1982 and had two children, Matthew, 17, and Katie, 15.

"She was a housemother," Pattee said. "He was on the West Coast a short time and then they transferred him to Reno."

The couple divorced in 1987. Brockovich met Steve Brockovich in 1989 in a Reno stockbroker's office. They married, but the kids didn't accept him. Just as the divorce was finalized in 1990, Brockovich discovered she was pregnant with her third child, Elizabeth, now 9.

The movie depiction of Brockovich's life picks up soon after. In Reno, she was

in a car crash (the movie shows L.A.). After moving to L.A., she hires the law firm of Masry & Vititoe in 1991 to settle her claims. (In the movie she received no settlement; in life she did.)

"She was going through some tough times," Pattee said. "Three kids. No child support. No alimony of any kind. She's on her own and how is she going to survive?"

The movie, of course, tells how lawyer Ed Masry (played by Albert Finney) hires Brockovich as a clerical worker.

"She was looking for a job, and they felt sorry for her," Pattee said.

The rest is movie and legal history. At Masry & Vititoe, Brockovich helped prove that a rash of illnesses, from nosebleeds to cancer, plaguing the tiny town of Hinkley, Calif., was the result of water and soil contaminated with chromium VI used by the local Pacific Electric & Gas plant. She rallies the townfolk. A lawsuit is filed.

Brockovich, who turns 40 in June,

went from earning \$800 a month as a clerk, to receiving a \$2 million bonus for her work on the case.

Hollywood got hold of Brockovich's story after co-executive producer Carla Santos Shamburg first heard it while at the office of a chiropractor whom Brockovich also sees.

In March, Brockovich married 34-year-old actor Eric Ellis. At Masry & Vititoe, she's involved in several new toxic contamination cases.

Although more successful than she could have ever imagined, her 15-hour workdays have taken a toll on the family. Brockovich last year sent both Matthew and Katie to boarding schools after she discovered they were taking drugs and had been chronically absent from school. The children reportedly are doing better.

"I don't know what it was, a stroke of the Lord or something when she started that job," Pattee said. "She was never an outstanding student, but she was a smart-enough gal. She got started on this case, apparently, she must have a steel-trap mind. Talk to her today, you'd think she had a chemical engineer's degree."