



20 years ago it was going to be...

"Just a Few Houses a Year"

Have you ever looked back and wondered if one question, thought or idea didn't happen at just that exact time... "Would it all have worked out anyway?" When I look back to the very first thought of McMichael Realty - now 20 years ago - I can't help but think about that question and have to just wonder,

"HMM...WOULD IT ALL HAVE HAPPENED?"

As I have taken time to look back over the last 20 years, I am realizing it's a lot to take in: The people we met, the properties we sold - and yes, the mistakes we made along the way - but, there's one constant we somehow got very right. This quietly became the foundation for which everything was built on, and since the beginning, it always has been... "It's Just Us. Helping Just YOU."

Most people don't know McMichael Realty started at my older brother's house one Sunday night over supper. On this particular night, my brother had the idea to go around the table and ask each person what they would like to do if they could do anything or if they could pick a second career. Scott and I had recently moved from Scott's home state of Kansas, where I was a 1st grade teacher and he was a Kansas State Trooper. I remember thinking about the question and when it was my turn, I knew exactly what my answer was - a Realtor. I remember my brother turning to me quietly and saying, "Well, why don't you? You could even do that part-time."

Have you ever slept on something and kinda hoped it was gone by morning, but knew once it had been said, it was now out there... somewhere... just waiting. I woke up the next day

thinking about what my brother, Steve, had said. I remember calling my Dad to ask him if he wanted to open a real estate company. When I was a kid, my Dad had always sold some real estate, on the side from his full time job, by selling his own subdivision lots; therefore, he held a broker's license. I don't even know what answer I was looking for, but obviously, you know the answer I received. We agreed and discussed how in our spare time we could just sell a few houses a year.

We opened our doors in the Spring of that same year, 2003, and in the same location we are at now. Dad had this building rented to a company making and selling handmade fishing lures. He told the gentlemen we only needed the front room, because we were only expecting to sell a small volume. Once we got everything set up, we started by driving around and approaching homes for sale by owner. We would take turns going to the door trying to get our first listing... any listing.

I remember the two of us sitting in the car saying to each other, "This will be the worst it ever gets!" as we took turns knocking on doors. There was a lot of knocking before we finally got our first listing. I think, the owner gave us this house to sell because we had stopped and spoke to him so many times. One listing became two and two listings became three. We thought, if we could ever get to the monumental number of 10 listings, then we had really arrived.

By summer, Dad was passing the office with his clients in his green truck, going around the block and heading back up to McDonald's for a coffee, because my clients and I had gotten to the only desk first. We didn't even have access to a

bathroom in our one-room office. By the fall of that first year, we were both committed full-time - now we needed more space. We took over more of the building and, thank God, the bathroom! Oh, and the green trucks... happened only by accident... when Dad and I realized we were both driving green vehicles, so we lettered them up!

Scott was working full-time at the Department of Natural Resources, but he was helping as he could by running signs around at all hours of the night. That next year, Scott decided to get his real estate license because we were so busy and he planned to help us after work since he carried our health insurance. Once he took a week off of work to take the real estate course, he gave his 2 week notice and that was the point of no return. My dad was worried that we had given up the only job between the two of us with full benefits and he was especially worried we would not be able to make a consistent income.

When Scott passed the Missouri licensing test to become a Realtor, Dad and I took Scott on his first listing. The house belonged to an older, widowed lady with a bit of a language barrier. I can still remember Scott packing most of his desk to put in his new briefcase, right down to the stapler. Dad and I usually traveled light and only took an interview folder of information and forms for a new listing. Scott was eager and seemed over prepared, so we let him explain the listing contract to this new client. He was taking care of the client and explaining his new found knowledge when I realized he was only on the first page after about 15 minutes - there were six pages to that particular contract in those days.

Dad and I both wanted to help Scott as we could tell he was getting more and more nervous, so we looked at each other and excused ourselves from the kitchen table and walked a few steps out onto the back deck. Quite frankly, it was not going so well, and we could not watch anymore and keep our composure at the table - we needed some relief.

Dad and I could hear this sweet lady saying, "We go to court?" over and over in broken English. The clearer Scott tried explaining the contract to her, and all the possible outcomes,

the worse it got. She now started repeating, "I no go to court. I just want to sell my house!" Out on the deck, Dad and I were laughing so hard at this point, I was in tears and we were trying to keep it down so they did not hear us through the sliding screen door. Scott had finally explained to her that she was not going to court, but signing a listing contract.

On the truck ride back to the office, Dad and I couldn't quit laughing, and we tried to quit for Scott's sake. To this very day, all one of us has to say is, "We go to court?" and it brings us right back to that day with uncontrollable laughing. It was an appropriate welcome to McMichael Realty and the briefcase was short-lived.

We worked late at the office frequently and people would often see the light on and come in to conduct real estate or just visit. Reid Millard, would stop in when he saw our lights on and chat often with words of encouragement. We were just up at the office trying to catch up and felt we couldn't hire anyone because that would slow us down. There were many a transactions negotiated well past 10pm, because we were just going to outwork everyone else. Looking back, we did what we had to do or better said, we did what we loved to do, but it did take a toll.

Working hard, along with laughing a lot, became a part of everyday work. About 3 years into our business, we had our first child, Gavin. Combining a new baby with the amount of hours we were putting in... I still don't know how we did it. Gavin came to work with us a lot his first year and we still pulled all nighters. I remember letting a client know one night around 10pm that we would be dropping off posters outside their home sometime in the night and we didn't want them to be alarmed. I don't know why I remember this particular instance, but Gavin was in his backward facing car seat at 5am as we drove down Hwy. 94 to deliver those posters.

Now, I have to tell you about the time Scott went out of town to Colorado. Dad and I had taken for granted that Scott now measured the outside of all the houses for the square footage total. We were at a new listing, on this massive front porch, when we got our tape measurer stuck in between the boards



of this porch. Dad and I pulled and negotiated that tape, but the more we moved it, the more it became on its side, sliding down between the boards even more. Having a 20 foot tape, with not much of it visible, is a problem. So there we were, in the heat of summer, on our hands and knees, sweating through our clothes - STUCK!

Finally, inch by inch, we wedged it out with Dad's pocket knife. Once it was out, we couldn't even extend the tape back into its holder! We just wadded it into a big ball as fast as we could - like we just needed to get it out of our hands - and threw it in the bed of the truck. I think we both wanted to wrap that tape around each other's necks before we finally got it released. Quite frankly, we looked like complete idiots more than once, but hopefully you all didn't notice too often! When the owners commented on how long we were outside measuring, we just smiled and acted like all was perfect.

I will tell you this, we worked as hard as we could, we laughed a lot, but it never got better than when it was just the 3 of us starting out.

I think that's part of why sharing our 20 years causes such emotions for me. When I think of those past years - each and every time - the same emotions, on cue, in the same order, come over me. First, I get a huge grin. (I say grin very purposefully, because it's not a smile but a grin with a bit of foreboding like something more is to come. It's more complicated than a smile that can put a sweet closure to a conversation) Secondly, I feel a deep breath that lets out with a...Whew! (We really have seen it, been there, done it, and we just sold the heck out of it!) Lastly, I feel my heart warming, with a small lump in my throat where I have to catch my breath. That one, that one, takes me back to thinking about

each and every one of YOU.

You all just amaze me. I have to stop, smile, shake my head and laugh just thinking of all of YOU!

THE - PLACES - YOU - HAVE - TAKEN - US!

From generational farms to junk yards; from bomb shelters to crawl spaces lined with canned food; from blufftops to springs; from Sunday Open Houses 2-4 to wearing masks to enter; from final walk-throughs to closings, from being chased by a peacock to getting bit by a dog, from weddings to widowers, from children to bigger houses, from lists of wants to not even knowing what you want; from walking away to driving down long lanes; from tough negotiations to easy ones; from thinking you would never get it to owning it; to wide open spaces to downsizing; from starting a new life to driving away from one.

We have done it all... Right with all of YOU.

All of YOU are the ones we grew with, learned lessons from and shared a part of our lives with and considered our closest friends while we shared that time together. I've cherished and enjoyed every last one of YOU, and yes, even the tough ones.

Looking back at all the people we have met and all the different personalities - I am so amazed and I've probably learned the most from the ones of you that were tough on us. Sometimes, we may have deserved it and sometimes, we didn't. I know people say, "You can't make everyone happy." - but we sure tried. So, when writing this article, I also wanted to thank the people that - for one reason or another - were just tough. The tougher you were, the more I tried. Scott has pointed this out to me, over the years, and helped me realize how working harder can just aggravate a delicate situation even more. He has taught me the skill of just sitting back and letting things breathe. Dad taught me there are many ways to look at any given situation and just as right as I may think I am... the other person thinks they are equally as right. The experience I have gained over the past 20 years is something you have to live through one sale at a time. Our Team has done over 2,200 transactions with all of YOU and because of that, I have gained a quiet confidence. We have done a lot

more right than we have done wrong over 20 years and that is why we are still in business, but I will admit that sometimes we just couldn't see through certain situations.

A story that comes to mind is a client we had wanting to discontinue listing their house with us. I can't really remember what went wrong, but we asked the seller to abide by the listing contract and keep it listed. I think he was tired of us, and we were tired of him. Well, that was not the smartest choice for us to make. As per the contract, the Seller can decline showings, which he did from then on. You're going to see how I learned - You can be right, but still be wrong.

When the listing was over, he returned our sign and lockbox to the front porch of our office that very same day. Weeks later, when we were opening that lockbox to use on another property, all this Monopoly Money came flying out at us. I don't know how he fit that much toy money into the door of that lockbox, but he did. I didn't laugh on that day, but looking back now... I actually laugh about it.

One of my all time favorite movies is Roadhouse with Patrick Swayze. There is a part in the movie when he is explaining to a group of bouncers for a Texas Roadhouse bar that his number one rule is to be nice... be nice until you can't be nice anymore. Over the years, I have learned to keep my emotions out of transactions as much as possible, because I need to be the "calm." It's kind of like a Pitch Game when you have a hand, with enough good cards plus junk cards, that is referred to as a "deep hand." Having a deep hand and knowing what to do with it takes experience and that's what we all gained these past 20 years. (Okay, I just realized, I mentioned a bar scene and a card game all in one paragraph, but if you have watched that movie or played Pitch, I think the analogy is quite accurate.)

I am always watching, listening and just striving to do better, and so I watch all kinds of professionals in various industries. There are some great ones here in the Jefferson City area, but there are two people for which every time I encounter them, I am simply in awe of their people skills and how they have mastered their fields.

The first is Rusty Drewing of Rusty Drewing Automotive which I met long before he came to do business in Jefferson City. I met him late one night, coming out of the Columbia dealership right after he and a small group were locking the doors for the night. He flagged me down - I was really not in the mood for a car salesman - and after I told him I was just there to look at the outside of a vehicle I saw online, he asked me to pull over. (I'm picky about black paint and swirls.) That day, my engine had locked-up and Scott was out of town for a week with our son at Boy Scout Camp. That put a massive amount of work on me and I was looking in a vehicle my mother loaned to me - oh, and it was getting close to 9pm. All he knew was that some lady was driving through his lot at 9pm with my 3-year old daughter, Payten, sleeping in the back car seat, all of which looked like a shipwreck. He unlocked the business, which I begged him not to do and in 15 minutes told me to leave my car, go ahead and take the other vehicle home and we would talk in the morning. I didn't know who he was and he didn't know anything about me but my name or my circumstances, until I briefly told him about my terrible day. (He did tell me later he had Googled me at some point.)

Payten and I had not eaten anything, so we stopped into a restaurant to eat before returning home. Crawling into bed well after 11pm, I looked down and my phone and Rusty Drewing had texted me earlier that night a very nice message hoping Payten and I made it home safely and said to keep the vehicle for the week - we could discuss it once my husband got back into town. We bought that vehicle and have purchased 3 in total from his dealership since and I tell this story often.

The second is Tom Riley of Riley, Stingley and Brazas Attorney of Law. Every business needs a legal consultant and real estate companies need to consult a lawyer when transactions need legal advice. Tom reminds me how everyone needs someone on their side that can shoulder what they cannot. He is the epitome of control and has a true need to find right with a quiet tone and ease until, like in Roadhouse, you just can't be nice anymore. He is factual, truthful and has a way of making sure the truth gets out there in a carefully designed order to tell the real story. He's top of his game, and he likes fighting with facts and truth.



Here is what I had these two have in common and it's really three simple words:

"I've got this." When I am needing service in any industry, it doesn't have to be as serious as needing legal advice, I just need someone to take over and let me know "They've got this." Experience in any industry just trumps all else and it can only be gained through time and volume - there's no shortcut. Once you have it, I believe - just like with Drewing and Riley, your clients can feel it too. They know you have got this because you have been there many times before. As the McMichael Team and I have grown, we have gained a quiet confidence and with our team's experience behind us, I feel the, "I've got this."

Running a business is not all rainbows and sunshine. We were only up and running a few years, when the recession of 2008 hit, and we had just had our first child, Gavin. Those years were just scary to see everything change and the whole industry weaken to the point of disintegrating complete companies. We just kept our head down, pulled frequent all-nighters and made one listing look like three. We have never had a business plan or any idea where this all was headed. Maybe our ability to change and adapt was more important than a precise plan.

Ken Adamson, with then Central Bank and now Jefferson Bank, would have appreciated more of a cushion during those times, I'm sure. Any business would be flat lucky to have someone like Ken quietly in the background. We are more than lucky, and I do mean pure luck, that we have had a person dedicated to caring not just about our business, but also dedicated to caring about us. Ken has given us pep talks when we needed a boost, celebrated the good times with us and knew when to slow us down to rethink something. He has always been exactly right, but he has the skills to gently and graciously let us figure it out for ourselves and never said, "I told you so." He has been like a partner in our business and we value him like no other.

In Matthew McConaughey's recent book, Greenlights, he talks about how he didn't always know who he WAS, but he

knew who he WAS NOT, and from there he could find who he was going to become. That speaks to me on all levels of my life. I have learned not everyone will always be happy for your success, but when you know who you ARE NOT, then you can keep on track with who you are becoming.

I have never felt we ever arrived or made it in business - there is something in me that gets up every morning and wonders if this will be the day I don't work hard enough. I know that sounds strange, because we have been successful and spent a decade among the top 3. If you would say to me, "You've been very successful." I would, seriously, never answer with a simple, "Thank you" - but shrug it off with some off-handed comment and then think I need to work harder. I can tell you our stats and be proud of them, but they never have made me feel like they reserved a spot for me somewhere.

Many of you have heard me say many times how I don't want my kids working at McMichael Realty, because I wanted them to go find their passion, not mine. About a month ago, Payten, who is 9, was in the office with me on a Saturday and walked up handing her business card to clients I was seeing off and handing my business card to. These business cards were made for her a few years ago as a joke around our office, I had forgotten about them. She kept standing beside me and would not go on, when I kept nudging her to move - that it was not the time. She was not moving and they left with a business card from an unlicensed, 9-year old, Realtor.

And then there is Gavin, my 16-year old, who I have always thought would be an engineer, or - in the back of my mind - maybe a lawyer, because he's so good at arguing. He recently mentioned if he becomes an engineer, he doesn't think that could lead to also being an entrepreneur. I have never even used the word, entrepreneur.

Who knows what the future for the next 20 years will bring. It might be a fiery, young blonde running our office with us sitting back watching, laughing and living through all the mistakes we made all over again. Maybe the entrepreneur in our son will start something entirely new. Either way, it will continue to be - It's Just Us. Helping Just You.

Over the past 20 years, so many people supported our business; from builders to developers - which we have life-long bonds with - to our colleagues in the real estate industry, but especially the people who have worked with us in our office. Every single person gave us something that has helped us get to this milestone. I have been extremely lucky to work with my husband and my dad everyday for most of those 20 years.

Scott, you have become my right hand and I yours. I am the more outgoing one, which can lead to more glory or criticism, but you are the steady one keeping me going and standing me up again telling me to "Go get it" ...You are my biggest fan. I get asked all the time how Scott and I can work so closely together in our business and still go home together happy, and to answer that question is very simple - we just get along. Sure, we have been through growing pains, but they always lead us back home. You are my home. We've learned to keep people around us that appreciate our hard work and contribute to our lives. We ride through life with determination and equal work ethic and it has been the extreme pleasure of my life to just be with you each day learning from your strength, grace and kindness.

Dad, you agreed to journey with me on this wild ride and just said, "Yes" 20 years ago. Since you were in a different phase in your life when we began, you were able to teach us how to only worry about us and not our competition. You taught us that competition is good, because it means properties are moving and there's plenty for everyone that is willing to work hard. You also taught us to always be humble enough to drink out of another man's thermos, even if you don't know who that man is. (I'll write about that one in the next magazine issue but Dad and Scott are laughing.)

Some of the things I learned from working with you: "One bird in the hand is better than 2 birds in the bush" ...Ponder that one for a while, because it was said before presenting many offers, and after 20 years, he may be right. Via my Grandmother McMichael, and passed down through my father, "Every dog shall have their day." ...Everyone gets to have their time in the limelight.

Most of all, thank you for letting me make mistakes in business that I could grow into who I needed to be. The note you left on my desk on my birthday after our 1st year in business goes ditto for me. It read, "Kris, there is no one I would rather be in business with. Love Dad"

The three of us will always be the McMichael Team - even as we transition into the next 20 years. Together we're a bit of all the best: Wisdom that could only come with age and experience. Quiet confidence that could only come with self-knowledge and self-worth. A driving force that could only come with a fear of never being the best you could be. All of those wrapped into one...well...

All of these have made one
hell of a McMichael Team
which got us here,
to 20 years.