

Interviewee: Julie Bailey
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Worcester Women's Oral History Project

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Abstract:

Julie Bailey was born in Lancaster, Massachusetts in 1974 and attended University of Miami and Colorado State University. Julie began to work for a couple of veterinarians and animal clinics, then found herself volunteering at the UMASS Memorial Hospital in the child life program. It was at the UMASS Memorial Hospital that Julie realized she could not face children day-to-day and not get emotionally attached so she decided to become a veterinarian. Julie currently resides in Clinton, Massachusetts with her son, Benjamin, and works at Becker College as a Director at the Lenfest Animal Health Center. In this interview, Julie discusses the struggles she faced applying for colleges, being divorced and raising Benjamin as a single mother, and overcoming an eating disorder. Julie elaborates upon the importance her family has played in her life as she faced all these difficult challenges, and she gives advice to women of Worcester, and also to students looking to earn become doctors of veterinary medicine.

SH: So we can start with the basics, like where were you born, where you grew up?

JB: I grew up in Lancaster so only about 20 minutes away. My family was from Clinton so just one town over so we're originally from the area.

SH: Do you have brothers or sisters?

JB: I have 2 sisters, older and younger.

SH: Did you have both parents growing up?

JB: Yup, my parents are still together. They probably got married in [19]69 so my parents are probably going on for about 45 years. Yeah, I think 45 this year.

SH: Wow, that's great! Are you married yourself? Do you have any children?

JB: I'm divorced, yup I am. I have a son, he's 9, his name is Ben [Bailey]. And then I'm very good friends with my ex, his dad. But we have been divorced for probably about three years.

SH: Where did you go to school, where did you go to college?

JB: I went to U[niversity of] Miami for undergrad in Florida, then I went to Colorado State for vet school.

SH: What made you go to those?

JB: Why not?! [laughs] I guess I knew I was going to go to college and grad school, you know, I mean I knew I would probably do both. And I loved to scuba dive and I was interested in marine biology, so that's probably what made me head to Miami and then I love to ski and I knew I was going to continue to be a broke student for a lot longer [laughs] So why not go ski as a student? So it was more of my interest in the area and just knowing that I was going to be a broke student so I might as well be a broke student where I would love being you know [laughs] And I wanted to get away and travel and try new things.

SH: That's cool!

JB: It was great, I loved it!

SH: Did you face any challenges being a woman in general, like going to school or just from your upbringing. Was there any specific things that tried to bring you down?

JB: My guidance counselor in high school certainly tried to bring me down. She was a good person but at the time I think discouraged me too much based on just grades, you know, so I was not an "A" student in high school. I didn't like high school [laughs], you know? I liked my friends, I liked sports, and I didn't like all the different subjects...

QW: Sounds like me...

JB: ...I was terrible at English and history. Terrible! I think I got an "F" at one point [laughs] and so I was just very good at math and science. I was good at that and there were things that I was really terrible at so my guidance counselor said to me that she didn't think I was cut out for college and that I should think about some junior colleges and I said to my parents what do you think? They said "Don't talk to her and just apply to college." So I just applied to the colleges that I wanted to go to and I was accepted. Once I got to college I loved school because you got to pick what you wanted to study and nobody was saying to you, "Okay, you need to try to be good at everything," when I knew I wasn't good at everything [laughs] Not everybody is good at everything, our brains don't all work the same way. [laughs]

SH: Yeah exactly. So your parents were always supportive of you going to college?

JB: Oh yeah, my parents were very smart. My older sister is a civil engineer and then my younger sister went into like restaurant management so we all went to college. My

parents did not go to college, you know, but they were determined to give us all the chance to go to college so when we applied it was us. My parents weren't the ones filling out the applications, researching it. They definitely encouraged us to do it but they didn't do it for us. It was on our own.

QW: Very independent?

JB: Yeah, we had to be! They never did it so you know they had nothing to go on, they weren't computer savvy. My mom now is more electronic savvy than I am [laughs]. She's got the I-whatever long before I do but back then that wasn't the case. She was at one point she did like payroll and stuff, but she was typing on the regular typewriter at home doing her job [laughs]. So people weren't just home on-line going, "Oh how does my kid get into college, how does my kid get financial aid?" So it was something you more did in school at that point with your guidance office and things like that, whereas now I think you can do it more from the internet.

SH: Did you always kind of have a clear idea about what you wanted to do, like with your career?

JB: No! [laughs] I definitely knew math and science were my strengths but I did not know what I wanted to do with it. I know I started out as a marine biology major in college. I realized I was really pretty terrible at blatant memorization of some things [laughs] So you know marine biology just had a lot of like genus and species and really words that were just not clicking with me and I realized that this is not really my strength in science. I got chemistry easy and I got to biology easy but I didn't get some of the other stuff. It just wasn't coming naturally to me at all so I found myself gearing more towards medical so I thought about nursing. I actually switched my major to nursing for a really short time [laughs] and then I said no I don't think I want to do that, I switched to just a pre-med major so that was a broad major that you could do a lot of things with at Miami and not to be pre-vet or pre-dental or pre-med, you just were pre-med and you were prepared for any graduate school program. So I ended up doing that...so I probably was that by the end of my freshman year and stuck with that. But even after that, **I didn't know after college that I was going to go to vet school. I went and worked for a couple of vets, I worked with a large animal vet, I worked on a farm. I worked for a small animal vet clinic. I worked at UMass Memorial doing some volunteer work, doing the child life program kind of going between the human side and the vet side, trying to figure out which I would be better at. I loved the human side but I realized I was probably just too sensitive for that and I got so attached to the kids that I was working with and I didn't think I was probably the right personality for going into human medicine. I would've gone into pediatrics, that was definitely what I loved [laughs], but then I realized that would probably be too emotionally hard for me. So, it was hard being a vet too but it was something I thought I could handle better.**

QW: At least they can't talk to you...

JB: [all laugh]...they can't. But, they've got owners that do! [laughs] And so you definitely get really sad, you know, because of the attachment to the owners and their pets but it is different than the human side.

SH: So like has it been easy or hard to balance like having a son, when you were married, and your job. Was there ever like a disconnect in how to make everything work as one?

JB: I think it's tough. I mean I think growing up with a mom who was mostly home and then being a mom that clearly works full-time plus – and I did emergency for several years, I was doing overnights and weekends, you name it...holidays. This is the first set of holidays that I'll be off for every one of them and that's in twelve years [laughs] you know so it's been hard sometimes, but I definitely parent with somebody who is very supportive. I have parents that are very supportive so when you grow up and have children where you grew up it can be easier if you have a lot of contacts and connections still with family and friends. And I have really close family and friends so I had a lot of people to lean on and my parents are now retired they can jump in and get Ben off the bus whenever I need them to [laughs] and things like that. My son's dad works very close to home and it's a family business so he's had a lot more flexibility than me which helps me so...

SH: Do you like having a job? Or would you want to be home if you could?

JB: Oh no I love having a job, yeah, there's times where you would like to stay home every day [laughs] or the week, but no I absolutely love having a job.

QW: Do you ever bring Ben [Bailey] in to see...

JB: Yeah! Yup, Ben [Bailey] has probably seen most of what I do. He hasn't really seen the emergency side of what I do, but he has definitely watched me do surgery and he's been to most of my job. He's pretty aware of it.

QW: Has he taken an interest in it or is he kind of just like he doesn't really know...

JB: Yeah he's definitely all boy and all sports [laughs]. His interests are definitely deck hockey and he loves [laughs] to ski with me, and he goes to play deck hockey, but no he really hasn't been a kid to say I want to do this when I grow up but he loves our pets, you know, we have a bunny and we have two dogs and he really loves our pets. And he really because of me understands the value of pets in a family. So like our bunny just had bladder surgery that I did a couple of weeks ago. And you know it's not every day that a nine year old really understands that your rabbit needs bladder surgery and that mom's gonna do it and that we know there's risks and that we know things may happen but we're pulling for him you know so, he definitely gets it.

SH: Is there any like community service event at all or do you like volunteer?

JB: I definitely do a lot of shelter rescue stuff and when I was young like I said I did more on the human side you know getting into college with kids. Now it tends to be more of shelter rescue stuff. I would really like to get to doing more with kids as Ben gets older I could see myself going back and doing the child life program again and because I do kind of miss that, that part of it. But no I can't think of...I'm definitely involved with SMART [Specialized Medical Assistance Response Training], which is our program response to disasters you know, so I have to do some disaster work, I went to the tornadoes in MA a couple years ago, we went to Hurricane Katrina, things like that, so...

QW: The tornado, was that the one in Wilbraham, near Springfield?

JB: Yeah, near Springfield.

QW: That's where I live!

JB: Oh yeah! We went down there and did you know like a mass clinic where people could bring animals down that needed anything so...

SH: So what exactly is like your title right now?

JB: My title! [laughs] My title is the clinic director of Becker [College Lenfest Animal Health Center]. So basically I'm in charge of running the clinical side of everything, there's an academic director in charge of the academic side of the animal sciences program so we have an on-site working vet clinic. So I really oversee everything that has to do with the vet clinic and I'm required to help grow that clinic and turn it into more of an all-year functioning clinic to be used by the students.

QW: So like hands on type of thing?

JB: Yeah

QW: Okay

JB: It's been there for over 30 years and seeing clients for over 30 years but on a small scale. So we're just going to try and give the students more exposure, more experience with other things growing up so.

SH: It seems like you really have a soft spot for animals; did you grow up with a lot of animals?

JB: I did yeah, I definitely had dogs, rabbits, we had a cat at one time. My mother never let us have a cat, but one snuck in at one point [laughs] But we had our share of iguanas and other random animals [laughs], but we always had pets.

SH: I love pets, I feel like it's not the same, I love coming home to a dog, it's the most exciting part about getting home.

QW: I have two, well I had two cats. One of my cats passed away a week and a half ago.

JB: Awww!

QW: But literally love them, so fluffy.

SH: They are like family members

JB: I know, I'm sorry to hear that .

QW: When was born she had a heart murmur but it was never an issue and then my parents actually came up to bring my car up to school and they went home and they just found her just laying there and she just, yeah..

JB: Aw, yeah. That's so sad!

QW: I know, it really was, my mom's still emotionally a wreck but we're getting a new one so it's okay [all laughs]

SH: Not to jump to a different subject but are you politically involved or do you have any strong...

JB: I really am not very involved [laughs], is that a fair answer? [laughs]

SH: Oh no, that's fine.

JB: Yes, politics have really just never been my thing. I certainly have views but I... I'm independent and I truly have views on both sides of politics, so I, I don't really follow them very closely, which is probably not the best quality [all laugh] But I also am definitely not a one sided political person, I'm pretty open minded about most things. So when people are not open minded about different groups and you know, different cultures, and different lifestyles I tend to [laughs] be for the inclusive as opposed to any of the exclusive things, you know...

SH: Yeah, as for health wise, do you have any health issues or things you might've struggled with or...

JB: I did struggle with anorexia when I was in college and I am glad to say that I was fully recovered, you know, probably by age 20. But I did battle anorexia for about 2 years. And so I definitely have a soft spot for people that struggle with eating disorders. And I've had family member also struggle too, but now I've really been, knock on wood, pretty healthy [laughs].

SH: That's good.

QW: Have you ever spoken out to anyone about that, just like women in general or...

JB: I have reached out to people that I was concerned about and tried to help, you know, with whatever you could, but I don't find at this age that I run into it so much as when you're younger. I do think it tends to effect more young woman then women my age, but I, I tend to still really try to encourage good self-esteem to everybody, you know, and I really try to help people understand that an eating disorder, it's not a vanity thing, it has nothing to do with somebody being so into their looks or concerned about that, but it tends to be more have to do with depression and truly being a mental illness that I definitely battled. I was in a different head. I can tell you [laughs] that my brain was not functioning the way my brain functions on a normal basis when I was sick. So I, I have tried to help people understand that about eating disorders.

QW: Yeah

SH: It's good that you're open about it; you can really be an advocate for it.

JB: Yeah, it's nothing to hide, [laughs] I mean who wants to think that anybody grew up and had it all perfect and had it all together. You know [laughs], like that doesn't help anybody see somebody that's in my position, and think, "Oh they just went through life and they made it every step of the way just easily." Nope! [laughs] You know there were lots of, lots of things that were tough, so, so that was one that was tough.

SH: Is there anything else that you have gone through in life or any accomplishments that you're proud of or like wanted to include, or fun facts?

JB: Umm, [laughs] great question!

SH: I know very vague

JB: [laughs] I do, I do race skiing still to this so day...

QW: Oh, that's cool!

JB: I'm pretty proud that I am 40 and still do race [laughs] We do for fun on Wednesday nights go up to Wachusett Mountain and we have a race team. So that's pretty fun. I don't feel like everybody hangs onto something like that...

SH: Yeah...

JB: You know, so it's been fun to have a group of friends that we still actually get out and do that kind of stuff.

QW: That's cool, yeah

JB: I don't know if I can think of anything specific.

SH: When is your birthday?

JB: February

SH: Okay, February what?

JB: 10th [laughs]

SH: Well put that in there [laughs]

JB: [laughs] That's gotta be in there, February 10th, 74.

SH: Well I think that was pretty much all that we had. I was like, oh this looks like it's a lot but we breezed right through it.

JB: Well I guess you covered your topics.

SH: Yeah, right

QW: Sorry, we didn't let you drink your coffee!

JB: Oh, I'll get a to go cup, I actually, really just like coffee and I drink decaf which is so pathetic but I, and I drink soy because I can't have dairy so it's, and that's why I like coffee shops because you can get soy and you can get more interesting coffees. You go to Dunkin and you can't really order soy, they don't have any so I never drink anything at Dunkin so, I would, I would prefer to go get the cheap coffee [laughs] But I gotta go to coffee shops.

SH: Yeah, I was saying to Quincy and talking about, because I'm a celiac so, these little coffee shops they have like flourless stuff and gluten free.

JB: Yeah, they have actually Coffee Beanery, has gluten free cookies because I had a friend and picked some up for, oh no vegan. She was vegan yeah. One of my coworkers – I also work at Tufts in the vet school. So I teach part time as an instructor for the vet students at the vet school. I've done that for 5 years. But one of the technicians she's there, she's vegan so I'm always looking for good treats for her.

SH: Yeah, that's hard. One of the girls on my team is a vegetarian, so I'm like, good for you [all laugh]