

Interviewee: Melissa Gibson
Interviewers: Billy Gargano and Sean Henderson
Date: April 16, 2012
Place: Worcester, Massachusetts
Transcriber: Billy Gargano



Abstract:

Melissa Gibson was born in 1972. She was raised in Stow, Massachusetts, by her mother and father. From the ages eight to fourteen Melissa lived on a farm where she developed a deep passion for animals. After high school, Melissa married Bob Gibson, Jr. During the twenty-two years of their marriage she gave birth to three children. While pregnant with her third child she began attending night classes at Fisher College where she received her Associate Degree in Business and Accounting. Ten years ago she opened her first pet store in Grafton and then just last September she opened her most recent store in Worcester. In her spare time, Melissa enjoys participating in rodeo events. This past year she was named the Massachusetts state champion in the rodeo event called barrel racing. Melissa is able to juggle all of these commitments while dealing with a dangerous condition called Cavernous Angioma. Throughout all of these experiences Melissa has learned to do what she wants and not take no for an answer.

BG: Hello, my name is Billy Gargano; I'm with Sean Henderson. We're here with Mel Gibson on April 16th, 2012. We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics. We want to focus today on your experiences with your work. Thank you for your help with this important project. All right, do we have your permission to record everything here today?

MG: Yes

BG: All right, sounds good. What is your full maiden name?

MG: My maiden name is Melissa Brown.

BG: All right, so I'm guessing your married name is Gibson?

MG: Yes, Gibson.

BG: OK, when were you born?

MG: Two, twenty-two, [19] seventy-two.

BG: All right, and...

MG: So, I'm forty this year

BG: All right, so were you ever married? Well, obviously you're married.

MG: I've been married for twenty-two years.

BG: OK.

MG: Well, almost twenty-two years.

BG: All right, what is the name of your current husband?

MG: Bob Gibson, Jr.

BG: OK, and have you had any previous husbands?

MG: No

BG: All right, do you have any children?

MG: Yeah, I have three children, Michael is twenty, David is seventeen, and Christopher is fifteen.

BG: Any grandchildren?

MG: No, god no. [Laughs]

BG: What cultures slash ethnicities do you identify yourself with?

MG: White, Caucasian

BG: OK. What are your parents like?

MG: My Mother passed away about ten years ago, and my Father is retired, he was in sales for his whole career.

BG: OK. Where have you lived during your life?

MG: I live currently in Grafton, lived before that in Milford for a few years, about five years, then we were in West Palm Beach for a few years and then I grew up in Stow.

BG: All right. What was your neighborhood like where you grew up?

MG: The time of my life that means the most to me where I lived was when I lived on a farm with my family--I was probably eight to fourteen. That was probably the best, living on the farm.

BG: OK. How did you come to the Worcester area?

MG: My husband got a job at EMC [Corporation] back in ninety-five maybe. And we moved back up from West Palm to Milford, and then when I wanted to get into business, we looked around and found a good location in Grafton for us to settle down and have a business.

BG: Do you have any family members in the area?

MG: My in-laws live in Marlborough

BG: Are there any challenges you face in the city?

MG: No, I think Worcester is a great city. You can get anything you want, it's big enough to find anything you need but it's still small enough that you feel kinda easy access to anything. You don't get lost so well.

BG: Have you seen any changes in Worcester over time?

MG: Definitely. I think the Hannover Theater is a huge asset to bring the arts into downtown Worcester there. I was just at Saint Vincent's last week and I think that is a huge addition to downtown. I'm looking forward for the City Square projects that are going on—that's gonna be another great asset to bring some other good local business and some good shopping into town.

BG: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

MG: I typically as a woman don't have huge issues in Worcester. I think you have to be a little bit assertive as a woman, but there is a lot of, you know, blue collar working, you know, so women aren't exactly on the same playing field. They're looked at a little bit lower so you have to be a little assertive. There's a lot of women's groups where you can get together and network yourself and be part of so you can have some support system. If I find I have a real hard time with a gentleman that I'm dealing with in business I usually ask my husband to handle it and you know he handles it because there are still those men out there that treat you like you're lesser or you don't know what you're talking about, that you don't have the brain power that they could possibly possess so you have to deal with that.

SH: OK, we're gonna switch to education. Where did you attend school?

MG: I have just a regular high school diploma and then I went to Fisher College at night when I was having my third child. I got my associate degree in business and accounting, and then last year I went back thinking I could go for my bachelors and did online studies and did probably about six marketing classes with them to make myself feel comfortable enough to open the next store. I wanted to have a better marketing basis underneath me, but a lot of my learning besides that is just reading. I read a lot, I'm on the internet a lot. I'm reading, I'm educating [myself], looking at what other companies do, what other businesses do, how they handle things, you know, and I implement what I think could work for me. So, I think sometimes hands on or just being observant is more important than a college degree.

SH: During your time in college what were the greatest challenges you faced?

MG: I had no challenges in college, I was an all A student and I graduated with a three point nine [average]. It was fairly easy to get my associate. I think because I had two little children at home and I was pregnant and then nursing in the end with my third child—that was probably the hardest part. You know juggling that part, life outside, because I didn't go directly into college after high school.

SH: Upon graduating from college what were your options? What were you doing at the time?

MG: I was a stay at home mom and I just really wanted to get the education so when I did go out into the field that I would have something on my resume. That was the only real reason for going.

SH: While in college did you seek out any support networks or anybody to help you, a mentor or anything?

MG: Not when I was in college, no

SH: Switching to work, when did you begin working? Did you have like a part time job?

MG: Well, when I was a teenager I worked--I worked at the movie theater, and the dry cleaners and the florist. You know those jobs just to get you to be comfortable working with people and build relationships with people, and then I was a stay at home mom. So for ten years I was stay at home. It was then about ten years ago we opened our first business over in Grafton and I had to go to work, and working for myself you know putting in a lot of hours. And then last September we opened this second store and I'm here five to six days a week putting in hours.

SH: When you started working for yourself did you work with somebody, did you work with your husband, or was it mostly you?

MG: When we first opened over in Grafton it was just me, he still held a job over at EMC full time so he would come home and work from five, six o'clock at night until eleven o'clock at night doing construction. And I would do construction and build. We built that facility in Grafton ourselves. You know I got on the tractor and graded the stone. And you know we did all the labor for that over there and about six months into operation over there being open I told him he either had to quit or I had to hire someone. So they offered him a severance package because they were gonna lay off some other guys and he said, "I'll go instead of them," you know. And they gave him a severance package so it was good, it was a good time.

SH: What does this field of work mean to you, what does it mean to own a pet shop?

MG: Well, it's more than a pet shop. I mean here we have the largest store, but we also do daycare, and in our other facility we do daycare and boarding and training, grooming at both locations. It's our ultimate goal to educate the pet owner that you don't have to break the bank to give good quality care to your animal. I mean we just want to educate them on what's good food and good care and that they need proper exercise and training and you can really enjoy your pets much better if they're taken care of correctly.

SH: What kind of personal benefits do you get out of working in this field?

MG: It pays for all my hobbies; I mean that's what everybody works for right? It's to pay for their fun time. So ultimately your benefit is your paycheck at the end of the night so you can go home and do what you wanna do. And I barrel race and rodeo so I have five horses you know, and that's my fun, that's my release. And you know everyone wants to pay for the food on their table. That's the ultimate goal for financial wise, but as I said in the previous section is why were doing it is because we want to educate people and get them to have better relationships with their pets.

BG: Is that how you got into the pet field?

MG: Yeah, well, because I grew up on the farm you know. That's what makes me feel all warm and fuzzy when you think about your childhood so the time I spent on the farm with my horses, and with my dogs, and you know that kind of feeling that they give you. They just give you a good happy place when you have a good relationship with an animal if you're not struggling with them.

BG: All right, some community involvement type thing. Like, do you think you consider yourself active politically?

MG: I am definitely very political. In business you try to keep it neutral because you don't want to offend any of your customers, so I don't put it out there really loudly. If someone is talking to me and I can get a feel of where they are, then I then I definitely put my political views out there. I do give money towards campaigns. I do, you know, vote every chance there is to vote. I'm out there voting. I mean I try to stay active up on what's going on and what would be best for my small business you know. I don't wanna be run down so I can't be in work anymore.

BG: Have you been involved in volunteer or community work at all?

MG: I do a lot of donations for raffles and fundraisers and things like that. So a lot of the, you know, garden club and the little league; I sponsored a little league team; and the spelling bees, and the women's things. It's just they come looking for donations, and I do help with donations. The North High [School] here in Worcester came through with some of their special needs classes and you know did a little tour and the kids got to see the dogs in day care and stuff. I have another elementary school coming next week, I believe. You know, to get a tour and get a feel for it there each gonna have money and they're gonna get a little beta fish and stuff so you know we try to get the kids involved and stuff and be helpful to the community. If they ask, I'm willing to do it.

BG: Has religion played a role in your life at all?

MG: I am not religious. I don't hate Jesus. I think he was a great person and did great things but I don't have any religious beliefs.

BG: OK now like health. Have you had any health issues that impacted your life or like your family?

MG: Yeah, I have Cavernous Angioma in my brain which is kinda like a blood clot but not. It's kinda more in the capillary feathery system there--so I have eight blood clots in my brain and I have lymphedema in my leg which just caused me to be in the hospital last week with cellulitis infection on my leg. My mother died of complications from the same thing; so, yeah, my mother died about eleven years ago I guess and when she died it was from the complications from the same thing I have. And she only had one; then it kind of was the catalyst to do all this. It was like life is too short; live everyday to your fullest; you have no idea what is going to happen. You know she went to the hospital thinking she had the flu. It wasn't so--nine months later she was gone so, so you never know. So do what you want to do, what you enjoy, and don't take no for an answer if you really believe that that's something you should do, just go for it.

BG: And are you responsible for anyone else's health other than your own?

MG: Well, yeah, my family. Everyone's healthy except me. I'm always the one who has had the issues but I keep going. Put on your big girl panties and get over it.

SH: We've got some extra questions for you. What is your favorite musical group or song?

MG: The one that just popped to my head is, "No rest for the wicked, money don't grow on trees." I don't even know who the band is but that's [singing], "ain't no rest for the wicked, money don't grow on trees, I got bills to pay" [laughing]. I like them all. I don't really have any preferences. I like everybody; Adele's great.

SH: Are there any particular parts of the city you like to be around?

MG: I like Shrewsbury Street. I go to the Chop House regularly. Love them, I try to get out to the Sole [Sole Proprietor] at least once a month or at least every couple of months. And as I said Hanover and the downtown area is nice, it's just a nice place to be.

SH: I think you touched on this earlier, but what are your hobbies? What do you do when you're not here?

MG: I barrel race with the National Barrel Race Association.

BG: What exactly is barrel racing?

MG: And I rodeo. Barrel racing is a clover leaf pattern, so you come around. You go through one barrel, another barrel, a third barrel and the back.

BG: That's horseracing?

MG: Yeah, you're on a horse, and you're going as fast as the horse can go and the tightest turns you can make, and you stay on. [Laughs] I'm actually state champion this year and won the state year end also for high points. So, I'm looking forward for this season. I've got three horses to ride so we'll see.

SH: Did you go to the rodeo as a kid?

MG: No, I rode English as a kid, and I went western when I got back into it as an adult. English is a little more structured and it's more judged on appearance and where you're at in breeding and if the judge likes you. It's a person judging you, and I didn't want to come in as an adult and be judged from somebody. I want my hobby to be fun, the only one that's judging me is the clock in barrel racing and myself, and if I screw up then it's my fault. I never blame my horse because he's only doing what I ask him to and if I don't realize that I asked him incorrectly, then it's my fault too. So it's always me.

SH: Do you have any regrets or anything that you wish you could go back and redo again?

MG: I wouldn't say it's regret, I just did things differently. I got married right out of high school, I had kids right away. So would I have—do I wonder, if I hadn't done that would I have gone to a regular four year college? If I had been through a few relationships and settled down would things have been different? I'm sure, I'm sure we wouldn't have struggled the same and we wouldn't have strived as hard I think to succeed as we have but, so yeah I look at it as: what if, you know, you done it differently, I don't think I would be where I am though now if I had.

SH: What advice would you give to women today and in future generations?

MG: Don't take no for an answer and if you believe in yourself and believe in what you're doing then do it, that's probably the biggest thing. Don't let anybody look down on you because you are a woman, you know,—prove to them that your brain is just as good, if not better than theirs, and you know just work hard, work hard.

SH: This last one might be a little silly but do you feel like you have a legacy?

MG: I do, I do actually because we have the two businesses and we're building an online site too and I think our name is gonna get out there and my kids are gonna have something that they're gonna be a little part of . And most of my kids, two out of the three of my kids at least, plan to live with us forever. And we're talking about putting additions on so everyone can have a place you know for their wives and children to kinda all just be with us. We're not home a whole lot anyway so [laughing], so yeah my legacy is my children and the business; you know it's gonna go on.

BG: Ok just wrapping it up now, now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women than has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include? That's kind of a weird question, I'm sorry.

MG: Yeah, I'm not sure.

BG: Yeah, I think we already concluded it. I don't think we need anything else. Thank you very much.

MG: Yeah, edit and tweak as much as you need.