

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 0:02

I am Jessy Blackburn interviewing Barb Gifford at SUNY Brockport on November 4th 2019. Okay, can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

Barb Gifford 0:12

Yeah, I came from a small town, my mom, dad and sister all lived there along with my paternal grandmother, she was in town and so I was with you know, cousins, that type of thing. So it was, the village that not only I grew up in, but my father did. His father, you know, went back a couple generations.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 0:40

What were your parent's educational backgrounds and how did it impact your view on education?

Barb Gifford 0:45

Well, my mom graduated from college. She was a nurse. It was during World War II that she was in school and certainly they needed nurses. So she went to Keuka College on some type of government deal and it was accelerated. So she got her RN in three years. My dad, he didn't finish high school. I'm not sure what grade he went through till, his father died when he was only seven. And he kind of rebelled, you know, you know, it was hard on him. And his mom was a teacher, his teacher, a one room school, you know, type situation. And so, again, it was during World War II, so he enlisted in the Navy, pretty young. He, I think he was just of age. So he was in the service and actually, probably about 20 years ago, maybe, maybe not even that long. The government came out with a situation where they would recognize life experience for high school diplomas, so he was able to get his high school diploma from life experience as a World War II veteran and that that was really special to him because I think he always felt a little bit embarrassed that he hadn't graduated high school.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 2:31

So what expectations did they have for you? And your...

Barb Gifford 2:35

You know, I don't remember discussions. I think it was just always assumed that I would go to college. And, and I did, it was just matter of fact, I finished high school and go to college.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 2:51

Okay, do you have any siblings?

Barb Gifford 2:52

Yeah, I have an older sister. She's three years older than I am. We both went to junior colleges out of high school. She didn't finish. She got married, had a couple kids. When she was probably only like 19 she got married. And so when her kids were little, she went back and got her two year degree. So that's, that was it for her.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 3:22

Yeah. What was your high school experience like?

Barb Gifford 3:29

Small Town. Small high school, I could walk to school. We were that close. I was a little bit quiet. Kind of a mediocre student was involved in a lot, not sports. I'm not in the least bit athletic and back then they just didn't encourage it. You were a cheerleader or you were not in sports. I mean, that's just kind of the way it was. But you know, **chorus** a lot of clubs, those types of things, good friends that we've, you know, been together since, you know, kindergarten practically. So nice small town type experience High School.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 4:14

So was that different when you went to college? (Inaudible)

Barb Gifford 4:18

The first school I went to was Mohawk Valley in Utica, and certainly bigger. You know, a lot more freedom, you know, away from home, which all I really looked forward to and embraced. Primary I went there because there were dormitories. And most of the two year schools didn't have **dormitories**. And I didn't know what I wanted to do at that point. So any college that would offer liberal arts was fine **with me**, fine with my parents, but this one had dormitories. That's where my parents wanted me to go, you know, because of that, and my best friend's brother went there. So I think there was some, you know, good feeling about that.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 5:12

Yeah, having him there.

Barb Gifford 5:13

Yeah. So that was the only year I lived in the dormitory.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 5:19

So how far was that from home?

Barb Gifford 5:21

Two hours from home.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 5:22

Oh ok.

Barb Gifford 5:22

Yeah. Good two hours.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 5:24

So after that, you went to Brockport?

Barb Gifford 5:27

Yeah. I transferred here after the two years. So I was two years there two years here.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 5:33

So what made you choose Brockport?

Barb Gifford

You know, I really don't remember. I honestly don't, know what made, I don't know.

Jessy Blackburn

A lot of people would say probably like, the price.

Barb Gifford 5:45

Well, certainly that was true. I, there was no, no other option than a state school.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 5:51

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 5:52

You know, and this one was fairly close to home, about an hour and I was interested at the time in social work. And I ended up majoring in sociology. So it offered what I wanted. I applied and was accepted. And so that's...

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 6:15

And there you went.

Barb Gifford 6:16

That was about it. Yep.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 6:20

What was your attitude like before coming to college?

Barb Gifford 6:23

Well, being from a small town, you know, I, it was kind of a protected environment in that, I think that in my mind, I was liberal and was kind of not feeling the small town type atmosphere but not really realizing it or knowing why. So definitely, you know, college, being more liberal being around a variety of folks. I really enjoyed.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 7:00

Do you think that you were prepared when you got to college?

Barb Gifford 7:06

No, no, I don't think I was, no I don't think I was academically or socially prepared. But like I said, I don't think anybody is you know, until you get there and experience it.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 7:22

So what did you say? You said, what your major...you wanted to do social work.

Barb Gifford 7:26

I wanted to do social work, and they offered it here, well they still do. And a girl from my high school was majoring in social work here and or was going to be and she says, "oh, you'll never get in". It's very competitive when you haven't been here as a transfer, so I didn't even try, which I've often regretted at least not trying, but that's how much people influenced me.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:00

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 8:00

You know, just her saying that I figured, well, that must be the case and I didn't try.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:06

So right out of high school you didn't...

Barb Gifford 8:08

I didn't know what I wanted to do right out of high school. This was when I transferred.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:12

Okay. Yeah.

Barb Gifford 8:13

I was interested in that. So I majored in sociology.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:20

So what did you plan to do with your degree once you got it?

Barb Gifford 8:23

My, my thought was, I wanted to help people in some manner, work with kids. I wasn't sure what area of social services I wanted to go in. But you know, that was just kind of the way I felt. I wanted to work with people and help people that was how I felt.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:50

What did you do for fun in or outside of school?

Barb Gifford 8:55

Too much fun. At the time, the drinking age was 18. So we were able to go to the bars and certainly I did that, there was one right across the street. When I was here at Brockport. There was one right across the street from where I lived. And that was the social life. So,

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 9:20
Still is.

Barb Gifford 9:21
I know, I live on Monroe.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 9:25
Oh no. (Laughter) Oh no.

Barb Gifford 9:27
Yeah, definitely. But I understand. I mean, that's, that is part of college life.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 9:35
So wait, where did you live when you went here? Did you **live...off** Campus right?

Barb Gifford 9:40
Off campus yeah. In a large house on Main Street, with 30 some other girls. It's still a college house.

Jessy Blackburn
Yeah. Did you do any extracurricular activities?

Barb Gifford
You know, I didn't and that's one of my regrets that I'll, I'll mention that I didn't get more involved in things but I, as a transfer student I didn't...

Jessy
Yeah you were kind of late into the game.

Barb
Yeah... exactly the way I felt. Yeah.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 10:15
So do you want to tell me a little bit about your social life or like your friend group?

Barb Gifford 10:22
Well, the girls in the house, we partied, you know, and had parties and, and then the bars. Several of them had dancing. Those, you know, it was a real fun type college town.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 10:41
Yeah.

Barb Gifford 10:42

And there were also at that time, places here on campus. What was it called...the rathskeller. That was also a bar.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 10:54

Yeah, that's what we were talking about that. They had them on campus?

Barb Gifford 10:58

Yeah. And our... what we called Spring-In...

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 11:03

And we were talking about that too. I was wondering if you're gonna say anything about it.

Barb Gifford 11:06

Yeah. Those were great because it was right, you know, right here on campus. They brought in the beer trucks.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 11:14

That's wild.

Barb

Yeah, and it was just spontaneous. It wasn't a date that was you know, it was the first really nice spring day, all of a sudden, you know, the word got out that it was Spring-In and the beer trucks came and everybody partied.

Jessy

So what like buildings were they in?

Barb Gifford 11:34

It wasn't in the buildings. It was in the... what do you call it the quad or whatever the open area?

Jessy

Yeah the quad.

Barb

Yeah, that's where it was.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 11:42

They would just...

Barb Gifford 11:43

Pull up the trucks.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 11:44

Oh my god.

Barb Gifford 11:46

I think there were bands as I recall, also, and, and just, you know, shoulder to shoulder people.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 11:54

That's so fun.

Barb Gifford 11:55

Having a great time. If you've seen pictures of Woodstock, it's kind of like that. In little Brockport

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 12:01

Yeah. Do you feel like your self-identity changed when you went to college?

Barb Gifford 12:10

Yeah, you know, I felt that I, you know, and I think probably fairly typical of college age kids, you kind of are all full of yourself. Think you know everything, but I still remained rather quiet and a little shy as well.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 12:30

So those girls that you lived with, how did you meet them?

Barb Gifford 12:35

Just by renting out I didn't know them before I came.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 12:39

Oh and you just...

Barb Gifford 12:40

Yeah, I just, you know, at that time, I think my mother helped me find a place to live. We came there and that was it. It was close to campus and so for the two years, I rented there. Different rooms, while I was there and a different roommate. The first room I was in it was actually a billiards room originally in the house. And it was very large and there were, there could be up to four of us. I think there were three. And then the second year there was just another girl and I, you know, someone I had gotten to know.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 13:22

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 13:22

And was friendly with in the home, we decided to room together.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 13:28

How was that with all those girls?

Barb Gifford 13:30

It was kind of crazy. You know, I didn't really get to know a lot of them. You know, it seemed like there was a group from New York City area and then some who were fairly local here like lived in Holley and stuff so they, they would go home on weekends.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 13:50

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 13:50

Quite a bit and all so I, I only stayed in contact with the one girl I roomed with.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 13:57

Oh, really?

Barb Gifford 13:58

Yeah.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 14:03

Do you think that those girls that you hung out with here were different than your friends in high school?

Barb Gifford 14:08

Yeah, especially the ones from New York City were certainly more worldly and...

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 14:14

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 14:15

Louder and just different.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 14:19

Yeah. It's interesting to meet so many new people.

Barb Gifford 14:22

Yeah. And that's, that's a great thing about college. I think that's that you do have those opportunities to get exposed to a lot of folks and experiences and stuff.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 14:35

Yeah. Who do you think had the biggest influence on your college experience? So it could be like a teacher? (Inaudible)

Barb Gifford 14:44

Yeah, I had a sociology professor, actually, that wasn't here that was in the other college. And that's kind of why I chose sociology. I really liked him. Yeah. And then here I had an English professor. That I remember was very liberal minded, very cool, you know, just a really neat guy. He's still here...

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 15:10

Oh really?

Barb Gifford 15:11

Not, not teaching on the campus, but he's still in the village. I just sort of encountered him recently and he's still very intelligent, well-spoken just really neat. I didn't interact with him one-on-one, it was a group type setting. But, you know, those are the types of things that college I think was great that you could be encountering people like that. Whereas in the small town.

Jessy

Yeah, you would never meet.

Barb

No. (Laughter)

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 15:52

Do you have any memorable or favorite moments you would like to share?

Barb Gifford 16:03

You know, I really didn't think of any specific ones. It was more just kind of a feeling.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 16:09

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 16:10

A feeling of being independent and just in a different environment, you know, felt good.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 16:23

Good answer. Okay, so coming out of college, what was your occupation?

Barb Gifford 16:29

Social Work. I did, I did go into social work. The first job I had was working with teenage girls that were in a home and I was a child care worker and took care of the girls. That was a real challenge. They were there on PINS, you know, persons in need of supervision. They had to be taken from their homes for whatever reason or, and that was a real challenge. They had to cut back so I wasn't there very long. And then I'm from Clifton Springs, I don't know it's a little village about an hour from here and there's a small hospital there. And so I went back home

and got a job in the social work department there, and alcohol rehab, part time in each just sort of as a secretarial, clerical type position to get my foot in the door.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 17:35
Yeah.

Barb Gifford 17:35
And then did eventually end up as a social worker, got married to my high school sweetheart. And then we moved out of the area. So I had a couple other social work jobs, outreach, and then in another hospital. It's, since I have my bachelor's it was more of like a social work assistant type job. And then we moved back to our hometown of Clifton Springs after we had our first child. And so I went back back to work at Clifton Springs hospital where I worked for close to 30 years, probably after that in social work, and nursing home admissions capacity.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 18:31
So where did he go to college? Your husband.

Barb Gifford 18:33
Geneseo.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 18:34
Oh okay, that's not far from here, is it?

Barb Gifford 18:37
No, no. Probably not even an hour.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 18:42
So you were together the whole time?

Barb Gifford 18:47
Off and on a little bit. (Laughter)

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 18:52
What is your overall opinion of your experience at Brockport?

Barb Gifford 18:57
It was positive. It's what you make of it.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 19:05
Yeah.

Barb Gifford 19:06
You know, and so probably I would have done some things differently. But you don't know when you're young.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 19:14

Yeah, you have no idea.

Barb Gifford 19:16

So yeah, and when I'm auditing the courses, certainly I am with the students, and sometimes I think, "Oh my gosh, that's me", you know, not paying attention, not doing the work, waiting until the last minute to do it, you know, and I'm like, "Oh, I wish I had done some of those things differently", but you just don't know.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 19:41

So how many how many classes are you in right now? Like, do you just...

Barb Gifford 19:45

I'm auditing one in film studies right now. And then I'm also doing one called the great decisions, which is not like a full semester. And it's not on campus. It's at the Seymour library, but it is part of the lifelong learning program. So basically, it's two, two courses.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 20:10

So you just kind of sit and observe or is it...

Barb Gifford 20:14

We take part as long as the professor is interested. They have to agree to allow us to come to their class. And this is, I think, the sixth one I've done. And some of the professors have been a little bit more comfortable. I think, with it, then others. Jason Dauenhauer is the professor that leads it up and his one of his social work courses was the first one I took. And there was a large group of us lifelong learners along with the, the regular students and that, that one was really great because it was about aging in America and who better to have there, than the folks that are aging. And so that that was really interesting. But they've all been so different. I just, I just pick something that he's included in the group that we can pick from. And that sounds interesting, different. I've taken some like that one that was in social work. And other ones like the film studies, I took the Hitchcock course, the same Professor offers that was a lot of fun. And I took a disability in sport one. And that was, that was just awesome, because, like I said, I'm not an athlete. So it was so out of my comfort zone.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 21:46

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 21:48

And yet, it was one of the best experiences I think I had, small class. Dr. Lieberman is wonderful. She was so welcoming and included me and whether I wanted to be or not in some things, which was good because it really made me do stuff that I wouldn't normally. So it's, it's been great. And like I said it, you know, I see the other students I and I think, "Oh, you've got these wonderful opportunities, you know, take them" and yet, I was the same way.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 22:22

Yeah. That's, I never knew that, I knew nothing about that until my professor told me that...

Barb Gifford 22:30

Well, it only started here kind of officially, I think three, four years ago maybe. And so it's, it's relatively new and a lot of the seniors you have to be 60 and older to do it, I believe, are not aware of it in the village either. So it's, but it's great.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 22:57

So when did you move back here?

Barb Gifford 22:59

Ah, good question. I moved back here a year and a half ago when I bought a home here in the village, but I've been coming here for about another year and a half to take care of my grandchild. My son in law, got a teaching position at the school, elementary school. And so they came, bought a house here in Brockport first and when they were going to have a baby, I decided to take early retirement, so I could take care of the baby. And I would, I was still living in Clifton, but separated at the time. So I would come here and stay with them during the week and go back home on the weekends. And then I decided, "oh, that's getting a little bit much, why don't I just move to Brockport" and a home very close to my daughter's was going to be available and I bought it. So about a year and a half I've actually lived here and I, I hadn't come back to Brockport. I don't remember if I did at all between times.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 24:14

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 24:15

From when I graduated to when I moved here.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 24:20

Are you happy to be back?

Barb Gifford 24:21

I am and it's great taking care of, now It's two, two grandkids. I enjoy that.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 24:30

So you said that you only talked to the one girl that you roomed with, do you talk to anybody else from college?

Barb Gifford 24:36

No, no, I don't. I have some girls that I keep in contact with from my other college, the junior college that I went to, but she's the only one and again I think it's because being a transfer student I didn't really get involved in a lot.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 24:51

Yeah, and it's hard, everybody has their little friend groups already.

Barb Gifford 24:57

They're already had, yeah, they already did. At least that was my impression. And I think it was, it was correct.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 25:03

Yeah, definitely. I could see that being harder.

Barb Gifford 25:05

Yeah. And also, I was involved, you know, with going to visit my boyfriend on the weekends at Geneseo. So, you know, I was kind of tied up with that too.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 25:19

What's your opinion on the school today?

Barb Gifford 25:24

Now. Could you elaborate what you're looking for with that question?

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 25:28

It's kind of open ended, it could be anything. But I think that it's interesting that you're here now. So you see, kind of, you know what I mean, in the classroom or it could be the social life of the kids here now versus when you were here?

Barb Gifford 25:42

Yeah. I think it's a great school.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 25:44

I know I love it.

Barb Gifford 25:44

You know, I just don't think people realize how much it has to offer and it's got so much going on. And I think it's, it's great that they are connected with the small community I mean, it is kind of a smaller town, you know, it's got a lot going on. And a lot of that's because of the campus because of the college. I, you know, I go to lectures and stuff here too, as well as the courses that I've taken. So there's a lot to really, if you want to take advantage of it, there's a lot to be offered here. For sure. I think it's great. And that as far as, like the kids and all because I live so close.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 26:32

I know I was going to ask you that.

Barb Gifford 26:33

I live so close to campus. I mean, there's, there's kids, that rent, you know, there's rental homes on either side of me. I mean, the majority of the homes are rentals are on our street, same thing, my daughter's on the other side of the street. And, you know, they're all rentals there. And certainly, you know, we knew that there'd be a lot of partying at the homes and there, there is but especially the, the kids on the both sides of me. They're friendly. They're respectful so I can kind of overlook a lot of loud music and stuff at night because they are nice. Actually on the one side of me is the hockey team, the ice hockey team, and they're real nice guys. I think some of them are a little bit older and, and just, you know, I take cookies over to them and stuff, you know you kind of want them to think kindly of you too, but they're, they're nice guys, they've come over and, you know, shoveled during the snow. You know, they said if there's anything they can do, you know, so that really helps my impression. Now very soon after I bought the house and moved in was scholars day. And that was horrible.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 28:02

Really?

Barb Gifford 28:02

Yeah. This year, the kids on the other side aren't, aren't as, loud or anything, they're really no problem. But that first year I was there. They had the biggest party I've ever seen and it started like 11 o'clock. Well, no, I mean, even before that,

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 28:25

Yeah, I'm sure it was...

Barb Gifford 28:26

And, and the ones across the street so it was like back and back and forth. And it was, it was really bad. And the police came to break it up. But you know, that was like beer bottles broken, you know, and I went out front when they were breaking it up because they're going across my yard and you know that, that type of thing. And I saw a girl that I knew from one of my classes. And she says, "Oh, no". She felt bad.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 29:03

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 29:05

But it was, that one was really, really bad. I have

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 29:09

I have yet to experience scholar's day so. So did they have that when you went to school?

Barb Gifford 29:15

No, it was it was like the Spring-In for us. So it was kind of on campus, of course I'm sure we went to the bars afterwards you know so it was probably a lot of the same kind of stuff. But that was just, the, I mean there were hundreds.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 29:31

Yeah, I saw videos of all of them.

Barb

Outside and oh my goodness, it was, it was it was bad. But not as bad the second time so hopefully it's going to be calming down a bit.

Jessy

Yeah. Have you been to any reunions? Do you go to those?

Barb Gifford 29:48

Since I, have been living here. I've gone to the alumni weekend. Just you know, the parade.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 30:00

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 30:01

And I've come to campus for some of the activities. But not as a, you know, I haven't officially signed up as a graduate to do anything.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 30:15

Okay, one more question. We kind of already answered this a little bit. Looking back on your college experience, is there anything that you would do differently?

Barb Gifford 30:26

Yeah, you know, it's it's true that you look back and think, "Oh, I should have done this, I should have done that". It's really too bad that I didn't get more involved.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 30:36

Yeah.

Barb Gifford 30:36

I think it would have helped me as far as maybe confidence and just for the fuller experience, maybe gotten involved in some clubs or something I think would have been would have been good.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 30:56

All right. And what advice would you give your college self? And you have a good view on it because you see kids, you kind of said it.

Barb Gifford 31:04

Yeah. I should have taken it more seriously and yeah, studied a little bit more and partied less probably.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 31:14

Yeah. (Laughter)

Barb Gifford 31:15

But then again, you know, that's part of the college experience. You know, it really is. I have a great niece who's going to Cortland, and she's trying to finish it in three years or less. And it's like, why, you know, enjoy it. And don't rush yourself to get out. You know, while you're there, enjoy it, take full advantage and have a little fun along with the study. She's just very, very driven. And, you know, there has to be a little bit of a happy medium, I think.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 31:54

I agree. Alright that's all I have. So thank you!

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