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Fall 11-26-2019

Valerie Taylor, interviewed by Shannon Regelsberger

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Repository Citation

Tynan, Jacob; Regelsberger, Shannon; and Duru, Betul, "Valerie Taylor, interviewed by Shannon Regelsberger" (2019). *Interviews With Students Past & Present*. 18.

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Abstract:

Valerie Taylor, current resident of Fairport, New York and Alum to SUNY Brockport, recants her childhood and what it was like living in Fairport and Brockport. Valerie recalls how community, teachers and the hardships of youth have prepared her for her adult life and being a mother to 2 children, Jake and Autumn. To the future, Valerie discusses her expectations of her children and how attending SUNY Brockport further prepared her for her life ahead and changed her life.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 0:06

This is Shannon Regelsberger. Today is November 26, 2019. And I'm in Fairport, New York with Val Taylor. So, what was it like growing up in Fairport?

Valerie Taylor 0:18

It was a very nice area to grow up in. Lots to do. Very, I would say, accepting community in a very pretty area. So, it was nice.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 0:30

What about the community and the school?

Valerie Taylor 0:35

That was very good as well. I think it was- when I was growing up- it was typically one class though, of kids, you know, I'm talking about socially and economically. Whereas now I see more of a difference in that, which is good, you know, with my kids going here. So, it was more of a one type of economic status, you know, growing up here. So, if you were in the other economic status, it was a little bit different sometimes.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 1:07

What class do you mean?

Valerie Taylor 1:09

So, I would say that people that grew up here years ago when I was a kid going here, it was more middle class to upper class. So, there wasn't really a blended economy within the school. And then we obviously had, you know, our own challenges in our family with just, you know, economics and stuff with my father getting sick. So, you know, sometimes you didn't fit in with that type of economic class, that it was then. If that makes sense.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 1:37

What has changed about the community?

Valerie Taylor 1:40

So, I think what's changed now is that you definitely see more of a blended economy in Fairport, and I think that that's a good thing. And you see more different types of people and a lot of students from different areas of the world. And I think that that's been good for my kids, to have that exposure.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 1:56

What do you think has changed about the school district?

Valerie Taylor 2:00

I think they are becoming more competitive with other districts. And I think that that's good academically. I do also see, though, that the admissions have gone down because people don't tend to leave this area. So, you know, whereas I think the learning and the expectations of learning have increased and they've gotten better. There's not as many kids. So, on one hand, that could be a good thing, because there's more for them to focus on, you know, with each kid, you know, rather than because I was in classes with 35, 37 kids. And I don't think that's the case now.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 2:36

How many did you graduate with?

Valerie Taylor 2:38

I graduated with 700 students.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 2:41

Wow.

Valerie Taylor 2:41

Yeah. My class was in 1998 it was 700 students.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 2:45

And how many do Jake and Autumn have?

Valerie Taylor 2:47

I think they're about 400. So, you can see there's a big difference.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 2:52

Were you involved in any clubs or activities at Fairport?

Valerie Taylor 2:55

Yes, I was. So, I played soccer, I played basketball and I played lacrosse. So, that was something I did. And then I did that up until junior year in high school. So, yeah.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 3:06

Were there any memorable teachers?

Valerie Taylor 3:08

Yes, there were several, one of them who's passed away. So, he was probably the most memorable to me, Mr. Nowak.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 3:15

Oh yeah.

Valerie Taylor 3:15

So, he was a very good teacher and very altruistic. And he was a very, you know, accepting person. An outside of the box type of thinker, you know, and he was a great influence in my life, you know, when I was a kid, so, yeah.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 3:33

Has your view of Fairport, both the community and the school now changed since you're a parent?

Valerie Taylor 3:39

Yes. And it's changed for the better, just because there's more of a blended economy here. There are more students, like I said, from all over the world. So, I think that that's been good for Jake and Autumn to be exposed to that, where it's not just one type of person, you know, like when I was going here. So, I think that it's gotten better in that regard. And I do think, you know, they do more stuff to include everybody now, at least from, you know, my memory to what I see the kids included in now. So, I think it's nice.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 4:11

And what about the view of the teachers now that you're a parent?

Valerie Taylor 4:18

I- so, that's interesting, because I do think you tend to get more critical when it's your children versus yourself. So, we listen to every teacher's feedback. We do take their advice, because they're the ones that are with our kids longer than we are each day. And so, you know, we're the type of parents that listen to all the feedback and all that, but I've seen some teachers more excited and seem to care more than others, you know, and I think where my kids have had more success is with those teachers that really care a lot and that really want to be there, you know. But overall, their experience has been great. I can't complain really about anybody that they've had.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 4:56

What made you and Chris decide to stay in Fairport?

Valerie Taylor 5:00

We were living in the city, which was great. But when we had Jake- Jake was about a year old, we were looking to not be in the City School District because it was a lottery system. So, you weren't guaranteed to be in the school of your choice in the city. You'd be where they, you know, in the lottery where they placed you. So, that was a concern to us. So, we were looking in Fairport, Brighton, Penfield, all good districts. And then we happened to find the house here, and that's where we settled on, which is convenient because my parents are in Fairport, and my in-laws are in Palmyra, so, very helpful with the kids.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 5:35

What was your childhood like?

Valerie Taylor 5:36

It was crazy. It was good. It was- there was a lot of love, but I had a dad who got sick, as you know. You know, and he was disabled, when I was 12 years old, he had a massive stroke. So, for me, a lot of my childhood consisted of work and of helping my family and, you know, just really adult type stuff. You know.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 5:57

You had to grow up fast?

Valerie Taylor 5:58

I did. I grew up very fast. Yeah, absolutely.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 6:02

Did your parents go to college?

Valerie Taylor 6:03

Yes, they did. So, my mom didn't, but my dad did. So, my dad graduated from St. John Fisher with an accounting degree. Yeah.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 6:10

How did that impact your view of higher education?

Valerie Taylor 6:12

It was like a non-negotiable. I had to go. So, I didn't I saw when my parents were self-employed, they were successful. But when my dad had the stroke, they didn't have disability insurance, and so, financially, they took a big hit. And I saw my mom struggled to find a job because she didn't have a college education. So, I think, for me, it was never an option of going or not going. It was always to go. And that's what they instilled in us too, is that that was very important, so. To me, it was never- it never crossed my mind to not go. That was just what I had to do.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 6:48

How many siblings do you have?

Valerie Taylor 6:50

I have an older brother and a younger sister.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 6:55

So, you went to MCC first.

Valerie Taylor 6:57

I did.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 6:58

Why did you decide to go there first?

Valerie Taylor 7:00

For financial reasons. And then also, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. So, it was a good place for me to kind of grow up a little bit more and figure out what I wanted to do, plus I could be close to home and help my parents still with everything that they needed help with. I had a great education there. And then I was able to home in my focus by the time I went on for the final two years... And I always knew I would go on to a master's degree. So, this was a way- and I paid for my college all myself so, it was a way for me to save some money up front because I knew I'd be putting it into the masters.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 7:38

So, you commuted to all the schools that you went to?

Valerie Taylor 7:42

I did. Yes, I did.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 7:43

Okay. What were the biggest differences between MCC, Brockport, and RIT?

Valerie Taylor 7:49

Yeah, so MCC, I don't- that was surprisingly a very good education, and I don't want to water it down by any means, but it was almost like an extension of high school in a way, just because it didn't really feel like college at first. Then it did because then you realize, you're in charge of your own destiny, you can do this homework or you can't, but you're paying for it, so, you're there to learn. So, I really grew up there finding, you know, really loving school even more than I ever did. And then when I went to Brockport that was really like the home atmosphere, and that was like, you can tell, you know, the kids that had the experience to stay on campus, that was home for them. So that was a totally different experience. And I actually respected school even more by the time I got to Brockport. I really thought that it was... it really enlightened me to a lot of things. I learned a lot. So, it was cool. And although I commuted, and I didn't have the experience that everyone else did, it was just, it really was- like all the buildings, they were like little homes, for everybody.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 8:53

What made you choose Brockport?

Valerie Taylor 8:55

Close to home, close enough for me to commute. Being a SUNY school, I knew that I'd be able to save some money but also get a really good education. My mom worked in student loans at the time so, you know, the SUNY schools did very well. And they were also- I don't know if you know what deferments are, but that means the students that can't pay their loans- but the research on the SUNY schools is that those kids are able to pay their loans back as they get good jobs. So, that was a lot of, you know, that actually weighed into my decision a lot.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 9:26

Did you ever notice a sense of community at Brockport?

Valerie Taylor 9:30

I did, I did. Again, I didn't stay on campus, so I didn't have that normal experience that a lot of kids do. But I did notice that in the classrooms and, you know, if I stayed for any activities or any weekends that they did, you know, stuff, then yes, absolutely, more of a community atmosphere. Whereas MCC is so huge, that it was hard to- other than people in your class, it was hard to really get to know people, so.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 9:57

How was Brockport different from Fairport?

Valerie Taylor 10:02

It's very different. Fairport at the time, had a little bit of a sense of entitlement, whereas Brockport- I mean, people were there to get an education, to learn what they wanted to learn. I mean, that's what college is, you choose what you want to study and what you want to become. So, to me, it was a big difference, you know, in the sense that that's what I noticed the most. You know, and then what was cool is that you're in classes with people who have like-interests, you know, of the same career path. So that was cool.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 10:37

Do you think the communities were different too? Because I've interviewed people who have said the community is a really big part of Brockport.

Valerie Taylor 10:47

I don't know that I can answer that 100% intelligently only because I didn't spend a ton of time in the community, but I do think that they're different. I think Fairport- well, if you look at Brockport and the community around it, I think that's a blended economy. Whereas at the time, Fairport was not. And I think that that- actually think Brockport had more to offer from that sense... And I think the school brought the community together.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 11:16

Did you like living off campus and commuting?

Valerie Taylor 11:20

Yeah, I mean, it wasn't really an option for me in my mind, just because of my father being disabled and I wanted to be able to be home and help my parents. I also worked full time and I went to school full time. So, I waitressed, basically full-time hours when I would get out of classes. So, you know, and I was able to make a lot of money to help pay for my school loans and everything. So, hindsight, you know, what I want for Jake and Autumn, I want them to have the experience of going away, and not commuting, and staying on campus. My parents would have let me stay on campus. It was a choice I made, as I felt responsible to help them, you know. I don't regret it, but I want my kids to have the experience to be away. Because I just think it helps you- it sets you up for you know, more success later of being on your own.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 12:09

Was it difficult to take care of your dad and work and go to school?

Valerie Taylor 12:13

Yes, but I'm somebody who's used to managing a lot. So, you know, it's almost like when you, it's all you know. You don't know what you don't know. So really, I didn't know any other way. So, it's, you know, it really was never an issue for me where I felt like I couldn't handle it.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 12:35

Did you ever go out on the weekends?

Valerie Taylor 12:37

Oh, I sure did. I did go out. So, I had friends at Brockport, but I also had friends at other schools. So, I would go often times to SUNY Fredonia, because that's where my boyfriend was at the time who I ended up marrying. And so, I spent a lot of weekends there, I spent a lot of weekends, you know, going to Geneseo where my other friend was. So, you know, the experience from that regard I had, you know, staying the whole weekend doing that type of stuff. So, yeah, I mean I made sure I had fun too amidst taking care of everybody.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 13:13

Do you have any good stories?

Valerie Taylor 13:15

Do I have good stories? Oh, I've got tons. I don't know that I want them recorded. [laughter]

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 13:20

That's fine. [laughter]

Valerie Taylor 13:22

I've got tons of good stories.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 13:25

So, Chris went to Fairport, right?

Valerie Taylor 13:27

Nope, he went to Palmyra.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 13:28

Okay, so how'd you meet?

Valerie Taylor 13:30

We met through a friend that I worked with- I worked with his best friend at a grocery store. And then we'd get- we became really good friends and I used to hang out with him, and then he introduced me to Chris. Yep.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 13:45

So, what did you originally want to do as a profession when you first started?

Valerie Taylor 13:50

Marine biology. So, I got accepted into Southampton and into U Mass for that program. But again, you know, and my parents wanted me to go, and I was like, you know what? I just- it didn't feel right at the time, to leave. And I chose then, you know, to change to kind of course correct, and change what I was doing. And also knowing that, okay, I am somebody who likes to be close to my family too, and marine biology would take me further away from that, and I didn't have enough of a passion for it to justify something in my mind. Now, I went down, you know, when I went to Brockport then, I really chose a public relations major. So, that's what I majored in, with a minor in journalism and in general anthropology. So, they do relate, because I'm very fascinated by people and I'm very fascinated with studying different things like that. And then when I did my masters, I honed it in on business and that's when I got my MBA.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 14:50

So, when you graduated from college, did you have a job or what happened after you graduated?

Valerie Taylor 14:57

Yeah, so I had a job right away. So, I worked at a bank, and I was a supervisor at a branch. So, I would go, and I'd actually open up new branches at the time. So, it was a bank, Citizens, and it was turned into Charter One. And so, they were opening new branches all around, and so in Western New York, I was responsible for helping to open all those branches. So, I had a, you know, for me, it was a great job. I mean, it was about \$20,000 per year. But I thought that that was, you know, amazing. So, I was able to do that.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 15:28

Do you think Brockport prepared you well?

Valerie Taylor 15:30

Absolutely. Yep. I think all of my education prepared me well, because for me, I knew that I was gonna need to have something to, you know- money doesn't grow on trees. I didn't have parents to rely on, financially. So, I knew that I had to make my own way, and I was fine with that. And so, you know, Brockport- the pressure of having to do your homework, of choosing what you want your career path to be, you know, of presenting- now that was one thing, I was very uncomfortable with, but I had to take a public speaking class, it was required, and I was very nervous about that, but you know what, it prepared me for everything. And that's all I do, all day long today in my field of work, is present and present and present. And now, you know, that's something that, had I not had those skills, I would have stumbled with.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 16:22

Okay, so what were you, what was your friend group like?

Valerie Taylor 16:26

Very, very mixed. So, you know, there's some girls, some guys, but all from very different backgrounds. And it would just depend on who was in my classes or who I was working on a project with. There were some older people that had, you know, been going back to school to get their bachelor's. I took a lot of night classes. So, that's where I met, that's where I met them. And then there were some younger people, football players, you know, and then, you know, kids from different backgrounds, so it was very mixed, which is what I prefer anyway.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 17:00

Do you have any memorable professors from Brockport?

Valerie Taylor 17:04

There was... yes, so there was a forensics class, and I cannot remember his name, but I took a forensics class in monitoring for anthropology there at the time, and that was a really cool- we studied skeletons for like a whole year, and I'm a science freak, and that's- I work in medical now, and I work in science now. So, that was something that really probably out of all the classes there, that was a really cool experience, you know, and I cannot remember his name, but I do remember that class and, you know, I still remember every bone in the body. So. [laughter]

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 17:38

Have you been back to Brockport since you graduated?

Valerie Taylor 17:40

I have not.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 17:41

So, you haven't seen the different campus?

Valerie Taylor 17:43

Nope.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 17:44

It's changed.

Valerie Taylor 17:44

I have not. I'm sure it has.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 17:49

So, what would you- or would you change anything about your college experience?

Valerie Taylor 17:55

No, I wouldn't, because I feel grateful for what I had, I feel grateful for learning what I learned, to get me to where I'm at today. What I will change is, like I said, I'll make sure my children have that student life experience that I didn't have, because I do think that's important. Just for many reasons, for growth and for, you know, learning to be on your own and stuff like that. You know, I was on my own very early if you think about it, even though I lived with my parents, but, growing up as fast as I grew up, I kind of was forced into that, but, if I have the choice, my kids will do it the natural way, so.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 18:32

Do you have expectations for them to go to college?

Valerie Taylor 18:35

Yeah, absolutely. But I don't want them to just go if they don't know what they want to do. So, I want them to understand what it is that they want to do, and depending on what that is, then to go on that. I think, you know, a lot of kids go when they don't know what they want to do, and I don't think they're very successful in that. You know, so I do believe in higher education, but I do believe some kids might need extra time before they're ready to do that too. And, you know, some kids need to see what the real world is like, to understand they need to go to higher education. So, I do have expectations of my kids going, but we'll have an open discussion about it, so.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 19:14

Do you have any other good stories about your childhood or college?

Valerie Taylor 19:22

College, many. We're not gonna record those. [laughter] Childhood, you know, for all the stuff that we went through, we still had a very nice childhood. We didn't have a lot of materials, but we had a lot of memories. And we always had family around. That was really important. So, if you ask Jake and Autumn, my kids, they always will say, Mommy, you had such a rough childhood, but I don't look at it like that. Because it prepared me for who I am and what I'm able to do, and I know that there's nothing that I can't do. You know, I get stressed. I want somebody to do it for me, but I know that I can do things because I've had to be like that for my whole life. So, I don't ever really have that fear of not being able to figure something out. So, for all the bad, it prepared me for a lot. So, and you know, we're very blessed to have what we have now. So, you know, yeah.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 20:17

Anything else you want to say?

Valerie Taylor 20:19

No, I think, I think what you're doing is very, very cool. I think it's cool that you get to interview different, you know, people from different backgrounds about this. I think you're lucky to go to Brockport, I think you're going to get a good education there and you're close enough to home when you need to come home, but you're getting that experience of being away, so. I'm proud of you.

Regelsberger, Shannon M (srege2) 20:43

Thank you for sitting down with me.

Valerie Taylor 20:44

Thank you for having me.

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