

Interview with Stacey Ballard

**Interviewed by Associate Dean Ann M. Pflaum
University of Minnesota**

Interviewed on June 7, 1999

Stacey Ballard - SB
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: It is June 4, 1999, and this is Ann Pflaum. Your name is Stacey Ballard. Stacey will give us, for the tape, a little background about her high school and her college and the job she is doing. I'll turn it over to Stacey.

SB: Where shall I start?

AP: Why don't you start in high school, where you grew up, and how you got to the university.

SB: I was born and raised in Gary, Indiana. I moved to Minnesota in 1989. I went to Highland Park Senior High School and I graduated in 1991 from Highland Park. When I graduated, I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do, if I wanted to go to college or start working. I got a name from a friend who was in college . . . Tony Diggs, who works in African-American Learning Resources. I spoke with him and he told me of a program that they had called the Summer Institute Program, which is, basically, a program for African-Americans to just kind of get them oriented into the college. They handled everything. I stayed in a dorm. They took care of all my expenses as far as tuition fees and dorm fees, everything for the summer. At that point, you were immediately enrolled in the fall. I was what you would call a non-traditional student because I was a single parent in college. I was actually pregnant when I started. When I graduated, I had two kids.

Shall I talk about my experience at the "U"?

AP: Absolutely.

SB: It was, actually, a very positive experience. Because of the fact that I had kids, I had to try to find resources that would help me with day care and things like that. I was told of the Student Parent HELP Center, which is located in General College. This is where I actually started. I was in the General College for two years. The one that I worked with was Diane

Wartchow. She was a great help with child care issues, financial issues, and just helping out with other resources in the community that I could use that would help me while I was in college. I got a lot of scholarships. I was awarded the Fred. L. Estes, E-s-t-e-s, Scholarship two years in a row, which is also offered in General College. I don't know if you're familiar with that? Have you heard of that?

AP: I haven't.

SB: He owns a funeral home in north Minneapolis. He, I think, was a graduate of the University of Minnesota and had gone through General College and he offered this scholarship for African-American students and I won that two years in a row. He also told me of other grants and things that I might qualify for. I won a grant from the Sumasil, S-u-m-a-s-i-l, Foundation. I don't know if you're familiar with that?

AP: No.

SB: They helped me purchase a car, actually while I was in college.

AP: Wonderful.

SB: Because of the fact that I couldn't work full time and go to school full time and care for the kids, I just had to look for outside resources to kind of help out.

AP: Absolutely.

SB: I made it through! It took me five years. I just graduated in December of 1997. I had actually started in the summer of 1992. So, it took me about five years to graduate, but I made it through. I actually didn't decided on a major until my second year. Like I was telling you earlier, I majored in psychology and I had a minor in Afro-American Studies.

AP: Did you do any particular papers at that you're proud of?

SB: Actually, yes. I did one paper for a writing course and it was twelve pages and it was on domestic abuse in African-American families. I was really proud of that paper. It was really hard to do and there was a lot of research involved. It was time consuming.

I also participated in a lot of extra curricular things while at the "U". I participated in another summer institute program through the African-American Learning Resource Center. They sent me to an historically black college, Xavier College in New Orleans [Louisiana]. It was somewhat similar to the program that they had at the "U" when I first started. The only difference was that they sent you somewhere else to go to school. They had students that went to China. I think one student went to Africa. I just happened to go to Xavier University in New Orleans and that was a really good experience for me. I had never been to New Orleans and that's kind of in the South and I had never been South. It was just a really good learning

experience for me. I met a lot of nice people, learned a lot about the college and New Orleans.

I also participated in the Metro-Internship Program. I don't know if you're familiar with at all? That's through the U-YWCA. That actually was an internship, thirty hours a week, for the entire quarter, like three months long, and they fit you with an internship with different corporations. You actually got to choose three and because there were only so many students and there were so many internships available, if a person chose, the same one, they kind of fit you with one that they felt would be the best fit out of your choices. You did get to choose from three.

I ended up doing my internship at Pillsbury Company in downtown Minneapolis. I worked in their diversity library and I worked with a lady named CeLois Steele, [C-e-L-o-i-s S-t-e-e-l-e]. She was the diversity manager at Pillsbury. That was a really good experience for me. It was a really intensive program. You had to go to seminars once a week. It was a \$500 stipend for the three months. I guess that was the compensation for the time you were there at work. It was like thirty hours a week. I was able to get credits for my classes for doing that.

AP: Oh, good.

SB: I really learned a lot because I was interested in going into the corporate world. That was just really interesting to learn a little bit about what goes on in the work force, because, at that time, I had just been a college student and had not worked yet. I learned a lot from that experience.

AP: How did you then get to the Urban League?

SB: Actually, this was not my first job out of college. My first job out of college, I worked for Turning Point. I don't know if you've heard of that organization?

AP: No.

SB: It was a similar position; I was a youth counselor. Juvenile counselor was what the title was. I worked in a group home with at risk kids. Basically, it was like direct, kind of one-on-one, supervising and also a lot of role modeling. We did groups with the girls. We took them on outings and we were just trying to give them some living skills because a lot of these girls had been from foster home to foster home, had been in jail, had used drugs in the past; so, it was kind of a transition for them to be on their own. That was a good experience for me; but, the hours didn't really work for me. I was looking for something where the hours were more structured because I do have two kids and I needed some day time hours and the weekends didn't work for me. This job is Monday through Friday.

AP: It's the Minneapolis Urban League?

SB: Yes, this one now is the Minneapolis Urban League.

AP: Your title?

SB: I am a lead youth worker.

AP: And you work with kids on probation or truant kids?

SB: Actually, the only kids I work with here are kids who are picked up for being truant from school. They don't necessarily have anything to do with the legal system. They just may have been picked this particular time and they come here and be processed and we do a whole packet on them. We do a confidential assessment on them. We do a physical description on them. We contact schools and parents to let them know that they're here. We keep the information on file here at the center, so this doesn't go on any police record for them.

AP: What is the name of the center? Is it called the Minneapolis Urban League Center?

SB: No, this center is called the Minneapolis Curfew Truancy Center. I just happen to be employed by the Minneapolis Urban League. There's also a school liaison that works here and she works for the Minneapolis Public Schools. We have a police officer that works here and, naturally, he works for the Minneapolis Police . . .

AP: The theory is that you intervene before the kids get into a worse problem. They're not in horrendous trouble as it is. This is sort of an alarm bell and you want to try to do what you can.

SB: Exactly. At this point, we're just kind of implementing a follow-up program. We don't have one right now. They see that there's a need for one. We're trying to implement that into what we're already doing and just follow-up on the kids, maybe thirty days or sixty days down the line and find out, are they still having trouble with their attendance at school? Have they gotten any better? Some kids are chronically truant and we see them in here, like, every week. They are chronically truant. Those are the kids that . . . we call their schools. We ask, "Has there been a truancy petition filled on this kid? What's going on? But, for the most part, a lot of the kids might just happen to be skipping that day, kind of like a one time thing, but they really do have good attendance in school.

AP: Do you have plans to go back to graduate school at some point?

SB: Definitely. Because of the fact that I have a BA in Psychology, I'm actually looking at the master's program in social work. They have a weekend program through the School of Social Work and I've been looking into that. I actually have all my materials and everything and, hopefully, I'll be applying this year for next year.

AP: How do you manage the day care on the weekends? Is that tougher than during the week?

SB: The weekend program is really Friday evening and all day Saturday; so, I would just need someone to watch them on Saturday. It will work out well for my schedule because I'm able to keep my full time job.

AP: As you look back at your time at the "U", are there professors, that you really enjoyed? You mentioned Diane Wartchow, for example.

SB: She actually was an adviser.

AP: Right. Are there other faculty or people that you look back on and say, "Gosh, they were wonderful?"

SB: Diane would be one. It can be faculty as well as [unclear]?

AP: Sure, absolutely.

SB: I'd have to say Tony Diggs, once again, in the African-American Learning Resource Center. If I ever ran into any type of problem, school related or not, he was always able to point me in the right direction and, also, Jessica Morgan who is head of the Minnesota Women's Center in Nicholson Hall. I worked there—it was a work study position—my last year at the "U". I thought she was just really great. She always stressed that school comes first. If you have some school work you need to do, do that—even though I was working there, I think it was, fifteen hours a week. I thought that she was just great.

AP: That is wonderful. Did you have other extra curricular activities, like, go to football games or any stuff like that?

SB: I was not involved in the recreational type things because of the fact that I was a parent.

AP: Sure.

SB: Basically, my time, if I wasn't at school, was at home with my children. Then, there was the homework; so, I didn't have a lot of time to do the recreational things in school. I always wanted to join a sorority and I was not able to really do that. Time didn't really permit it—but, I don't have any regrets.

AP: It's really touching to see your diploma on the wall here.

SB: I'm very proud of it.

AP: I notice your picture of Martin Luther King.

SB: Yes.

AP: In researching this book, I discovered a letter signed by Dr. King. He was recruiting Minnesota students and students from all over the country to register voters in Georgia. So, a delegation of Minnesotans came down and spent a summer in Peach County, Georgia, doing voter registration in the early 1960s.

SB: Ohhh!

AP: I'm going to try to locate some of those people to see what their experience was like and how they look back on that. I think it's an interesting thing to have done..

SB: Right.

AP: Do you think you'll send your kids to the "U" when they get older?

SB: I think I will probably leave that open for them to decide. They were born and raised in Minnesota and I think they might want to, possibly, venture out and see some different places. I plan to be here and make this my home.

AP: To give them some other . . . ?

SB: Yes, give them the opportunity to make up their own minds. I would be happy if they stayed here and went to school here. I've got a long time to think about that. [laughter]

AP: Sure. This is just very helpful. Are there any questions about your experience as a student that you wish I had asked and I didn't?

SB: Not really.

AP: This was a fairly painless interview. Thank you very much.

SB: You're welcome.

AP: I appreciate your doing this. We'll keep in touch.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[End of the Interview]

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