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Carissa Higgins interview for a Wright State University History Course

Cassie Higgins

Carissa Higgins

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Profile

Narrator Name: Carissa Higgins

Interviewer: Cassie Higgins

Author: Cassie Higgins

Date of Interview: 03/04/2011

Subject: An Oral History Interview with Carissa Higgins who is a mother, teacher, coach, and personal motivator.

Keywords:

PTO

Community

Teaching

Swimming

Diving

Dayton

Xenia

Carroll High School

Catholic

Master's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Overcoming Personal Obstacles: An Oral History Interview with Carissa Higgins, HST 685: Introduction to Oral History, Dr. Marjorie McLellan, Winter Quarter 2011

On Friday March 4th Carissa Higgins graciously accepted my request to interview her in her home. To provide some background information on her, Carissa Higgins was born on December 22, 1969 in Kettering, Ohio. She has been married to her husband Patrick Higgins for almost 17 years and has four children, Cassie- 21, T.J.- 16, Nate- 11, and John-Michael- 5. She graduated from Carroll High School in Dayton, Ohio in 1988, and from there proceeded on to Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio on a diving scholarship. After having some trouble so far from home after a year away, Carissa then moved back home to Beavercreek to attend Sinclair Community College from 1990-1992. With her goals set on being a teacher, Carissa continued on at Wright State University, getting her Bachelor's Degree in 1996, while working in the Beavercreek YMCA daycare. Immediately after getting her Bachelor's Degree, Carissa was offered a teaching position at Arrowood Elementary School in Xenia, Ohio where she did her student teaching. From 1993 to the present she has volunteered as a swim coach at Pinecrest Swim Club in Xenia, Ohio during the summers. This interview takes place in the home of Carissa Higgins at 1818 Highlander Drive in Xenia, Ohio. We conducted the interview in the library of her home, and tried to eliminate all distractions and disturbances, but such as with life, it is not always possible to give a mother of four an hour of uninterrupted time. As for any mother, the amount of volunteer hours are countless and undocumented, but include things like Brownie Troop Leader, Pee Wee Soccer Coach, Field Trip Volunteer, Mentor to many, and teacher to countless. My mother has always been involved in any school fundraising I, or my brothers have ever done, and been involved in various clubs over the 21 years of being a mother. Being from a small community in Xenia and originally from Beavercreek, it is easy to make fast friends and do minor favors for them, such as Carissa mentioned, like giving friends advice on their first grade child. These things may not seem like much, but help bond the community and

helps parents share information as they both grow and helps parenting techniques improve. Carissa has learned from the example of her parents how important it is to get involved in your community and in your children's lives. She now knows from their example that being involved in your child's lives not only proves valuable for the obvious reasons of getting to know your child, but also provides important community ties to other parents in the area.¹

Coming away from this interview I learned how much my mother has done over my life time. I thought that she was worth interviewing because of her community work as far as volunteering, yet little did I know how much more than that she has really done. It is hard to document each and every little volunteer project and time a mother has done community work, but that does not mean that she has not improved the community. Just by lending a helping hand and being an involved parent, she is improving the community one day at a time and this is something that I will most definitely carry away from this interview and into my own parenting in the future.

¹ Carissa Higgins (first grade teacher) in discussion with the author, March 2010.

Oral History Interview

Name of the Project: Overcoming Personal Obstacles: An Oral History Interview with Carissa Higgins

Name of the Project Director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University

Archives or repository: Wright State University's Paul Lawrence Dunbar Library

Interviewee/Narrator Name: Carissa Higgins

Interviewer Name: Cassie Higgins

Others Present: None

Place: 1818 Highlander Drive Xenia, Ohio 45385 The Residence of Carissa Higgins

Date: 03/04/2011

Length of Recording: 58:30

Original Format: MPEG-4 Movie

Notes: This interview takes place at the home of Carissa Higgins at 1818 Highlander Drive Xenia, Ohio 45385. Carissa Higgins has four children so it was very difficult to find a quiet spot in her home, and she was unable to go to another quieter location because in addition to four children she also had a sick husband that evening. We finally found a quiet spot in her home, but forgot about the dog that was outside. When it started raining the dog started scratching at the door, I let the dog in but he created such a disturbance that I was forced to force him outside, which made him yelp and my brother came downstairs to see what the noise was, which you can clearly hear on the recording. The other disturbance to the recording was the phone ringing two or three separate times, which my brother was supposed to take care of, but decided to let it ring and ring because it wasn't for him apparently. This interview takes place in the library of Carissa Higgins' home in Xenia.

Key words:

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Indexed By: Cassie Higgins

Index

00:00:00-00:00:28 Introduction to the recording.

Information listed above

00:00:28-00:03:49 General Family Information

Carissa talks about her life growing up with four sisters and two very involved parents. She talks about how her parent's involvement in her life and childhood activities has influenced her to be an involved parent herself.

Keywords:

PTO

St. Luke's Church

General Motor's

Beavercreek, Ohio

Carroll High School

Catholic

00:03:49-00:06:30 Community Involvement

Cari talks about how she began her community work through her church as a child, and how that taught her that community service is a great way to get to know the people in your community as well as it making you feel good about yourself. She talks about her involvement in a summer swimming program in her community and how that is a great way for her to be making a difference in her community as well as helping her practice teaching children during the months when school is not in session.

Keywords:

Swimming program

Kids

Community

Friendships

00:06:30-00:10:44 College Life and Background

Carissa describes how she had a lot of difficulty staying focused in school before college, and that inspired her to help other people. She tells about how her A.D.D. pushed her to really become the person that she is today, and that she doesn't think she would be as strong of a person had she not known the trouble of that growing up. She also talks about how getting her Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree were some of the biggest accomplishments in her life.

Keywords:

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Xenia

Dayton

Wright State University

Attention Deficit Disorder

Xavier University

00:10:44-00:14:06 Diving

She talks about how being involved in diving as a young adult really gave her something that she was good at separate from her older sisters. How it gave her something she was passionate about and opened doors for her as far as going to college.

Keywords:

Wright State University

Diving

Scholarship

Gymnastics

00:14:06-00:17:31 Pre-Teaching Career

She explains how coaching swimming really prepared her for her teaching career, and how her experience with coaching and having children opened the door for getting the teaching job that she got at the school where she did her student teaching.

Keywords:

YMCA

Oakwood High School

Arrowood Elementary

Xenia High School

00:17:31-00:23:18 Obstacles

She explains how she dealt with ADD and having trouble get along in grade school as she wasn't the best of students. But one of her biggest satisfactions was gaining her Master's Degree from Wright State University with three kids at home. She says that with her ADD she was able to take advantage of some things such as problem solving and keeping her head in tough situations. She takes these things as new challenges every day.

Keywords:

ADD

Frustrations

Disorganization

00:23:18-00:24:56 Greatest Accomplishment- Bachelor's Degree

Carissa talks about her greatest accomplishment, which she believes is getting her Bachelor's Degree after eight years. She had many distractions along the eight years such as relationships and children but that has taught her that if she can accomplish that, that she can really accomplish anything.

Keywords:

Master's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

00:24:56-00:27:18 How experiences growing up shaped who she is today

She believes her ADD has made her a stronger person today and that it helped make her the teacher that she is. She feels like because of her difficulties she faced she is able to help her students deal with similar issues.

Keywords:

ADD

Overcoming

Philosophies

00:27:56-00:30:19 Impact on the Community

She talks about how the example of her parents being so involved in her life has made her realize that being involved in the community not only makes you feel good, but also helps you stay connected to the people in your community. That being involved in your children's lives helps you keep on top of how they are doing in school, what their relationship is with the teacher, and who they are friends with, as well as makes valuable friendships.

Keywords:

PTO President

Community

00:30:19-00:32:18 Lessons

She talks about how being forced to do community involvement as a child made her realize that it is key to a good family life and that her involvement has changed with her time availability with having children. She never forgets that not only does it make you feel good but it also has a drastic impact on the community to be involved.

Keywords:

Neighbors

Community

Life

Children

00:32:18-00:34:18 9/11

Cari tells the story of what she was doing when 9/11 happened. She explains how she wanted her kids in her class to feel secure but at the same time she didn't want to alarm the small children.

Keywords:

9/11

Secure

Safe

00:34:18-00:37:32 Why teaching?

Carissa says she has an understanding of how kids have trouble organizing their time or focusing and that is something she feels she can bring to the table. She believes the challenges have made her into a stronger person.

Keywords:

Reading
Passion

00:37:32-00:39:56 Above and Beyond

She talks about how teaching is really a 24/7 job. That doing outside work really focus' you during actual class time on the students and how to help them.

Keywords:

24/7
Science
Math
Language Arts

00:39:56-00:42:08 Every Year is Different

Carissa talks about how every year is different because every year you are given different children with different problems. She is also learning each year about what works and what doesn't work and continues to improve her teaching methods year after year.

Keywords:

14 years
Challenging
Better techniques

00:42:08-00:45:05 Future for Arrowood

She tells about how Arrowood is closing this year due to district-wide budget cuts. She hopes that good will come out of this, that each of the staff members that she now works with will bring the community feel of Arrowood to whatever school they will be working at in the future.

Keywords:

Arrowood
Positive
Community

00:45:05-00:50:47 Learned from Teaching

Cari talks about all the things she has learned over the years of teaching. She talks in detail about four autistic children that she had in her class and how those four children have taught her so much about teaching and about life in general. She would like to work with more students with disabilities but the lack of a special ed degree really limits that.

Keywords:

Autism
ADD
Learning Disabilities
Special Ed

00:50:47-00:55:43 Technology in the Classroom

She talks about how due to competition with XBOX's and IPod's that students have at home, it is very important to start substituting technology in the classroom instead of only standing up and lecturing as teachers have done in the past. She has had experience with teachers in her building that may be afraid to change to a more technological approach to teaching but her experience has been that sometimes you can learn from the students, as she has had a couple of instances where her students have fixed a computer problem.

Keywords:

Technology
Smartboards

00:55:43-00:58:30 Conclusion

To those students who are not as confident in their pursuit of a college degree, Carissa recalls the words of her father, who told her that it is 90% determination and only 10% sweat and work and tears, that if you only have the determination to do something, then the battle is almost won. She reminds listeners that the key to a good adult life is all about balancing things that are important to you in life.

Keywords:

Community
Determination
Balance
Family

Oral History Interview

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Date: 03/04/2011

Length of Recording: 58:30

Original Format: MPEG-4 Movie

Transcribed By: Cassie Higgins

Interview Transcript

Cassie Higgins: My name is Cassie Higgins and it is 6:20 on Wednesday March the ninth and we are at 1818 Highlander drive, the residence if Carissa Higgins. Carissa did you get a chance to read and sign the release form?

Carissa Higgins: Yes I did.

Cassie Higgins: Alright, great. We're ready to get started. So, first question: tell me about your childhood, your family, and your experiences growing up.

Carissa Higgins: Well I came from a very large family, I am one of five girls. I'm the fourth one. My father is- was a chemical engineer at Inland in General Motors and my mother was a stay at home mother as was per, at that time, the way that everyone, the wives always stayed home. My dad traveled a lot growing up, was a very involved in community, involved in church, and as I said traveled often, and my mom would be home with us getting us to school, getting us ready. With having four sisters, of course, there was never a dull moment in our house and we had many experiences, arguments going along the way. We learned how to live together, how to love together, how to live in a community together, and I look back on it fondly, I was really happy with having that big of a family even though it did cause trouble at times, but there was never a lack of someone to talk to when you needed somebody to talk to about what was going on in your life, they definitely had been through many of the experiences that I'd been through as I grew up. I was- we grew up in Beavercreek, Ohio and lived in the same house throughout my whole lifetime so, fairly small community at the time. I went to St. Luke's Church and that was the school that we belonged to also. I went to school there all through grade school and went to high school at Carroll High School which is also a Catholic high school, private. My parents definitely put a lot of value in education and paid for all of our educations through school as I was growing up. So, really great experiences growing up.

Cassie Higgins: Alright that's great. How has your fathers involvement in community service influenced the person you are today?

Carissa Higgins: Yeah, my dad was definitely a huge influence because he was so involved in our community and our lives as kids growing up, as I said he did travel a lot, but when he was home he was definitely taking the time to be involved in PTO's and any church functions that were going on. He was a reader, elector at Mass every Sunday. But my Mom wasn't out of that picture either, she was always the PTO President at school, they did it as a couple between the two of them, getting involved in any of the activities that all of us girls got into. Whether it was our sports, through swimming, our school, or our church activities. So he definitely guided me, and my mom, in to how to be involved in your kids' lives and how to make sure you were influencing them as they were growing up in a positive way. So, just the fact that they were there, they were signed up, and they were in to what we were doing all the time. They definitely had their finger on what was going on in our lives and our friends, and in our school work.

Cassie Higgins: Tell me about your involvement in community life, how has this changed across your life?

Carissa Higgins: Okay well, I've been involved through my church through things like the fish pantry and in my school life in the beginning it all came through volunteer services and things like that that we HAD to be involved in as I was a student in grade school and in high school but having been exposed to those experiences I kind of learned as I became an adult, that it was a great way to get to know your neighbors people in the community and to feel very good about yourself and I definitely rely on it now as an adult to keep myself involved and kind of the tempo of the people I live with and it definitely is a pick me up for when if you start to feel like there is too much going on and too much chaos, taking the time to volunteer or to be involved in your community definitely makes you feel better about yourself so I've found as an adult it's a win/win situation being involved in community life you know what's going on around you, you're making friends and your also feeling better about what you are doing.

Cassie Higgins: How did you did you get involved with community issues or community service?

Carissa Higgins: I got involved in the beginning through the church and making sure that the activities that were available to my kids, that I was leading through those types of things. I also am very involved in our community through a swimming program that we have, a summer swimming program. I coach during the summer time and it is a great way to get to know the people in my community and I have had an opportunity to be able to teach swimming and my career being teaching it has been really the perfect way to be teaching throughout the summer time months and having kids around and being involved in the community, again, getting to know all the families. I've also been involved through my kids schools. Anytime there is an opportunity to get involved with class projects or fieldtrips that are going on, things like that, I definitely use those opportunities to get to know the other people in the area and find out, again, like my parents did, what's going with my kids and their school work, friendships and other parents. Getting to know other parents as well.

Cassie Higgins: Tell me about your background and preparation for this work.

Carissa Higgins: Okay, as I was saying I went to grade school at St. Luke's and it was a very small community church, a Catholic school in our community. In my class it was the same kids from year to year to year, so really once you were defined in Kindergarten, it followed you all the way through 8th grade. So that definitely had an influence on me, because I had a LOT of trouble in grade school. I had a lot of difficulty staying focused. I had a lot of difficulty socially, getting along with other students and knowing the right way to get involved with other people. I used my childhood knowing my sisters and things like that to help me make sure that those experiences were something that helped me. Then after grade school I went to Carroll High School and that is in Dayton, and again it's a bigger high school but again, it's still the same type of very small community within the high school. It was people from several different communities coming together, Beavercreek being one of the small communities, and Xenia also, the community I live in now. And at Carroll I feel like I got an OUTSTANDING education that really helped me through college and to prepare me for the world and for my career. After Carroll I went to Xavier University in Cincinnati. I got a scholarship there on a diving scholarship, and during that first year had a lot of trouble as many first year college students do. I had a lot of difficulty staying focused and making sure I was on track, doing what I was supposed to be doing. It was really a challenge for me. Looking back now, knowing what I do, they didn't have the label back then, but Attention Deficit Disorder was definitely something that I inherited from my father in particular and in college I had a lot of roadblocks that were put up along the way that I learned to overcome and over compensate for in one way or another. But I was only at Xavier for a year, and then ended up coming back home and continuing my education through lots of encouragement from my father to stick with it and see it through. So I continued on at Sinclair University for a year just to keep myself going and keep motivated so as not to give up and put it back on my level, and then I finished college at Wright State University through their Education program and ended up on the Dean's list and towards the end definitely had it all figured out. But I definitely took a long road; it took me almost eight years to get through college just to get my Bachelor's Degree. So, once I had my Bachelor's Degree while I was student teaching I was offered a position, a teaching position, in first grade at Arrowood Elementary in Xenia, where I live now. And was able to, during the first seven years of teaching, get my Master's Degree, again, through Wright State University through their Education program. So I overcame tons of obstacles along the way I think due a lot to the A.D.D. that I know now was what it was that I was struggling with but, that definitely prepared me for life in overcoming any hardships that come along that adults run in to, it actually made me a lot stronger adult than I would have been without that.

Cassie Higgins: Great. How has being involved in diving instilled any work ethic in to your life?

Carissa Higgins: Yeah, my parents again one of their biggest beliefs was that children, to stay healthy and to stay on the right track as far as mentally and physically and you just- time management, they really were firm believers that you needed to be involved in sports. They really didn't care what sports we were involved in as long as we immersed ourselves in it and really became part of a team. Understood what team was about. And my three older sisters were all very good swimmers and the personality that I had when I was younger really drove me to find my own path, I didn't want to follow the same path as my three older sisters. So I really

started to shy away from swimming, and my mom in particular was very supportive of the fact that I didn't want to do what they were doing, she just kept saying, "what DO you want to do? If you don't wanna do that, what is it that you're GOING to be involved in?" And so I found a route that I wanted to pursue, which was gymnastics in the beginning. And I was involved in a gymnastics program. Found that it kinda gave me the individualization that I was looking for. It defined me separately than my sisters. However, I also came to a very quick realization that gymnastics, being as competitive as it is, that I was not a phenomenal gymnast, I was a good gymnast, and I wanted to find something that I was phenomenal at, that I was really good at. Along the way, as I was trying to find what I was that I- my gift was, I was spotted by a diving coach that is at Wright State and he came to a gymnastics meet and he said, "you would be a great diver with your swimming background and now you've got the gymnastics background as well. You outta come and try diving." And it was just the thing for me because it was at the same meets that my sisters were at. There was swimming and diving combined at that time, so it was really- it fit into our family which was why it worked, but it was also different enough that it gave me something different than what my sisters had been involved in and I really found I had a knack for it. It took a little bit of nerve and it took a little bit of daring and those were definitely traits that were right up my alley. I liked being somewhat afraid of what I was doing and not too afraid to try it and the feeling when I did it and succeeded and so the diving scholarship was the icing on the cake at that time. It was really just showing that all the time and effort that I had put into the diving choice was the right choice for me. So, it definitely opened the door for me, I don't know that I probably would've been on the college track had it not been for my involvement in diving and the opportunity with scholarships, even though it didn't end up working out in the end. It definitely gave me a shove in the right direction as far as the college track.

Cassie Higgins: That's great. Tell me about your work experiences and your career.

Carissa Higgins: Okay, as I was in high school when I probably first started working I started out, of course, as you'd heard, we were always at a pool, we were swimming, we were diving, and I started out as a swim instructor, teaching lessons, teaching other smaller kids how to swim. I was doing diving lessons later on, I was into coaching the summer leagues and that led in to later on, more volunteering as far as high school. I'll come back to that in a second though because in-between the swim instructor, while I was in college, I wasn't doing a lot of swim instructing, I was working at a daycare. By that time I'd had my first child and I was having to use a daycare and it made sense that I was going to school and then working at the daycare where my daughter was and it made it work so that I wasn't overwhelmed with school and work, being away from her, I had her with me at work so I was in daycare, learning again, and this definitely helped me on my career path. It was helping me learn how to deal with the kids themselves and the care for the kids and how to deal with the parents and the interaction between the kids. While I was finishing college, while I was doing my student teaching the very last thing before you graduate, I was offered the first grade teaching position at the school that I was doing my student teaching at which is an amazing opportunity that just doesn't happen and it was the opportunity for me. So I've been in that same building at Arrowood Elementary, in that same room teaching first grade for thirteen years now, this is my fourteenth year. So since I've been teaching I have had the opportunity to go back to coaching now that my kids have started getting older. I've coached high school swimming for two years at Xenia High School in the community

here where we live and then just recently I had the opportunity to coach Oakwood High School for a year and I coached during the YMCA program, throughout the YMCA program during my kids swimming because now they're involved in swimming and I've coached them swimming through the years just a couple years here and there, my kids are spread out so when I don't have real little ones that's when I'm able to do things like that. And I think all of these things absolutely prepared me for being the teacher that I am. I really believe the experiences that led up to work and volunteering and coaching are what made the principal at the school that I was student teaching at come to me and say, "you really need to apply for this position." With her coming to me I think it was due to the experiences she saw that I was able to handle many of those experiences through having many sisters, and taking care of my own children, coaching, and instructing throughout those years. So definitely helped me on my path.

Cassie Higgins: Great. What are some obstacles, frustrations, disappointments or challenges that you have faced in your community work?

Carissa Higgins: I have run into many, like many people have. I would say the biggest frustration that I've had throughout my life and the obstacles seem to come from within. They definitely are things that I see, inadequacies that sometimes stare you in the face like the ADD, having trouble getting along in grade school with other people. Not being the best student in the class when you are trying to figure out how to be the best student in the class so I definitely had run into obstacles along the way. Many of the frustrations come from when you are having so much trouble just getting a task finished with ADD the on task time and the organization along the way and keeping everything together I kind of took a zig zag path along the way and keeping myself goal-oriented has always been one of my biggest obstacles. I got my Master's Degree from Wright State University while I had three kids at home, I teaching full time, and I was definitely still dealing with the challenges of ADD. One of my biggest satisfactions along the way is that I was able to overcome those and push through with determination and realizing that some of the deficits of Attention Deficit are, they also come along with gifts. I was able to be very laid back about when problems came to me and problem solve calmly. I was used to adversity so when it came to me I wasn't surprised, I was taking it on like bring it, here's a new challenge, here's a new fight. If I had just gotten over this hill, I definitely can take whatever comes at me over the next hill. So, I think those disappointments and challenges have really, along the way, honestly just soaked my fires and made me more determined to get through whatever comes next. I feel, not invincible, but that I can pretty much take whatever comes at me with little exception and figure out how to get through. So, I really think the determination is the thing that was the key that all the challenges taught me was just how to push through, how to really become determined and get to that goal, that end in sight.

Cassie Higgins: So you would say that your Attention Defect Disorder growing up has made you a stronger person today? Able to face more challenges today?

Carissa Higgins: Without a doubt. Without a doubt. Especially in the field that I'm in, being a teacher, it's one of the gifts I feel like I bring to the table. Had I not had the troubles that I had in grade school, socializing, learning how to deal with my deficits, the inability to focus, the lack of attention, the disorganization, if I hadn't learned how to deal with those things I wouldn't be able

to teach my students that I have now, how to deal with some of those issues. Not that they all have ADD, but of course we all have some of the traits that are combined in there.

Cassie Higgins: Especially as children.

Carissa Higgins: Right. Absolutely, especially as children. So I feel like I have a lot to bring to the table as far as understanding of what they are feeling when they are having trouble staying organized or the frustration of trying to get a task finished without getting side tracked, and how to help them. Ideas for how to keep them on track. I definitely think the challenges have made me a stronger person without a doubt.

Cassie Higgins: And honestly I would say that I think that, that has also made you a more relatable person to your first grade students. Just that they know how difficult it is to be organized and stay focused that it's something that you can relate to.

Carissa Higgins: Right. And honestly I show them on a daily basis. I'm still- it's not as if you know, you become an adult and suddenly you are cured of ADD, I still definitely show many of the traits and I just never let any challenges that I face, I don't hide them from my students. You know, they are six year olds, and if I've set something down and I can't remember where I've put it because my mind was elsewhere I'm verbally saying to them, "okay, so, let's see, let's just back step, let's see if we can- let me see if I can back step, and retrace my steps and figure out, oh! Here it is" and how to handle it in a calm fashion and how to use it, kind of almost with humor so that not everything seems like a weight and a load on your shoulders. That things can become, this is just how I work. This is what I need to do to finish what needs finished. Not, here come all these things at me and it just keeps coming and I can't get over it. But on a daily basis this is what I do to keep myself organized. This is what I do when I make mistakes, this is what I do to back up and get a re-do if I feel I can do things in a better way.

Cassie Higgins: Great. Looking back what do you see as some of your most satisfying contributions or accomplishments?

Carissa Higgins: Well definitely the fact that I earned that Bachelor's Degree after almost eight years of challenges and roadblocks and things that were popping up in my life, good and bad. Just distractions. You know I had wonderful distractions like relationships and I had terrible distractions like the end of relationships and I had wonderful distractions like children and I had hard to deal with distractions like children. And, both of those- all of those things have really made me appreciate the fact that I did it. There are times that I, even to this day, get worked up because I never thought I would be able to get through and do it. And I did! I was able to push through and get to the other side and I never lose sight of the fact that, that is a HUGE accomplishment. Not just for someone like me, but for me in particular. It was- everybody's experience is individualized and it was a really huge accomplishment for me to get through. A huge confidence boost for me to get through, which really drove me on to get my Master's Degree. I knew if I could do that- if I can make it here I can make it anywhere and I definitely knew if I can get this far I can do anything. So that was a- definitely an accomplishment that defined who I am.

Cassie Higgins: How have your experiences growing up shaped your work today?

Carissa Higgins: The experiences that I had when I was growing up, like I kind of mentioned a little bit earlier, learning how to be an individual within a group I think is something that people learn that have larger families and having that experience in my family, trying to figure out who I was, take a different path and yet stay within our family values is something that has shaped how I work now. I definitely make sure that my classroom feels like a community. It feels like a family. I'm often talking to my students about the fact that we are here for each other that we, you know, if you see your neighbor drop their pencil, instead of ignoring that fact, we work together. We work together as a team in our room, and I think that I've brought those feelings into my classroom which makes it a really calm feel so that students are in their best frame of mind to learn. Definitely the experience of having ADD and being a troubled student. I was never a huge trouble-maker but I definitely was a bad student that, you know, you were reminding them that, "put the book away" and "what are you supposed to be doing?" and little notes home saying, "she's not quite working to her potential" and notes that said, "we've had trouble keeping her on task to finish this, I know she would do amazing on this test, however, I can tell she lost concentration towards the end" and those trials and tribulations and those feelings that they invoked, I would not be near the teacher that I am right now without having felt those feelings and overcoming them. OR not overcoming them and how it feels when you fail to overcome them and how you move forward from that failure so it doesn't happen again. Those have defined my philosophies as a teacher and the attitude I have in my classroom and toward my students and have definitely made me the teacher that I am today.

Cassie Higgins: Great. What has been the impact of your involvement in the community and community service on you and your family and/or friends?

Carissa Higgins: It definitely has had a huge impact in all aspects of my life. As I was stating earlier, through my parents example, both parents being very involved. It was the best memories of having both my parents on the PTO and being that kid whose Mom was the PTO President and whose Dad ran the cotton candy machine at the community fair and, those are the best memories that I have. Those are the things that make me look back and think, my Mom and Dad were great parents. They were just involved. I definitely took that and applied it to my own life now and my family life. Also, through community service through school that I HAD to do as a child, that's influenced me because, like I was talking about earlier, the fact that I've realized that it really does make you feel good to do those things. That they really are pick-me-ups and they, they make you feel connected with the people that you live with, where you live. But, through my parents example I definitely am involved in my kids schools, I'm always volunteering to do reading and your child's face just lights up when you walk through the door because, "that's my Mom". Going on fieldtrips it keeps you connected to who your kids are friends with and their teachers attitude towards your child. Whether you need to do an intervention, ya know, there or if there are problems that are unspoken, they often come up when you are volunteering at your kid's schools. Also through the community involvement that I've had, we've, my family and I, have made valuable friendships, lifelong friendships with families that we are now growing up with and other couples that have children and the friendships that we have bonded now, through the volunteer time and through the community involvement activities have just really enriched our lives through, ya know, it's created other social availabilities and

other ways to become social and have your kids involved with children whose parents you know and that you can be involved in sports, that they're involved in and being involved in their education and helping each other out and making phone calls when- I get phone calls from friends who want help with their- you know, this happened to their first grader, can I give them some advice. So, again, back to it makes you feel good to be able to help somebody else out.

Cassie Higgins: Great. Have your motivations for engagement and service changed over time?

Carissa Higgins: My motivation definitely has not. Like I guess I said earlier, when I was younger it was something you had to do and then as I grew up and became more mature I realized it was definitely something I wanted to be doing and my motivation has been strong. It has changed over time, but really due more to my time availability, and as I've had children and as we have been involved in sports and activities and less about my motivation and more about the time we have available as a family to get involved in things but I definitely keep it in the back of my mind that it is key to a good family life.

Cassie Higgins: Great. What lessons do you carry away from your involvement in the community and in community service?

Carissa Higgins: That if I'm feeling bad and sorry for myself that it always makes you feel better to be involved. As a parent I know that when you are starting to feel frustrated with your kids that if you get out in your community, even just going to the grocery store is something that it takes. Somebody looking at your son or daughter and saying, "oh they're so cute" or "they're so sweet". Being out in the community and seeing your neighbors and friends really is a pick-me-up and the community service that you get involved in can make you feel better about, no matter what is going on in your life, making you feel better because you feel like a good person and you feel like you're using your time wisely and you're giving back. And, again, I just never forget that it's a win/win situation when you're involved outside in your community.

Cassie Higgins: Great. Tell me the story of what you were doing in your classroom when you heard about 9/11.

Carissa Higgins: During 9/11 my husband had called the school to let the office know that something major had happened, and keep in mind I've got six year olds in my classroom so the principal opted to not let me know right away what had gone on. She didn't want to alarm the students, so at lunch time I was informed about what had happened. And as we all, the teachers, were in the teacher's lounge were in shock about what it meant and what impact it meant even for the immediate future, the rest of the day, the next hour, the next five minutes, but also the long term impact of what it would mean. Really a lot to think about and so as we gathered there we really just kind of determined what we were going to do to make our students, in that moment and in that day, feel safe and secure and reassure them that everything was going to be okay as they were hearing all of these things and the news media spin and not knowing what parents were gonna let the kids hear and not hear and trying to reduce the impact of one student telling another student inaccurately about what was going on. It definitely changed everything in an instant and I immediately went into mamma bear mode and made sure my kids were going to be safe while they were with me. My students, I was determined, were going to be safe and secure

during that time. They became my personal children and I just made sure they were taken care of and felt secure for the time being.

Cassie Higgins: Tell me why you went into the field of teaching.

Carissa Higgins: Well, that's kind of a funny story I guess. As I began college I was really thinking, "summers off? Yeah! That's what I wanna do!" But as I got in to education I really didn't start to feel like it was college it was something that I was meant to do to make the Earth a better place and to make my world and the world a better place. I knew that the experiences and the troubles that I had as a student, I knew I could take away from that. What I wished my teachers would have done to make my path an easier one and a more positive experience and I used that to mold my philosophy as a teacher and to make sure that as my students were going through grade school, first grade in particular, but any grade that I was teaching, that they were going to have a positive experience throughout their day and learn as much as they could learn in their individualized way. The experience of going to a Catholic school and kind of being in a very small class really- it was not a bad experience but definitely pigeon-holes you in to a certain mold that you need to fit in to, and I didn't feel like I fit into that mold so it made it very difficult to get through, just your school year, ya know, get through assignments and things so I definitely wanted to make sure that I could go and I could change that for a student like me or a student struggling in a different way. So I really started to feel the passion that I am really gonna bring a lot to this game that I saw missing. So that's why I went into the field of teaching.

Cassie Higgins: Do you think reading is important in a child's life?

Carissa Higgins: Huge. That is THE most monumental- if there is a soap box I can stand on and talk about THE biggest impact that a parent can have on their child's life. I would make sure that they are reading to their children EVERY, SINGLE, NIGHT. That the love of reading is what is going to make a difference in the child's life, for the rest of their lives. As a student it's going to define them as a student, it's going to define them as a person. It's going to give them the tools they need to overcome obstacles. Again, you know, you asked me about why I went into this field that's another reason. My parents instilled a love of reading in me at an early age and I saw the benefits of that and I saw how that helped me through a lot of the hard times that I don't think I would've had I struggled as a reader. So, early intervention for reading and getting your student- your child- started in reading, a love of reading, at an early of an age as possible is essential.

Cassie Higgins: Great. Talk a little about the amount of time above and beyond your work hours that it takes to do your job.

Carissa Higgins: Well of course, being a first grade teacher you don't really just go in at eight o'clock and leave at three thirty and that's the end of that. Often the amount of time and energy and money it takes outside of classroom hours are more important because it allows you to focus on the kids, solely, between eight and three thirty. The preparation put in beforehand means that someone like me, having the difficulties of organization and just staying on task, if I'm organized a head of time, meaning I'm doing this at home or at work and extra hours, it makes the difference between a productive day and a scattered, less, or more chaotic day. So you

definitely are putting the time in for the preparation ahead of time and then also on the other end of it, you are going to be bringing home work that needs to be finished that doesn't get done because you can't grade papers while you've got twenty, six year olds that are trying to learn about Science or Math or Language Arts they don't do those things on their own, so you bring home all of those things so that you can assess and evaluate and get a good feel for who needs your help the next day and who needs to be challenged more, who needs to have the lesson completely re-done and who's got it. They definitely do not put time limits on those things. I've spent many sleepless nights worrying about students, not just their academic life but their personal lives and how I can touch them, because, ultimately to be a good teacher you have to reach into their hearts. You can't just be in their heads; you have to be in touch with their hearts. If you connect with their hearts it makes it a lot easier for them to download the information you are giving them into their brains. So, pretty much it's a 24/7 job, in that it just doesn't ever stop with your kids or your students.

Cassie Higgins: After teaching for 14 years, almost 14 years, how is each year different?

Carissa Higgins: Every year is defiantly different. I've had this question, actually, from student teachers before and they say, "oh do you just get tired of teaching the same thing year after year?" because I've been in first grade all the whole time, it is defiantly NEVER the same game twice. Every year you're teaching the same curriculum but you're learning how to do it better every, single, time. You're changing things to make it better. Technology has come in to play now, smartboards, ya know, you're always trying to keep up with the fact that the kids are wanting to play video games rather than to listen to you talk. You're trying to keep up with the media aspect of it and keep the kids challenged and stimulated, to keep things funny and light and incorporate games to make their school life enjoyable. You're always- I'm always- taking classes and trying to find a better technique from year to year, a better method, a new philosophy that I can try and decide whether or not it's gonna work in our classroom or it's not going to work and that's not even to mention the fact that each year you get new personalities. You have different problems in home life or have been supported at home through reading and being read to or have not been supported at home. So each yeah its new students and new challenges because, like I said, I don't ever want to lose sight of the fact that these are individuals so I am definitely not teaching the same thing year after year after. Its ever changing, living, individualized per student each year different program. The nice aspect of that is being in the same position allows me to find what works and what doesn't work. I get rid of the stuff that doesn't work and I continue improving the things that are working so that it is ever changing, work in progress.

Cassie Higgins: Great. Tell me, what is in your future at Arrowood Elementary School?

Carissa Higgins: Unfortunately we had some bad news about two months in to the school year this year. That Arrowood Elementary is going to be closing this year due to government funding and budget cuts that have been state-wide. Our school is one of the many being impacted this year, actually our whole district is being impacted but our school is bearing the brunt of that impact and will be closing at the end of the school year. We really didn't see that coming, we are just getting ready to build new elementaries. We are gonna have five new elementaries in Xenia, so we were really excited that our community supported the new schools. Trying to keep up with

technology and keep our buildings fresh and new and keep education as high as possible in the city of Xenia. We knew we were going to be going from seven elementaries to five but that wasn't supposed to happen for two years and then we were informed that due to the budget cuts the only way that we could stay operational was to close down two of the elementaries now and go to five before the buildings have been build. The impact is going to be that all of the students and all of the teachers will be displaced and put into the other elementaries and we can only guess what the impact of that is gonna be. We do know that class size is going to be increasing, which is not something that you want for productivity in the classroom. We know that the funding is going to be cut further. We have levy's that are coming up in Xenia and we are fairly confident that the levy's are not going to be supported and in that case the cuts that are going to be coming after this are going to be devastating to the students and teachers as well. So the future at Arrowood is not grim, however we are a very small school and we are a very close knit family. A community of workers and the staff that I work with is more like family and we really hope to take the community feel of our school into the new buildings. Wherever we end up being placed we'd like to take the feeling that we have with Arrowood that we are all working together to create a good atmosphere for students and make that happen at some of the other schools, that we have been hearing it hasn't been happening. We'd really like to take some positive spin off of it and make the best out of what we've got coming to us.

Cassie Higgins: What have you learned over the years teaching?

Carissa Higgins: I have had so many experiences to learn from and honestly the saying where the students have taught me as much as I've taught them it's really very true. The biggest thing that I think that I impart on my student teachers as they're coming in that I've learned is that you honestly have to get to know the student before you can teach the student. You have know what's going on in their home life, you have to know what's important to them, you have to know what they care about and once you know that student you can really figure out how to reach into them to get through to them the information that you need to cuz they feel that you care and that you really care about what's happening to them in their homes. I've also learned a lot about learning disabilities and deficits like I said with the ADD. I came in with the working knowledge how to overcome difficulties but it doesn't stop there. I just recently had a classroom where I had four autistic students. Which is a pretty high ratio for not being special ed, but I did have an aid at the time that worked with the students and I really knew nothing about autism at the time and I came away with a working knowledge of what autism spectrum was and the different ranges and the different gifts that come along with having an autistic child. I've actually grown to be quite fascinated with finding out how it works. The four students that I had, learning a head of time that they were autistic, I read everything I could get my hand on and they realizing quickly that nothing you read has anything to do with one individual particular child, they are just guidelines. These four children were as different as they could have been without the autistic label and I had one student that was very gifted, absolutely artistically gifted, could draw things in such realistic detail but had a lot of trouble with communication and had a lot of, actually had no social skills. Was not able to interact on any level except very rudimentary. I had another student that was very gifted academically, could really remember and had a photographic, could remember every detail of every baseball card he ever saw or could read Reader's Digest when he was five, so his reading level was just immeasurable but a lot of times the comprehension, the understanding of what he read was lacking. He wasn't able to apply it, he could regurgitate it, he

could bring it right back to you and tell you what it was that you had just said but he didn't understand it in a way that it was useful knowledge to him and so that was a very interesting experience. I also had a student that struggled academically but taught me a lot about unconditional love and being able to accept differences in our lives and the fact that you may not have gifts that are openly apparent but you are able to embrace life in a way that you just- no worries and happiness all the time and being able to look at any challenge and know you're not necessarily going to climb that hill but you are going to laugh all the way up it as you struggle up that hill. Like any other experience, these four students really opened my eyes to learning in a different way other than what I had already brought to the table myself so it was a really valuable experience for me having those students.

Cassie Higgins: Would you say that you would possibly like to work with autistic children in the future?

Carissa Higgins: I absolutely have looked in to that. Not having a special ed degree really limits my availability, however, they mainstream a lot of the students now and I definitely am looking forward to- I don't think autism is going away, I think it's becoming more and more, out there and it's occurring more and more often or we're diagnosing more and more often so I'm looking forward to learning as much as I can about it and applying what I know just, again, to the general ed classroom. You know, none of the students that I've had so far had the exact same problem I had in school, but you're able to take the experiences and apply it to new situations and make it help you become a better teacher and that's what I plan to do. I really loved working with those students because it kind of opened up, for me, another avenue of how I could help students that weren't autistic but that were struggling with some of the struggles that these autistic children had kind of glaring them in the face, the subtle differences.

Cassie Higgins: What are some teaching techniques that you use to keep students interested in your class?

Carissa Higgins: Yeah, the challenge today is that teachers, standing up and lecturing in front of students is competing with the fact that they are stimulated with Cartoon Network and they have XBOXs and they have iPod Touches that have at the touch of a fingertip the information that they want and so it's definitely imperative that we keep things interesting and fun. Not that it always has to be fun and games but you definitely have to incorporate all new techniques that you're learning into your teaching. We have now started to use smartboards on a daily basis because technology is going to be so huge to the students that I'm teaching right now, and it's also fun. It keeps them in the realm of their video games and it keeps them involved like it would Cartoon Network and it helps teachers incorporate some of those things right into what you want them to know so instead of lecturing and boring them or, ya know, just giving the information they're now researching, they're finding the answers to the smartboard and they're using the computer lab to research things that in the past you wouldn't imagine six year olds trying to research about an animal and now it really is at the touch of a fingertip so you definitely have to use the technology available to you, you also have to be willing to make changes to your curriculum and figure out what's working and I've often told student teachers that you have to really have an actor or actress inside you to be a successful teacher because you have to get them involved on an emotional level so that they're engaged and it becomes more and more challenging just to

stand up and talk. They need more than that, they need more stimulation and excitement in their day.

Cassie Higgins: Tell me some technological advances that you see in future for teaching.

Carissa Higgins: I really well, you know I, thinking Jetson's-wise, but I really hope that there is a lot more along the lines of iPads and that we're even past the computer lab that we're all sharing within our building, but that every student has something along the lines of an iPad or a smartboard that's interactive and I really just, the person that guides them on the path that they want to find out about, so it's not only the curriculum that they need to know but they're also at a very young age pursue what it is they feel may be a career path for them. Even as early as age six the first grade where I'm teaching, having them take this career path and pursue their own interests on an iPad or as their researching something I think it's going to be really what the future is about, and I think that it's gonna be amazing. I think that it's gonna be, make kids really look forward to school and be excited about, you know you don't have fifteen books to carry around or take out your spelling book, everything is going to be here. You can't lose your papers so organization becomes a non-issue almost and can be limited and educated and taught and I think it's going to be really exciting to experience.

Cassie Higgins: So you would say that incorporating technology into the classroom is a good thing for the future?

Carissa Higgins: Absolutely, absolutely. I know a lot of teachers, even that I teach with in my small building that are really resistant to technology in the classroom. Not that they don't want technology there, but they're either somewhat fearful or they don't understand it completely so they are afraid to do something that they don't understand but what I've learned, again, from my students is that often times they know more than you do and they can do the troubleshooting for you. My six year olds have on more than one occasion helped me with the laptop problem we've had in classroom or discovered why we couldn't get the internet on the smartboard and what was happening with that and so it's amazing what technology can do for their confidence and can help them become teachers in their own learning environment.

Cassie Higgins: What would you have to say to those people who are not as confident in their pursuit of a college degree? Words of encouragement possibly.

Carissa Higgins: Absolutely, well I can tell you that my dad told me on more than one occasion that college and the pursuit of any career is 90% determination and 10% sweat and work and tears. If you are determined you truly can learn anything, overcome any obstacle, that you can truly be whatever it is that you would like to be you just have to be determined enough and not losing sight of the fact that anyone can do anything is the key. That no matter how many times you're knocked down, if you are determined to stand back up again that you are going to get to where you are going, it's just having the confidence to get back up again knowing you may fall.

Cassie Higgins: Are there any questions that I've failed to ask you in which you would like to raise?

Carissa Higgins: Well, I really can't think of any. Maybe just thinking about the fact that one of the, I guess one of the biggest challenges that I had forgotten to mention is balancing between your career and your community service and your family life and not to lose sight of the balance and making sure you don't lose yourself in there as well and that feel like everybody needs to keep in the back of their mind that it's a short journey that we have here and a career is very rewarding and definitely makes you feel good. That you can't lose sight of your family and your children. Learning to balance all parts of your life is one of the key, most essential parts of having a rewarding, fulfilling career and being involved in your community and making sure that you have time for all of those things.

Cassie Higgins: Great. Are there any topics that you would like to return to any say any more about?

Carissa Higgins: I can't think of any...

Cassie Higgins: Alright, well, it's been fun and thank you for taking the time to sit down and talk to me. It's been enlightening and I think I've learned a lot.

Carissa Higgins: No problem, thank you!