

Interview with Julie Taylor-Vaz

Intro:

There is no guarantee for success, but there are ways to get closer to it when you do the right things, who you surround yourself with is just as important as what you do. Finding the right people, the right classes, the right activities, and taking the right tests are all decisions that shape your future. Find out more today on Destination Youniversity with Dr. Cynthia Colon. Dr. Colon and her guests will give you the tips you need whether you're a student, parent, or educator. Now here is your host, Dr. Cynthia Colon.

Dr Colon:

Pepsi or Coke. Remember the Pepsi challenge? It was a blind taste test with cup A and cup B filled with Cola. The taster chose which cup they preferred and then they were shown which brand they chose. John Sculley, CEO of Pepsi at the time shared that time after time Pepsi was chosen when blind tested, but he said when the brand was there, Coke won out. So, which would you choose, Starbucks or Coffee Bean? McDonald's or Burger King? Apple or PC? Harvard or Pomona? UCLA or Azusa Pacific? Ohio State or Indiana University? Berkeley or UT Austin? North Western or LMU? Here's the thing. When it comes to colleges, more often than not, we are lured in by the brand name, what I call the pretty, the perfect and prestigious. My question to you is this, are the institutions we covet the perfect choice for everyone? Do you go with Ivy or intuition?

Choosing intuition takes much more courage than following what may seem the obvious choice. If you go with what feels right to you, you will need a group of cheerleaders and believers to back your choice. Today's lesson is simple. Find your team of supporters. I am Dr. Cynthia Colon, author of the book *Tips, Tales and Truths for Teens*, welcome to Destination Youniversity where we explore extraordinary people who lived ordinary childhoods and found a pathway to college for themselves, for others or went back to college years later. If you are a student, parent of a student, you teach students or you are a student of life, this show is for you. Wow. Hello Julie.

Julie:

Hello Cynthia.

Dr. Colon:

We are broadcasting live from the Buckley school here in Sherman Oaks. It is a lovely, lovely day and this campus is just gorgeous as I remember it.

Julie:

Thank you.

Dr. Colon:

Thank you to the tech team and the media team. And this is my colleague, my friend extraordinaire, Julie Taylor-Vaz. Welcome Julie, how are you feeling?

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Julie:

I feel great. Thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Colon:

We are nestled in this very little spot in Southern California. So, what I want you to do before we do anything is just describe for our listeners across the country where we're nestled, where are we in Southern California?

Julie:

We are in a beautiful Canyon surrounded by greenery and deer sometimes in the Santa Monica Mountains where the San Fernando Valley meets LA proper. We are just over the Hill from Hollywood, California.

Dr. Colon:

We are so close to Hollywood, but really for all intents and purposes, we're in the Valley. We are Valley girls today.

Julie:

That's right.

Dr. Colon:

Which is what I love because we can be in the Valley and also be minutes and moments away from CBS studios and Warner brothers and all of that good stuff that people sort of always attribute to Los Angeles? So, I think the last time we saw each other, we were both at different institutions. I was at Marymount and you were at another private independent school. And this is what I love about private schools is the community. And not to say that that's not found in other schools, but it's a really, I got lost on my way to your office and there were these two wonderful women who were coming out with their lunch and they said, Oh, well let me walk you over to Julie's office. And I was like, okay, great. I feel like I'm a Disneyland already. So anyway, well today we're talking about Ivy or institution. And so I think the title, it makes no secret that we're going to get to the point where you were having to choose between Ivy league or going with your intuition and we're going to get to that quickly or we're going to get to that and at some point today. So, it's always a tease, right? We're going to get to that and you'll tell us sort of what you ended up choosing. But before we do that, let's set the scene for where you grew up. I loved talking to you a couple of weeks ago and I thought this was really a story that people should hear about; your journey, your pathway to college. So, tell us about a Crescent City.

Julie:

Sure. I grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana on the Gulf Coast and I attended a parochial school for kindergarten through fifth grade where my parish church and my school and my neighborhood and my family were all the same community. They

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overlap so much; they were all one in the same and that was just a really great supportive foundation from which to start my education.

Dr. Colon:

So, the Catholic school, you were wearing the Catholic school uniform the whole way?

Julie:

That's right. It was a little blue skirt and saddle Oxfords with a white shirt with a pocket that always had a handkerchief in it.

Dr. Colon:

Oh, what color was the handkerchief?

Julie:

White.

Dr. Colon:

I love it. I loved when at Marymount the girls had to wear a dress uniform on Mondays and they had to wear their loafers. They had to wear their penny loafers so that the saddle shoes were not then but the loafers were always shiny and spinning shine. So, this was your family, I love that you use the term, this was your family, your neighborhood, your community. They were your everything.

Julie:

Yes.

Dr. Colon:

Right as you grew up, right. The church, the school, the neighborhood, all as one family. So, walk us through who was in your life in elementary school and then walk us through high school that were people that were maybe models or doing things, heading to college.

Julie:

The models for me were largely family members. My cousin Todd Thomas, who was a few years older than I was and my god brother Billy Foster, Dr. Clarence Foster, and he also goes by the name Trip. They were both really great students who were at the top of their classes at their high schools a few years ahead of me and they both went away to college. So, they let me see that I could go away to college if I was a good student. And if I wanted to and they encouraged me to pursue that idea.

Dr. Colon:

Now, I don't know if I asked you this before, but did your parents go to college?

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Julie:

No, I'm first generation to college and both of my colleagues who are college counsellors here with me at Buckley are also first generation to college. I think many people who find their way to this profession were first generation to college.

Dr. Colon:

Because, and for me, it was so important for me to give that gift back to other people, someone in my life believed in me or showed me the pathway and showed me how to navigate this crazy process which wasn't so crazy when we were applying and it's crazy now. But giving that gift back is really important to me. What about you?

Julie:

And to help other people find out that they can pursue their dreams too. Yes.

Dr. Colon:

Yeah. It's really important. Absolutely. Now you talk about elementary school and that your experience there being that the majority was African American in your elementary school.

Julie:

That's right.

Dr. Colon:

So, what happened when you went to high school? What was the difference there?

Julie:

Sure. When I went to high school, I was still living in the same majority black city, but I was attending the magnet school for the gifted in New Orleans public schools, Benjamin Franklin high school. And at that time Franklin in the 80's was only 10% black.

Dr. Colon:

Oh wow.

Julie:

And so, I went from a situation where I had been in the majority to a situation which in the same city in which I was in a very strict minority.

Dr. Colon:

So did you realize that, I think sometimes when we were kids, we don't necessarily notice that, but what did you notice in high school?

Julie:

I really noticed that because the students were from all over the city for one thing. So not all from the same neighborhood. And we took school buses to get to campus or public transportation. So, I loved the fact that I was meeting kids from all

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different kinds of backgrounds, but it was uncomfortable at times to be in such a small minority.

Dr. Colon:

So, who did you turn to for support in that situation?

Julie:

I reflect back and realize that some of my greatest supporters were the African American women who were on the faculty and staff of that school.

Dr. Colon:

Okay.

Julie:

There were about a half dozen women who taught various subjects and one was even the librarian and the sponsor of the student government and those women I think really held me up and held up other African American students and encouraged us to pursue our goals.

Dr. Colon:

Which is what you need. Which is what we all need. So, you have these family members who you saw going to college and doing things and you said they were at the top of their class. And so, let's back up for a second and explain why were you selected to go to this school?

Julie:

Well, I suppose I had earned a spot through testing and grades and I had participated in the gifted and talented program at my public middle school and our humanities teacher especially encouraged us to apply to this particular magnet school that she had attended herself.

Dr. Colon:

So you were already on the path of being tops in your class in middle school, so then you get I don't know if you were selected or how it all, nowadays it's like lottery, all the kinds of things. So, you now are going to this magnet school and you're obviously smart and doing your thing and you find your way to becoming the student body president.

Julie:

I was the first African American student body president, the first African American homecoming queen.

Dr. Colon:

Julie, like this is amazing.

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Julie:

Like this was the 80's.

Dr. Colon:

This was the eighties. Okay. So, we're not going to talk about how old we are because I have a birthday coming up, so let's not, I can't even go there. Alright, so you become the first African American student body president. Now, I'm just going to say this out loud because when someone tells me that they were the student body president or currently a student now that I'm working with or when I talk to someone like you and you say that, I always remember when I was at Vassar college admissions back in the day where we still wrote notes for each applicant, the file folders were color coded and the top sheet was to take notes and at the very top of the sheet there was one line and if the student was student body president, editor in chief of the yearbook or the newspaper, a captain of a major sport on campus, Eagle scout or girl scout gold award, or had some major like regional or state-wide or national recognition of whatever that went at the very tippy top. So why do you, I see you're shaking your head so you know what I'm talking about.

Julie:

Yes, I did similar things.

Dr. Colon:

So why do you think being a student body president is so worthy of being sort of really denoted on somebody's application?

Julie:

Because typically that student was elected by his or her peers. The entire student body at that school said, this is the person, this is the person who should lead this. So, I say that not reflecting upon my own experience, but sort of universally, I think that's the experience that admission officers are thinking about when they're giving special attention to those kinds of positions.

Dr. Colon:

Well I love what you said. These are the people who have been selected, elected by their peers.

Julie:

That's right.

Dr. Colon:

And so, the application is so much more than just what you do. What you do becomes your resume, your application, but you know what people say about you say a lot about who you are as a person, your character.

Julie:

Exactly.

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Dr. Colon:

Yeah. So, I just think it's just amazing. And I wanted to just say how...

Julie:

I'm still really proud of that accomplishment all these years later, all these decades later.

Dr. Colon:

And so, you know what, I was student body president too. Maybe that's why we can along so well. So, let's go back to this little gem of these women. So, these women encouraged you and so what else do you remember? Let's speak to those who are listening to their educators, what are key things that you remember they did that our educators can learn from.

Julie:

They held us to very high expectations. They knew that we were bright and they wanted to make sure that we knew that we were bright, that we were strong students, and that we had the whole world available to us to do whatever we wanted to do.

Dr. Colon:

That's a **golden nugget**. And if I haven't said this already, last week, I said, you need pen and paper for this show because there's going to be golden nuggets but holding people to high expectations. Teenagers will rise to the level you believe they will. So last week's lesson was when, not if. So, when you do blah, blah, blah. What else can you remember that they did?

Julie:

They were also there to just catch us when we fell.

Dr. Colon:

Oh right.

Julie:

Because that's notable as well. Not everything is perfect. You don't win every competition. Things don't always go as planned. And they were there to say, it's okay, keep going.

Dr. Colon:

Keep going. That's one of my favorite lessons these days to keep going. Because I'm finding that I'm having to do that in my own life. Keep going. I feel like I'm on the right path. But teenagers, they often question, am I on the right path? Am I doing the right thing? Should I quit this team because I don't get a lot of playing time? So many questions they ask themselves and it's important that we have our team of supporters, our village of cheerleaders and our community of believers. So that's what we need to really be talking to students about and adults, how can you serve

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in one of those roles to help a teenager understand that they've got to just keep going. If they're following their gut intuition, follow your intuition.

Julie:

That's right.

Dr. Colon:

Then they probably should stay doing what they love doing. Even if they're not great at it. You can get there.

Julie:

Yes. I would also say that my parents were there for me. My parents just Say to me go for it. Do you want to be president or vice president? Go for president. They were there cheering me on the whole time as well. They weren't sure what was happening at school or in education in general, but they had confidence in me and they allowed me to be very independent and just supported me as I went along.

Dr. Colon:

Parents are educators.

Julie:

The educators around me.

Dr. Colon:

Parents are very key. I think my dad helped me make my buttons for running for president or something like that. We sat up all night long doing something like that. Well great. Well if I haven't said it already, you do need pen and paper always. Because they're always such great little nuggets for anybody who's listening, whether you're a student, a parent, or a teach students. So you're going to want to write them down because when we come back soon we're going to get into more of Julie's story and get to the place where you have to decide and how she wrestled with that decision and had her team right there to support her. We are just getting started. Julie's going to share more **golden nuggets** when we come back. We need to go to commercial break but stay with us. Grab your beverage of choice. I know I've got my green tea here and my water and you've got your water here. We've got the lavender going to keep us calm. I love it.

Julie:

A diffuser.

Dr. Colon:

A diffuser keeping us calm. So, all right, we'll be right back. Stay tuned. We'll be right back after this commercial break.

Commercial Break [17:56]

Dr. Colon: (20:46)

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Welcome back everyone. I'm Dr. Cynthia Colon here with Julie Taylor-Vaz, former admission officer and currently a private school counsellor at the Buckley school in Los Angeles. We should have said this before, but between the two of us, I mean we've probably visited over 200 colleges, well over well over 200. So, before we leave, let's do like round of like our favorites because I've seen so many and I'm curious to know what some of your favorites are too.

Julie:

Sounds good.

Dr. Colon:

See, I'm telling you, you need that pen and paper everybody. So, we're going to get back. We're going to do that before we go today, but here we're now in high school. So, Julie Taylor-Vaz is telling us her journey and her pathway to college. And she's the student body president. She's been elected by her peers. She's at this magnet school. She is in New Orleans. And at this particular school, even though the city is predominantly African American, the school is only 10% African American. So, she becomes the first African American ASB president. And here she is now as a senior. And tell us what senior year was like and where did you apply? What did you do? Tell us about that whole process.

Julie:

So back then students didn't apply to as many colleges as they do now. And as I reflect, I applied to me think six institutions. Like nobody does that anymore. So, I applied to Harvard and Yale and Penn and Stanford and Brandeis and Two Lane.

Dr. Colon:

Well, and Two Lane was the backyard school, right?

Julie:

The local university, the local private university.

Dr. Colon:

Did most people apply to Two Lane? Was that like the...?

Julie:

Two Lane and LSU.

Dr. Colon:

And so, do you go to the college counsellor office? What do you do back then? I mean nowadays we make appointments and all this stuff.

Julie:

We have a very methodical system now and I don't remember that structure at all and there certainly wasn't a rush to apply early. My Stanford application was due in January.

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Dr. Colon:

I don't even know that early action, early decision even existed, I'm guessing it did not.

Julie:

I think early existed largely for athletes at that time.

Dr. Colon:

I love that. And like the college counselling office, you just would go by and like pick up an application and like fill it out. Now I'm curious, so you mentioned three Ivy League schools and who put that bug in your ear? How did you decide? Who encouraged you to do that?

Julie:

That was my god-brother, Richard Foster. So, he said there's more to the world than New Orleans, Louisiana and you are a great student and you are student body president and you're going places and I think you should go places outside of New Orleans for college. And he just really encouraged me to reach for the stars.

Dr. Colon:

So, I love this. And I also want to say the point of most States wants to keep their best students in state and I think that's a noble cause as well. And that a lot of students do stay in state and at the same time many also come back. So, it's not a bad idea to explore outside of your four walls. Not literally, but sort of your 20-mile radius. So, I love that.

Julie:

He wanted me to see what was out there besides New Orleans.

Dr. Colon:

Absolutely. I love that. So, it's January you apply, it's not November. You apply in January, so you just have a short window before you wait and you get your decisions back. So, they come I guess April 1st week of April. And I'm assuming you got in everywhere.

Julie:

No.

Dr. Colon:

No. Tell us where you got in.

Julie:

I got into Stanford and Penn and Brandeis and Two Lane and I'm not ashamed to say I did not get into Harvard.

Dr. Colon:

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Oh, you know what? It happens to the best of us. Well, so you got into Penn, your Ivy League school and you had other choices and now, we should pause for a second. Stanford, Stanford, people listening is like, oh well she got into Stanford. Holy smokes. Wow, that's pretty great, that's the obvious choice. And it might be the obvious choice today, but that was not. So, tell us...

Julie:

It was 1984 and now we think of US News and World Report and a variety of ways among those of us who are college counsellors and admissions officers. But back then US News and World Reports ranking had just hit the scene. It was 1983/84 and in the first year of that ranking, Stanford was number one, but Stanford didn't have that cache.

Dr. Colon:

So, first of all, people were not clamouring to US News and World Report to figure out where to go to college. So even if it was there, it was the first time. But also, just to put in perspective, Stanford was not even a hundred years old.

Julie:

No.

Dr. Colon:

It was founded in 1885 established in 1891. This is 1984. So, it's not even a hundred years old.

Julie:

Yeah.

Dr. Colon:

So, can I just tell you how old Harvard, Yale yeah. Harvard was established 1636, Yale in 1701 and Penn in 17 something, right?

Julie:

It has a baby.

Dr. Colon:

It was a baby. It was a baby. And nobody really thought that anyone should pick a Stanford over an Ivy League school.

Julie:

I don't even think the term Ivy plus had been coined yet. Now people think of Stanford as being part of the Ivy plus crowd, but back then Stanford was not considered to be of the same calibre as the Ivy's.

Dr. Colon:

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Okay, so talk about that social pressure. What was happening now that you have these choices and you had until May 1st to make a decision what was going on then?

Julie:

There was a great deal of pressure for me to choose the Ivy League institutions simply because it was Ivy. Not because it was the best match for me, but I was the person who had actually done the research. I was the person who was drawn to Stanford who felt that it met my needs, but that was very specific research that I had done. It wasn't just sort of the quick off the top of your head, it's the Ivy. That's where you should go idea that everyone was coming at me with.

Dr. Colon:

So, what are you feeling as a kid? You're a teenager.

Julie:

Yes.

Dr. Colon:

And we sometimes forget that our students are teenagers because they act so grown up, they act so grown up. But I often talk about that April time is so emotional. So, do you do what everybody wants you to do and carry that and be the family member that goes to the Ivy League school or do you follow your gut? Tell a story that you told me about how students of color were portrayed and why you really loved what Stanford was doing at the time.

Julie:

So, in the 80's I was receiving all sorts of literature recruiting me as a student of color. And I don't even think we use that term back then.

Dr. Colon:

No, no. It was like minority students for sure.

Julie:

And some institutions were referring to me as a third world person.

Dr. Colon:

Wow. That just blows my mind when you told me that.

Julie:

And I thought, I live in the first world. I live in the United States. I'm not third world.

Dr. Colon:

That was in like brochures and stuff?

Julie:

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Yes.

Dr. Colon:

That's crazy.

Julie:

It was the term at the time, at a lot of institutions. And that just didn't resonate with me. So those leaflets got thrown into the trash right away. That didn't feel...

Dr. Colon:

They'll go unnamed right now. And so, what spoke to you about Stanford? What were they doing?

Julie:

I really felt that as I dug deeper and looked at statistics, I could tell that Stanford was really walking the walk and not just talking the talk, that Stanford truly was diverse. [29:24inaudible]. That was one of my main criteria. I wanted a place in the nearest city. I wanted a place with a strong reputation. I wanted a place that was medium sized. I wanted a place that had this or that or the other thing. But another thing that I wanted was a significant number of students of color. I wanted a cohort. I wanted there to be other African American students.

Dr. Colon:

Okay. So, you go there and you just fell in love.

Julie:

I did.

Dr. Colon:

You chose that. And do you remember the day that you made that decision or who you told, like who was the first person you were like, this is what I'm doing.

Julie:

I don't remember that day. I remember the day I moved on to campus.

Dr. Colon:

Oh, tell us about that.

Julie:

Well, I had never seen Stanford. Everything I had learned, I had learned on paper and through conversation because there was no internet, there were no websites to...

Dr. Colon:

It was far and expensive to go.

Julie:

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I could not afford to visit. So, my very first day of seeing Stanford was my very first day of orientation. I flew out there by myself, was picked up at the airport by orientation volunteers, got on a bus with other kids who were picked up at the airport like I was, and then driven to my dorm and saw all the orientation volunteers yelling my name, someone yelled my name when they saw me because they had studied the frosh book and could put names to faces.

Dr. Colon:

Oh, I love that person.

Julie:

[30:53inaudible] the orientation or grandmas. So, it was Julie Taylor from New Orleans woo-hoo. And I just thought, okay, this is my place. This is for real.

Dr. Colon:

I've been to the Stanford campus. It's one of the most beautiful campuses in the country in my humble opinion. So, can you just tell us what does that look like? Like you're from New Orleans and there's a very different architecture there. So, what do you notice right away? What does that look like?

Julie:

It took me a while to get used to the sandstone and red tower rooms. It really did. It took me a while to say...

Dr. Colon:

So, California.

Julie:

Yes, and it took me a while to get used to the natural California native plants, likely the eucalyptus scrubs and things like that. Now I hold on the scent of eucalyptus because Stanford has a huge eucalyptus scrub in the stadium.

Dr. Colon:

The farm.

Julie:

Absolutely. So it took me a while to get used to sort of the natural California approach to things instead of everything being manicured and old.

Dr. Colon:

So I just said the farm because that was my natural intuition, and as you know, I went to USC, so I'm part of that pack 12. So, the farm, I'm very familiar with the farm. I've been there blah, blah, blah, and it's worth saying that Stanford, the name Stanford, Leland Stanford. The school was named after the Stanford, the mother and father, their only child.

Julie:

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That's right.

Dr. Colon:

Who died of typhoid just before turning sixteen? And this couple tried for a long time to have children. They wanted children and she actually, especially for that time, she got pregnant very late. And so, they did everything for this child and the child wanted for nothing and needed for nothing. They had lots of wealth at this point. And when he died, I mean, that was devastating. And so, Jane Stanford really decided at some point that she wanted to be the mother of the children of California.

Julie:

That's right. It was very regional in the beginning.

Dr. Colon:

Very regional. And so, when Stanford was founded, I did a little bit of homework. California was only 35 years old.

Julie:

That blows my mind.

Dr. Colon:

And so back to again, Harvard was founded in 16, whatever I said, 1636. Yale at 1701. So, these schools had been there like over, hundreds of years old. So, it's pretty amazing when you think about it that Stanford is now like basically the number one school in the country. Don't say that too loudly. People out there will be like, no, I beg to differ. I beg different. But anyway, I think that the Stanford story they actually were tuition free for many, many years. And so, anyone who wanted an education in the region could come.

Julie:

And Stanford was always coed.

Dr. Colon:

Stanford was always coed. Oh, that's good.

Julie:

Stanford was always coed, whereas the Eastern universities had started out as men only.

Dr. Colon:

Oh, my goodness. We are talking about Stanford and talking about Julie's journey in choosing the non-Ivy choice. And so, after you graduate, I love this story too, tell us the story about you going home. You were going to be a lawyer. So, when you're young and you're smart, you have three choices, lawyer, doctor or going into Wall Street doctor.

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Julie:

Lawyer or engineer.

Dr. Colon:

Engineer, oh there you go.

Julie:

That time it wasn't business, business wasn't even, now it was before I suppose, doctor, lawyer, engineer, business person.

Dr. Colon:

Okay, so doctor, lawyer, engineer. You were going the path of lawyer.

Julie:

Yes.

Dr. Colon:

And you go home and tell us that story.

Julie:

So after I had become a college admission officer and a college counsellor, I went home to help my parents pack up my childhood home before moving and my mother handed me a box filled with certificates and report cards and all sorts of things. And one of the things I found in that box was a career interest inventory that I had taken as a test in middle school. And very clearly the results of that test indicated that I should consider becoming a counsellor.

Dr. Colon:

This is my favorite story. Even more than like not choosing the whole Ivy League, like the whole college story. This is my favorite story. You know why? Because we have to learn to listen to our gut. That's really what we're talking about today. Listening to your gut and having people around you who encourage you to listen to that gut. So often I say to parents, remember that kid, your child is now a senior in high school. What did he or she love doing at three? At five? At seven? At ten? So, I have a niece and she loves music, loves music and sings and knows every word, she's four. I mean even at three she would do that. So, I'm like, oh, you're going to be the next Ryan Seacrest. I say things to her like this because that's what you were really good at. So, going back and now you go back to being an admission officer and you now feel like, Oh, this is what I'm supposed to be doing.

Julie:

Yes.

Dr. Colon:

And not, and you sort of derail from the law because you had been interning, you'd been on all kinds of things, right?

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Julie:

I had worked at a law firm every summer of college. I was vice president of the Black Pretty Law Society. I taught a class on black issues in the law as an undergraduate, but I needed to be a counsellor.

Dr. Colon:

You were doing what the brand, right, the Pepsi challenge you were doing the Coke, what everybody would say, you got to do this and you got to follow this path and you got to become a lawyer. And now you finally say you know what; I've got permission to do what I'm supposed to be doing. Oh, my goodness. So probably the biggest thing that the listeners picked up on is that you were in the admission office as an admission officer at Stanford, probably in the days when they were really rising to become Stanford. So, I hope it's okay that I ask you when we come back to share some of those stories, some of the behind the scenes truths of the Stanford admission office.

Julie:

Sure.

Dr. Colon:

So, I want you to all to stay with us because we're here with former Stanford admission officer Julie Taylor-Vaz, private school counsellor. She's filled with **golden nuggets**. Please have your pen and paper ready and we've got our water's ready. We need to take a commercial break, but please stay in to stay tuned. We will be right back.

Commercial Break [38:03]

Dr. Colon: (40:19)

Welcome back everyone. You're listening to Destination University. I'm your host, Dr. Cynthia Colon, and I'm here with former Stanford admission officer Julie Taylor-Vaz. We are broadcasting live from the Buckley school here in Sherman Oaks, California, where Julie is the director of college counselling. Well we are having fun today.

Julie:

It's a great time.

Dr. Colon:

You were telling me that you had an internship at NBC.

Julie:

So, it was the local NBC affiliate in New Orleans. I did.

Dr. Colon:

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Well then, we're in our element. I can tell that you are right in your element. So, thank you so much, such a treat to be with you.

Julie:

Thank you for having me.

Dr. Colon:

So, as I said just before we went to break that I'm sure what's interesting to us is maybe not the most interesting to our listeners, but what's interesting to them I'm sure is your time at Stanford in the admission office. So, thank you for your permission to ask you, what can you share with the listeners. What were some applicants that stood out, your favorite essay, maybe a little mishap, little something, give us something, some pearls of wisdom and also some like craziness?

Julie:

So, I was in the Stanford admission office for six years and during the very first year that I did admission, one of the students that we admitted was David Shaw who is currently the head coach of the Stanford football team.

Dr. Colon:

Oh my God. I'm obsessed with college football, so I'm like just dying. I want you to introduce me to him. Wow. So, you were part of that committee that admitted him?

Julie:

I was part of that committee. It happens that his father had been hired to work at Stanford under Denny Green and his father Willy Shaw with coming to the university. And so, it was fun to admit Willy's son. But one of my very favorite students of all time from my time at Stanford was David's roommate, Vaughn Bryant, who was on the football team with him, who was coached by Willy Shaw, who went on to get a master's degree in social work at North Western after he left Stanford and played in the professional leagues for a while and then went back to the NFL and worked to help players who had not finished their college degrees, go back and finish those degrees, go back to college and finish their degrees.

Dr. Colon:

Oh my gosh. He needs to be a guest on my show. That is fantastic.

Julie:

Fantastic.

Dr. Colon:

That's a great story. Tell us his name again. His name is Vaughn Bryant and he was the roommate to David Shaw.

Julie:

They're still really close friends.

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Dr. Colon:

Oh my God, what a great story. I love that. Master's in social work from Northwestern. That's one of my favorites. Okay, so tell us another favorite.

Julie:

So in my very last year of admission at Stanford, I read the most hauntingly beautiful essay written by a young woman from the Delisle, Mississippi small town outside of New Orleans on the Gulf coast, who his name is Jesmyn Ward, J-E-S-M-Y-N, Ward, W-A-R-D. And her essay was so beautiful that when the Stanford alumni magazine asked for nominations of college admission essays that should be published in the fall when the students came to campus, I immediately said this one and Jesmyn's essay was published, and now she has gone on to be a published author who has won the MacArthur genius grant, who has twice won the national book award, who has published a memoir and three novels.

Dr. Colon:

It's amazing. And you read her admission essay.

Julie:

I read her admission essay, and two years ago our head of school said, Julie, we're going to read this book by an author you might know in our senior administrative team.

Dr. Colon:

It's wild.

Julie:

And I said, not only do I know who you're talking about, but I read her Stanford application. And the first thing we did in our administrative team meeting before reading her novel was to read her college admission essay out loud.

Dr. Colon:

I see two books. What was the book that you read as administrative team?

Julie:

She has many books, so we read Sing Bird Sing, I've read recently and then I can't even think of the names of them right now which book out. But she's also authored a memoir and that was actually what we read **[44:53inaudible]**. Of all the young men, the black men in our community who had died in various ways. It's called Men We Reaped, a memoir and it's about all of the people with whom she grew up in this really underserved community. And one of her themes through all of her books is that these people who were in the underclass in some ways are real people with real lives and real emotions and we need to pay attention to them and they don't get enough attention.

Dr. Colon:

You she said that she teaches?

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Julie:

She teaches at Two Lane in creative writing now.

Dr. Colon:

Love that, and you were admitted Two Lane and local. And I'm going to be in New Orleans in a couple of weeks for my Rhoda field's convention and maybe I should go knock on her door. I love that. Oh, my goodness. Any other little secrets? Can you give us one little secret?

Julie:

A little secret, a little secret? Well this might seem a secret to some, the people who read applications and institutions like Stanford, at colleges and universities all over this country are real live human beings. So much so that the team with which I worked at Stanford is having a reunion in a few weeks in Northern California. Everyone who worked under Dean Jean Vetter, who was one of the first women to head up in admission office at Stanford, she's a legend. She is calling us all together for a little reunion. We're going to have a potluck at her house and I am going to drive up to Northern California to participate with about 25 other people who served under Jean.

Dr. Colon:

So one of the things I talk about is that this process is not objective.

Julie:

No.

Dr. Colon:

It is subjected to humans.

Julie:

That's right.

Dr. Colon:

Real, real people. And I love that you're saying that you're going to get together all these people who worked there. I know others; I actually have other friends who've worked at Stanford as well. I wonder if there'll be there, but one of the things that former Vassar college admission folks do, we do the March madness brackets every...

Julie:

Together?

Dr. Colon:

Yes, yes. And then JC to sown, he's in the office, he's the director of admissions now and, and he sends out an email, I don't know like days before to anyone who's ever

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been an admission officer at Vassar and you have so many days to register your brackets or whatever. But I love college sports, so I do it for that reason, but I also just do it because it's a community of people. It's a really tight knit group of people.

Julie:

It's like a fraternal organization.

Dr. Colon:

It is.

Julie:

Even if you were not there during the same years, you have some sense of what it was like to work there and you feel connected to, I feel connected to the people who are doing Stanford admission now, even though I served during the eighties and nineties.

Dr. Colon:

So, they're not scary people. The moral of the story is they're not scary people. So, when we suggest that you introduce yourself, you send a note or there's just people and certainly everybody likes to get a thank you note. So, okay, we've made some promises. So gosh, time is flying by. We've got like seven minutes left. So, there are over 4,000 colleges and universities in the US, I want you all who are listening to let that sink in for a second. There are more colleges than there are shopping malls, Apple stores, amusement parks, and national parks combined. So, there were like 2,500, four-year institutions and then the others are two-year institutions and next week I'm going to be interviewing the executive director of colleges that change lives. She's also the national spokesperson for that and she's going to be one of your keynote speakers this year, Maria Fertado. And so next week tune in because she's going to give you an ear full of colleges that you probably have never heard of. Hopefully, you have, but probably not. So, in that sort of spirit of Maria we're going to do a Spitfire channel and we're channelling Maria if you're listening. Oh, my goodness. We are channelling you and getting ready for next week. Okay. So, I'm going to say a type of school and you tell me what first comes to mind and I'll tell you mine.

Julie:

Okay.

Dr. Colon:

Okay. Here we go. Let's get into the mic; we're going to share the mic here. All right, so your favorite science technology engineering, math school?

Julie:

At the moment, Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey.

Dr. Colon:

Mine is Olin College of Engineering. All women's college?

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Julie:

Wellesley Smith Scripts.

Dr. Colon:

Agnes Scott Barnard College. Liberal Arts College?

Julie:

Pomona Bates McAllister.

Dr. Colon:

Oh, that's going to be Rhoden College for me. Business school?

Julie:

I would say business schools within larger institutions like Villanova's. Indiana's.

Dr. Colon:

Oh, that's good. Babson College for me. East coast college?

Julie:

Tough. Long Chester.

Dr. Colon:

Seton Hall. South?

Julie:

Got to go with Two Lane here, very good school.

Dr. Colon:

That's good. That's good. You get bonus points for that. Minus Savannah College of art and design, Southeast?

Julie:

Davidson, North Carolina, and like University of Miami.

Dr. Colon:

Yep, that's mine too. I got that on my list. Midwest school?

Julie:

WashU and North Western are very popular among my students.

Dr. Colon:

So, I'm going with St Louis University, maybe that Catholic school girl in me. But also, it's also one of my favorite beautiful campuses. It has the most statues of any college campus. Pacific Northwest?

Julie:

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Lewis and Clark, University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington.

Dr. Colon:

Gonzaga University. West coast?

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Julie:

West coast, Stanford.

Dr. Colon:

I knew you would say that. For me it's UC Santa Cruz, that's where I have my banana slugs. That's where I had my rookie camp when I first became a college admission officer. Catholic school?

Julie:

Georgetown, Xavier, university of Louisiana, in Loyola, New Orleans.

Dr. Colon:

Yep. I had Xavier in Ohio. Private institution?

Julie:

Private? Oh, I like all of those big universities with state school names like Boston university, Southern Methodist university, North Western university. People assume their state universities, public institutions, but they're just named after places.

Dr. Colon:

So, did I skip one? College football team, your favorite college football team?

Julie:

LSU and actually Alabama. How about that?

Dr. Colon:

Okay. For me it's Nebraska and USC. Of course, I have to say my Trojans. Okay, we've got to keep going. We've got five tips for you before we leave. So, write these down. Here we go. Let's quickly go through them. Julie, you can go up first.

Julie:

I think it's just really important for students to be themselves, be their best selves in their applications and not try to be what they think admission officers want them to be.

Dr. Colon:

Number two, find your mentors. Again, your community of supporters, cheerleaders, and believers, find them. Three?

Julie:

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Know your friends and hang with those people who have goals that are similar to yours and who want only the best for you.

Dr. Colon:

Absolutely. Number four, find the person who will say, when you go to college, when you become a lawyer, and if you haven't listened to last week's episode, it's powerful. And number five?

Julie:

Believe in yourself.

Dr. Colon:

Oh, my goodness. Okay my friends, we've offered you some tips and tales. But here is the real truth. As a teen, and even as an adult, it is easy to be lured in by the brand name, the pretty, the perfect, the prestigious, but check yourself the school that tugs at your heart is likely the school for you. Parents try not to put too much pressure one way or another. Ultimately, this decision will become their home for more than just the four years ahead of them. Allow your teen to accept the marriage proposal that is best for her, the campus that is best for him. And if you are as lucky as Julie, you just might be choosing the school. That becomes the next big thing. So, the moral of the story, take the Pepsi challenge blind test and go with your gut. We're running short on time, but Julie tell our listeners how they can get a hold of you if they should have a question.

Julie:

The best way to reach me is via email at jtaylor-vaz@buckley.org

Dr. Colon:

Okay, that's great. College football starts this week. I'm sure we'll be watching. Gracias por acompañarme tu es mi familia. Thank you for joining me today you are my family. For additional free resources, a free consultation or to register for my essay camps, you can go to my website, drcynthiacolon.com. And if you have a question or a topic or something or you want to recommend a guest for my show, please email email@destinationyouuniversityatgmail.com. Educators and adults if you're looking to earn extra income or save for college tuition, you can also email me and we can have a chat. And that is all for today. My dreamers, I am Dr. Cynthia Colon. If this episode has fuelled your confidence or helped you think about bigger dreams, please share this episode with three people in the next 30 minutes. I'll see you next Wednesday at noon Pacific for another episode of Destination Youuniversity. Until then, wherever you are, may you have a happy and sunny day. Bye. Say bye, Julie.

Julie:

Goodbye everybody.

[Outro 55:08]

Thank you so much for listening this week to Destination Youuniversity. Be sure to join Dr. Cynthia Colon again next Wednesday at 12 noon Pacific time, 3:00 PM

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