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## Interview with Jody Vance

Sarah Bush

Jody Vance

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**Interviewer:** Sarah Bush

**Interviewee:** Jody Vance

**Date:** February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Place:** Peirce Pub

Sarah Bush: Ok, so maybe we can start off by just having you state your name and today's date.

Jody Vance: My name is Jody Vance, and today is February fifteenth, 2012.

SB: Ok, and can you tell me very, just briefly who you are your role in this community?

JV: I work for Kenyon College in the Student Activities Office, not always in there, I worked with Multicultural Affairs first, and have been here for ages, I'd say 19 ½ years, so small community is where I live and where I work.

SB: Um, so how often do you go to the post office?

JV: I go to our small post office, our personal mail is delivered to our home because we live out in the country and we have a mailbox. So, but we have a business and the business post office box is down in a small, very small community called Mount Liberty, Ohio.

SB: So, where do you live?

JV: I live outside in the country, but it's closest to Mount Liberty, which really isn't even a town, but it used to be vibrant. Historically, it was the center of Ohio or something of that sort. They like to promote it that way.

SB: Ok, um, so what kind of interactions do you have with other patrons at the post office or with employees at the post office?

JV: Currently they have one and a half people hired on there, um, the postmaster that is currently there used to work in a small town called Centerburg, Ohio, and bid on this job. They have to bid because they're part of a union, she bid on the job, got the job, and has a part-time employee that fills in when this woman can't make it. Because she is gone, she has a lot of accumulated time she can take, and although she can't fit it all in she certainly takes some time and this young lady helps her. Yeah. That would be, I guess, how I'd sum that up. Now, my engagement with her is that we ship things. And so we have orders he have orders we have to ship out from our business, which is a home business, um, we take it down to the post office. We would really be disappointed if we had to drive a distance to make the deliveries because that's an additional cost to us, not only in time but also in gasoline, and we, it's very convenient that we just have to go down a hill and over a block and we're there at the post office. Um, we don't, unfortunately at this point do enough business to keep her open, but there's another woman that she says comes

down regularly and makes a substantial amount of sales with her. So it would be detrimental- so, if you figure there are two of us, I don't know what correlation it used to be, like if there was one person voting for someone, that meant that there were a hundred people voting or a thousand people voting, so we have to trust that there are other people in the community who are doing a business with her for their own private businesses, and of course that would be the farmers too. And we need them to have conveniences.

SB: Do you often see people in the post office when you're there?

JV: Absolutely, um, people I haven't seen in years. And here it's kind of expected when you run into somebody because it's Kenyon and that's just part of the union at Kenyon is going to the Bookstore, going to the post office, they never want to have a union because that is the union. But in Mount Liberty, where you may encounter somebody it is always a surprise and exciting because, number one, you don't bump into these people regularly because it's so small and so random that the people go there, although there are the regulars who go to check, but it is also because some of the people have moved away but maintained their post office box there. So even though they've moved out of the community for some reason they're still keeping the postal box there and will come back so that you can see them again and you may not see them for a while and you see that they age and you haven't and you don't understand. [laughs] You know, it's hard to make, it is, sometimes it's just plain hard to recognize the people, as is for them to recognize you. So, needless- our children grew up in Centerburg, and we will bump into parents of children that, like, my husband used to coach or that I used to help out in the school system. And it's like, um, you were, so-and-s, so it reconnects people, as well as lets you keep up on people. Now another other thing I wanted you to know is that when it comes to voting time, there are local issues that only affect the people in the township. So, you want to be able to connect, not that the postmaster is the town gossip or the town crier, but there's sometimes news that she can provide that you don't get, whether it be from the township trustees or the newspaper. So you count on the postmaster to be able to say hey, what's going on here. Like, we had a building go up and as a matter of fact, there's a big, brand-new barn north of us on Columbus Road, nobody could figure out, what the heck is someone just building this random barn, and it's an expensive barn, on Columbus Road for. And, here she was able to explain to us that this guy just wanted to set up a basketball court for boys to come play basketball at. And if you go on Columbus Road you will see the place, it's now called the Open Barn.com, or something like that. So throw that in with the bike path that has currently been paved, there are going to be a lot of things that little post office is going to be able to do and towards transitioning into maybe more people coming into the village.

SB: How do you think other people feel about the post office in the county, or near where you live?

JV: Good question. Probably, not so much, not too concerned about it, because nor was I until we had the business and started shipping out of it. So it's like, as long as I get my mail in my, you know, box, that's all I care about. So really, seriously, probably not too

many feel too much about it. It is a convenience, though if they need to stop and get mail. Yeah.

SB: What would happen to your community if your post office disappeared in terms of having connection between people?

JV: Oh, it's definitely, it would definitely- I want to say that maybe Mount Liberty has approximately within the community itself has about fifty houses, if that, twenty houses? Twenty houses. And they have to come to the post office. So most definitely the interaction that takes place on a day-to-day basis, particularly when someone when has a health issue, particularly when there's been, there's crime, and we've had crime, we've been robbed twice. So it's a good way of keeping people in touch with each other to alert them. Like, a lady that works here, her car was stolen from her driveway. And so it's not that we met at the post office, but it's a place where people can, hey listen this is what's happening, so make sure you're aware of it. And it can make people more of like, um, a neighborhood crime watch area.

SB: Is there a bulletin board in the post office?

JV: There is, definitely. Um, that's another thing that is does, it's a way of advertising jobs. And, um, ploughs. You know, just different, random- wood is available, ploughs are available, babysitting is available, you know. Definitely it is a way to advertise. We do not have Amish in our community; we do have stay at home moms, and when you have stay at home moms that's an activity, it's an event, so that when the mom's going crazy 'cause the kids are inside, she bundles them up and they walk to the post office. That's an event in the day to break it up and give them exercise as well as contact with the outside world. For older people particularly, they'll go down and just spend fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes talking with the postmaster. And she's always showing concern, always showing care, and you know, gives that person outside communication.

SB: Ok. How do you see the post office's role as changing as we, from the way it used to be or the way it might be in the future with email and Facebook and everything?

JV: Well, we still, depending on the competitive edge that FedEx and UPS has, we have found the post office to be every bit as competitive, um, and easy to track. There will be those who will say yeah, you don't want to send through the mail but we've had some very good service through the mail. So as far as that is concerned, um, much of- shipping has gone up substantially, and if they can continue to be marketable, I see that it will continue. If not, I definitely see it going by the wayside. Because communication is taking more active, um, just becoming more active with Facebook and LinkedIn, all the social media that's available today, because it just goes so much quicker.

SB: How do you see, um, the role of post offices in rural communities as different from post offices in bigger towns or cities. Or do you, think there's a difference?

JV: Oh, most definitely. It's the personalization. In the bigger cities they don't have the time. They have to keep running the letters through and the people through so that they can help everybody that needs to be helped. So yeah, there is that time element, but that isn't to say that the postmasters in the rural communities have down time, because they are constantly getting phone calls from other post offices with regard to addresses or, there's always that inter-communication that's taking place. So, um, yeah they definitely still have those busy days, it's not like they're just sitting there waiting for people to come in. And that is probably a miscommunicated stereotype of the small community postmaster. They keep busy. Because, let me tell you this, they keep busy because they have to clean their own offices, they have to maintain their own little garden areas, they have to maintain the electrical and the electronics, so not only is it just the actual distribution of the mail and the receipt of the mail, but they also have everything that a typical post office hires out to have done. So they're polishing the floor, they have those expectations. And I don't know if that was told to you earlier or not, but it's amazing what we will see our postmaster doing. And it's because she wants to keep the place clean, she wants it bright, she wants it cheery.

SB: Mmmhm. Great. Um, I guess I've gone through all of my questions, so if there's anything you'd like to tell me that I haven't touched on, or anything. So you mentioned before that you were kind of passionate about the issue of post offices, and I was interested in why that was.

JV: I am passionate because, job less. For those who have worked hard to get what they have an to pull their benefits and it's not that anyone is non-patriotic, because we want our men too to come home and have jobs provided for them, it's what happens to those who didn't serve for our country but they still need income they still need jobs until they reach retirement and live on their own. So there has to be an understanding that, create the jobs, but don't bump someone else out of theirs so they don't have them. So, that's I come to you with a passion on that, and then also for the small businessmen, there are one, two, three, four, four small businesses that I know of that are in small, little Mount Liberty. And yes, I can drive, it's not a problem, I can go to Centerburg, I can go to Mount Vernon, but the very convenience of having it there for us and catching up with what's happening that we need to stay in touch with the community, it's what's important to me. So yeah, I'm passionate about both of those topics. The interesting part is the location, the location of this post office, I don't know about Brinkhaven, but it's in a small building that the landlord rents to the USPS, so that's another interesting piece of it. In front of the post office is a motorcycle club. Armageddon Club. Something. And behind it, behind it, is a man that lives in what looks to have been the garage of the building, so this guy, the landlord, is kind of making some money now that he has all three sections of that building rented. And, um, it used to be that the post office, I don't think that they owned the whole building, but they definitely weren't located in a place that they were right now, with two sides being occupied. So, that makes an interesting aspect. But the bike trail behind it, fortunately, has made a parking lot. And so if there were any ever overflow of traffic be it the bikers or be it post office, they would be able into the bike trail parking lot and park. Um, for the convenience of walking to the post office. I'm hoping that there will be a stop for bikers and, um, because our post office has

communicated with us what kind of activity the bike trail has. And it's kind of sketchy, the bike trail, it's scary, because people aren't familiar with it. So a girl, it's not like the Kokosing, from Mount Vernon to Kenyon, because it's so actively used, it's the random bike- railroad track that goes close to the back of people's homes, so you could be walking the bike path yourself and, um, it's scary because the woods are right up against it and so you don't know who could be around that, and you could scream and nobody would hear you. So she told me this, story, and this is the best story ever, she was running and thought she had the bike trail to herself, and all of a sudden, someone came running by her, scared her to death, continued running, it was a man. She didn't know exactly what to do until she watched him, I mean she started running to catch up with to see where he went, saw where he lived, she went right down to the door, knocked on the door, the woman answered, she knew the woman because the woman went to the post office, and reamed her out telling her that was so frightening for her to be on the bike path all by herself and for her husband to not- there's no code, there's no verbal code, people in that area are not used to what needs to be done as proper etiquette on a bike path. So, hopefully that gentleman has learned that when you go to the left you yell, to the left, and then the person is expecting you. But that was what she was able to communicate and she gave that to me because I told her that I was scared anytime someone came on the bike path because I didn't know if they were ok or not o.k. And she says that did happen, but she says, you know, once I told them about it I haven't had any problems since. Nobody thinks about that part of it. That would be an added story for your report, and that is, what, just the advantage of them knowing what's going on in the community as opposed to what you might know.

SB: Any there stories or anecdotes?

JV: Well, that doesn't speak too highly of me, I can't tell you that one. Well, why not. In awkward situations, when there have been health problems with neighbors, you don't always want to go check with a neighbor if you're not in regular communication with them, because you might be infringing on their privacy, um, or you might catch them at a bad time. That's another good reason for texting, or, I really do like media and I do like technology, but you could go down there and check with her and say, hey are they in need of anything, and she would to the best of her ability let you know what could possibly be down to help them out. Other than that, I think I covered everything. Really. She's a good gardener. She brings in interesting flowers. So, no, that's it. That's what it would be. In terms of would I like to see small rural post offices expand their services, absolutely. They could, why couldn't they take on the opportunity for people to come fax things, why couldn't they take on, you know, anytime that we order things, here's another piece to it, is that you can order boxes through, on the webstire, and they're devliered to the local post office, as opposed to we wouldn't be able to d that through oru mailman because there isn't a location for him to stuff all those boxes, so it's a real convenience because we get our free boxes, they're free, and they're priority shipping, and we just order 'em up, and they have them down there waiting on us for the next day or so. That's a real convenience, so that would be something I would really lose because at the other post office box, I don't know if there's a charge for it, but we would have to go up there and again drive the distance and haul them instead of the convenience of going down

there. That's the other piece of- but see, you know what they're doing, you know that they allow you to buy your own scales, and they allow you to put your own postage on, so then you just have to drop it into a mailbox. So I don't know what's going to happen, I really don't. I really don't. We'll see. But if you could build it up and submit it, or at least send a copy of your report to, and it would be the governing body, it would have to be to our senator, to any senator, actually, handling this, it would be great because if they did not get funding from the U.S. government I think that they'll have to fold. And I don't think the people are quite ready for that yet. I think there'd be an uproar. Yeah, its' pretty conve- yeah. Older people cannot use computers, they still need their mail. But baby boomers, they can, I don't know, Sarah, what do you think?

SB: I don't know.

JV: I don't either. It will be interesting. It will be. Yeah, because even sending bills, I refused for the longest time to pay my bills through my bank and have them pay it, I was always the old, put the stamp in the mail and send it on its way, my bill got lost in the mail and, you know, you get a finance charge if the bill is late, and I thought, I can't do that anymore, so I stopped using that and I'm going to the bill-paying service that our bank offers. So you see, I battle this constantly. So it's only for the business, and then do use the- and buying stamps. Another thing, the fancy stamps that they carry, that is a specialized service. Love them.

SB: The designs?

JV: Yes. You can't get that anywhere else. Yeah, those are good. And there's a little secret about me, that I was the stamp queen back in the day for the Panhellenic and Coin Show, and so tamp collectors, that's another reason, collecting is a very valued hobby, so people display and all their stamps all the time. So if they do away with the specialty stamps, that would be away with the stamp collecting to. [pause] Kk?

SB: Yeah, sounds good. Thank you so much.