

Interview with Jane Carey Blackwell Bloomfield (great, great niece of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell)

Q. If Elizabeth was placed in 2024 would she be pleased with the way it turned out?

I think she would be very pleased and surprised to know that about half of students in medical school in this country now are women!

Q. Did Elizabeth have a pivotal role in how this society turned out today?

I believe so. She set an example that paved the way for women today to play an important role in medicine and medical research, not only here but around the world. She established the British National Health Service that still exists today. She was passionate about medical care being available for all people, no matter what their financial resources, especially poor, immigrant women and children.

Q. Do you know of knowledge about Elizabeth Blackwell that isn't stated in common textbooks?

Elizabeth's father was very involved in the anti-slavery movement in this country. He and the whole family were very progressive people for the times and believed strongly in respecting the rights and dignity of all people, no matter what their background, gender, color, or religious faith. He also believed strongly in providing as good an education for his five girls as for his four boys, which was unusual for those times.

Elizabeth never married, but she adopted a girl she named Kitty Barry, who was devoted to her and who took care of her in her old age until she died. My parents gave my oldest sister the middle name "Barry" after this adopted girl. I wish I knew more about Kitty - she must have been a very special person.

Q. Beyond Medicine, what do you think Elizabeth's legacy is today?

She was one of the pioneers who broke the glass ceiling for women and proved they could do anything they set their minds to. She is remembered

today for her career in medicine and public health, but she certainly was part of a generation of women in the nineteenth century who were way ahead of their time in fighting for women's rights and equal access to education.

Q. How do you think Elizabeth would feel when she knew that she is a social rights activist?

I think she was keenly aware that she was a social rights activist. Her whole family were social rights activists. In fact, I think it was her passion for social rights that kept her going, despite all the barriers that were put in front of her to become a doctor and then to establish a medical practice and clinic for women and children in New York City and then to make her way in the medical establishment run by men in Great Britain when she returned there later in her life. I think she would be surprised how many books have been written about her and that the University of Bristol has named a health research institute for her. And she would be very touched that you are taking such an interest in her life.