

Question: Who is Jennifer Berrios?



Answers:

A: A lawyer.

B: A high school girls varsity basketball coach.

C: A catering manager at the Detroit Zoo.

D: A self-described hell-raiser as a child.

E: All of the above.

If you answered "E" – you're right!

Jennifer was born and raised in the Detroit area. She attended Wayne State University, Michigan's only urban research university, on a basketball scholarship where she earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science. She then earned a law degree from the University of Detroit Mercy. After passing the Michigan bar exam on the first try, Jennifer practiced criminal law for almost two years. Finally, the deal making and other challenges to her integrity began to get to her, and she began to question her career choice. While trying to make a decision, Jennifer returned to work at the Detroit Zoo where she had worked on and off since 1994. Jennifer joined SSA in 2001 when the company assumed management of visitor service operations at the zoo. Her current title is catering manager. However, she still loves the law and takes time to practice law while helping others with estate planning and other legal questions.

Jennifer was an active youngster, playing all kinds of sports, even boy's football. In high school, she continued her athletic adventures by playing varsity basketball, volleyball and softball. Her skills earned her a basketball scholarship, and her talent helped her college team earn a trip to the NCCA Division II playoffs her junior year. *Go Warriors!*

Her love of the game continues. During March Madness, she's not far from a television. "I love the passion demonstrated by college players. They play competitively and make plays they'll remember forever," she said. For the past 14 years, she has shared her expertise with the junior varsity and varsity basketball teams at her high school alma mater. She's currently the varsity coach. Her dream job would be to coach at the college level. Jennifer enthusiastically said coaching is truly her passion, and



Coach Jennifer strategizes with her varsity team.

it would be amazing to work with athletes that you selected and to coach these competitive athletes to execute the winning game strategy you designed. She said it would be competition at the highest level.

Her current full-time job as catering manager is similar to her part-time coaching job. Both jobs allow Jennifer to teach and mentor her staff or players. At the zoo, her department is certainly a family affair as employees include her mother, sister, half-

brother as well as seven nieces.

Jennifer said her mother is the best worker she has ever had.

The family connection has its benefits. Jennifer doesn't buy the "white" lies of "I can't work today because I'm sick, or I don't have a ride," because she knows

whether they're sick or not by

making a phone call, and if they don't have a ride, there's at least seven family members driving to work that day. While she has had the opportunity to nurture her nieces, she's also been able to coach them in basketball.



The Berrios family plays together as well as works together.

When not working or coaching, Jennifer likes to go home, cook herself dinner, turn off the phone and curl up to read a book. She enjoys reading drama, police and detective thrillers – anything but love stories. Her favorite book is *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult. The novel is about a young girl who sues her parents for the right to make her own decisions about how her body is used when a kidney transplant is planned in order to save her older sister's life.

She's not a huge television fan, but does watch *Monday Night Football*. With her interest in the law and sports, it's not surprising that she reads both *Sports Illustrated* and the Michigan Bar Journal.

Jennifer said one of the most important things that her hero, which was her father, shared was the power of family. He also taught her and her siblings to respect others and to have a great work ethic. "My father was very admirable and loyal. Everybody loved him," she said. He drowned in 2002. His religious medallion necklace is a valued possession.

Jennifer said that her friends and family would describe her as stubborn, opinionated as well as loyal, dependable and easy-going. She uses all these skills and traits in her daily life. It's obvious she has a passion for and knowledge of how to educate and nurture individuals whether they are her family, employees or her basketball players.