

WELCOME TO BENZIE COUNTY CENTRAL SCHOOLS FEATURED FRIDAY ALUMNI. Today, we would like to recognize class of 2013 Alumni, Jessica (Lemmen) Whaley. Jessica was kind enough to share this with us.

“While I grew up about two hours south of here, in Fremont, Benzie County will forever be my home. Due to circumstances out of my control, I moved in with my dad the summer before my freshman year had started. I was angry, sad, confused, all of those feelings! (Not because of my dad, just to clarify, but because my life was about to change big time). I was starting high school not knowing a single soul besides my older brother who had been going to Benzie for years before me (he was a junior, and it probably wasn't cool to socialize with the new girl, who just so happens to be your little sister. Although this was a new school to me, it quickly began to feel like a big family, and little did I know, this hectic transition period in my life would be one of the biggest blessings I've encountered.

After a few weeks, I had made some incredible friends, and slowly but surely I started to love the new home of mine. Growing up. I was definitely a tomboy and I loved sports, though I never really played any team sports as a child. At Benzie Central, I played basketball in 9th grade and softball in 10th and 11th. I also attended the Career Tech Center my junior and senior year for Allied Health. There, I was humbled to receive the student of the year award my junior year and student of the quarter award my senior year. I was also a part of the national technical honors society, which presented me with many great learning and volunteering opportunities. Both Benzie central and the Career Tech Center were such big parts of my life. I learned so much, I gained the best relationships, and the sense of community at both places is indescribable. The fact that I got to know all of my friends' parents as they were my own, and to have them treat me with such love and acceptance was amazing. Just one of the many perks of a small school.

Oh! In addition, I guess I should mention one other thing. I married my high school sweet heart, Jeffrey, in 2015. I met my incredibly amazing, handsome husband at Benzie Central. Thank you Mrs. Huddleston, for pairing us together to work on a project that little did I know would help determine my future path.

My senior year I had everything planned, or so I thought. I worked at Paul Oliver Memorial Hospital and Munson Medical Center for two years right out of high school as a CNA while attending NMC for a degree in Respiratory Therapy. Soon, I realized that's not what I wanted to pursue, so I changed paths. I started a new job at Stepping Stones Children's Center. There, I was an assistant preschool teacher, and then lead toddler teacher. Yes, STILL attending NMC, but for a degree in child development instead. During this time, about two years ago, my husband and I bought our first house in Benzonia. We have since remodeled it and made it into our home.

College doesn't come free, and neither do houses, therefore I had to put college on the side burner for a while. I've been 5 credits short from an associate's degree in arts & sciences for two years now, but I am finishing it this fall. Last year, I changed paths yet

again, and I now have an incredible job at Coyne Propane, which I absolutely love! Here I do any/all office, billing, and scheduling work at the Interlochen branch. Yes, I can fill your cylinders too!

Jeffrey and I love spending time with our friends and family, at our church, and outside hunting and fishing. In my free time I also have a passion for photography, photographing people specifically, so any senior out there needing senior photos, I am your gal.

I would not be where I am today if it was not for dad, my biggest fan. I imagine being a single father while raising your family is not an easy task, but he nailed it. He raised my brother and myself to be independent, honest, and hardworking individuals, and I cannot thank him enough for it.

My advice for any high school student, or anyone for that matter, is to not give up, live in the moment, stay true to yourself, and know that perspective is everything. As my grandpa still tells me, "death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Meaning, if you wake up and say you're going to have a bad day, chances are you will! *The glass is always half full!* Also, just know that is it OKAY to not have your life planned out when you're 17. It is OKAY if you do not finish college in two, four, even six years. It is OKAY to pursue a career in a trade as opposed to going to college. As you can see, I have had many different paths I thought I would go on, but I am perfectly content doing what I am doing. Life is good!

One more thing, go to the basketball games, football games, dances, homecoming and hallway decorating. Cheer your heart out! Wear the funky socks! Be kind to one another, and of course do your homework. You are only in high school once, so make it count!"

Thank you Jessica, we are #OneBENZIE proud!  
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