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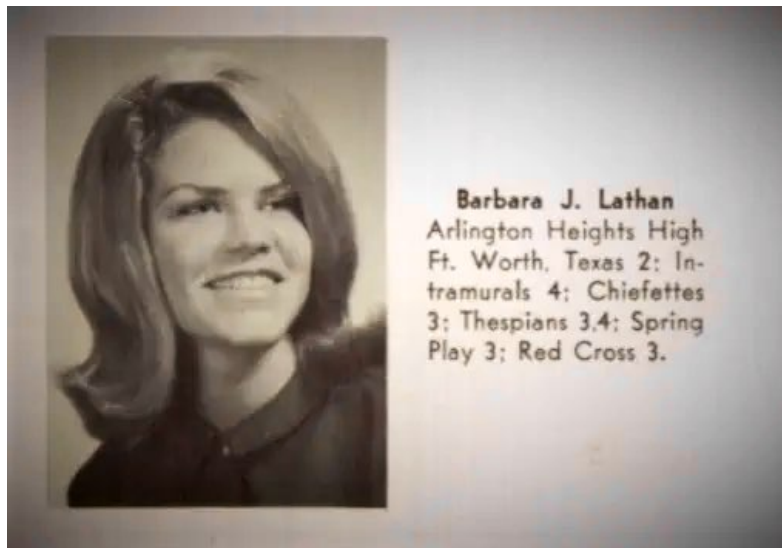


# Bobbi Jo Lathan

## Bellevue High, 1966

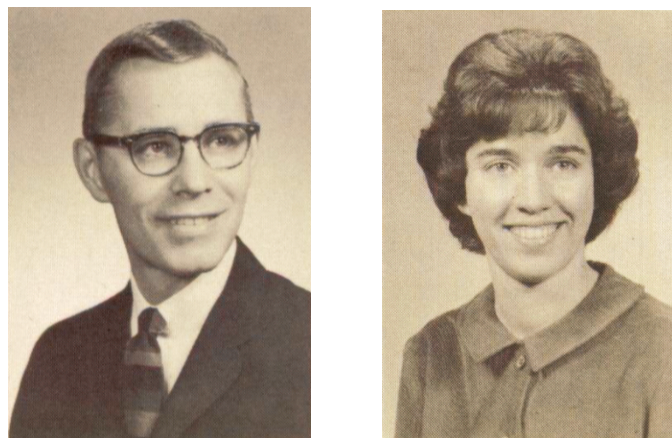
1966 Bellevue High graduate Bobbi Jo Lathan has had an amazing life. She sat down with us recently to discuss her time in Bellevue and her career - everything from teaching high school in Fort Worth to starring on Broadway. She even managed to find time to publish a series of cookbooks as well. Oh - she also fit in guest appearances on Seinfeld, St. Elsewhere, Night Court, and LA Law.

Like many students at Bellevue High during that time, Bobbi Jo's family was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base for a short time. One of her favorite teachers was typing instructor Mr. (Bill) Mahnke. Bobbi Jo recalled, "I was the slowest typist in the room and was seated, of course, next to the girl that was typing 100 words a minute! But Mr. Mahnke was so sweet... he always told me not to worry, that I'd be a star on Broadway someday and typing would be the least of my worries!"



*Bobbi Jo Lathan's Senior Picture, 1966 Bellevue High School.*

Bobbi Jo also remembers her English teacher, Ms. (Karen) Dennis. "She was a great teacher and encouraged me in my writing. She made me feel as though I had the talent to write anything if I set my mind to it...and I have Bellevue High School to thank, for hiring such a wonderful teacher that gave me encouragement."



*Bellevue High School Teachers Bill Mahnke and Karen Dennis.*

High school classmate and longtime friend Carol (Woosley) Ratcliff has kept in touch with Bobbi Jo over the years, and still recalls how much fun she was in high school, "Bobbi Jo and I stayed in touch over the years. She is a very talented person and very personable. She was always a very creative writer."



Bobbi Jo went on to college to earn a teaching degree. She landed a job at Dunbar High School in the inner city of Fort Worth, Texas. She had many stories to share about her brief time as an educator. The school was overpopulated and most of her classes had around 50 students. Still, she did her best to make connections with all of her students.

Toward the end of the school year, Lathan was bit by the acting bug and decided to move on and see if she had what it took. She began with commercials and local theatre productions, which led to some regional theatre. Around this time she married and moved to New York City where she was drawn to Broadway.

Bobbi Jo hit it big, landing a role in the Broadway production of The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas. She went on to play the lead role of the Madam in the Las Vegas production as well as in several touring companies. Bobbi Jo's southern charm was in full force during these productions. "On days we would have off, I'd call some of the group and tell them I was cooking. Around dinnertime, I'd have thirty or more actors at my place, hungry for dinner."

Her love of cooking led to a whole new career later in life, but more on that in a bit.



Bobbi Jo had a very successful run of guest appearances on some of the very top television shows in the 1980s and 1990s. Beginning in 1982, Bobbi Jo guest starred in over twenty TV shows including St. Elsewhere, Simon & Simon, Night Court, Matlock, L.A. Law, Beverly Hills 90210, The Larry Sanders Show, and Seinfeld. Bobbi Jo shared her experience on the set of Seinfeld.

Have you ever seen the Seinfeld episode called "The Bet"? No? Don't worry, No one has.

"The Bet", not to be confused with the classic "The Contest", was an unaired episode in season 2. "The Bet" is also known as "The Gun" and it was to be the fourth episode filmed that season and set to air on February 13, 1991. The episode was fully written, sets were built, and Bobbi Jo was cast as a flight attendant named Lucy Merrit.



*Bellevue High's Bobbi Jo Lathan (left) as the character Patti staring angrily at comedian Jerry Seinfeld, who played himself on the immensely popular sitcom. Actress Julia Louise-Dreyfuss (center) played Elaine. The scene above is from Season 3, Episode 10 "The Stranded" (often remembered for a line about a dingo).*

As with most Seinfeld episodes, "The Bet" featured two plots running at the same time and intertwining at some point. The main plot centered around a bet that the character Elaine Benes (played by Julia Louise-Dreyfuss) makes with friend Jerry Seinfeld. Elaine bets that it would be easy for her to purchase a handgun to protect herself. In the 'B Plot,' character Kramer (played by Michael Richards) is returning from a vacation in Puerto Rico. When he gets back he tells friends Jerry and George (played by Jason Alexander) that he made out with the flight attendant. George doesn't believe him, makes a bet that he is lying, and then heads to the airport to find the flight attendant to ask if Kramer's claim was true.

When asked about this unaired episode, Lathan recalled, "My story was - I was an airline stewardess who starts out all grins and sweet and funny and cute, and then I gradually turn into 'Nurse Ratchett' because of all the stuff the Seinfeld cast was pulling on the airplane. So my character goes from being this friendly airline hostess to this crazy person. It was really good stuff.... but the other storyline, they just couldn't get it to work."

So why didn't it air? The cast started rehearsal but stopped soon after. Several sources cite the heavy-handed gun theme and not being able to properly develop the balance of humor, to the point where it was a dark episode with very little funny about it. Julia Louis-Dreyfuss stated, "I read the script and I remember thinking, 'We're not going to do this.'"

The episode ended up being replaced by "The Phone Message".



"Jerry felt bad the episode was canceled. His office called me two weeks later and asked if I would be interested in playing a character in a new episode. It was a smaller role, but I didn't care - it was fun."



*Bobbi Jo Lathan (right) playing Wendy in a season four episode of The Larry Sanders Show entitled "Beverly and the Prop Job". She is pictured above with veteran actors Jeffery Tambor (as Hank Kingsley - center) and Rip Torn (as Artie - left). In this scene, she is posing as Hank's sister, trying to get a job as the new assistant to Larry Sanders (played by Garry Shandling).*

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Always wanting to try new things, Bobbi Jo took her cooking skills, her experience traveling the United States, and her love of people and wrote her first cookbook, "Bobbi Jo's Southern Sunday Supper". She had such a good experience that she has since published three more cookbooks. Book two is titled "Bobbi Jo's Cookin' with a Right Smart of Love" while her third cookbook is "The Skillet Diva Cookbook".

Bobbi Jo's latest cookbook is called "An American Gal's Cookbook" and she discussed her experience in creating it. "I thought about where I was in my life. I'm an American girl and I'm

back in my American hometown of Fort Worth, Texas. And since I was an 'Air Force Brat', I decided to go across the whole United States with this book", Lathan said. "I divided the book up into different regions of the country. Then the research started and I discovered how these different foods came about... even something as simple as spaghetti and meatballs or a Philly cheesesteak. I gained a new respect for our ancestors and how different groups of immigrants came together in the creation of many of these foods."



*Lathan's first published Cookbook, "Southern Sunday Supper". Lathan talked about the book when it was published in December 2000, "I learned to cook in my Grandmama Watson's kitchen that my Granddaddy built for her by kerosene lamp. Wasn't nuthin' like Grandmama's fresh home-cookin'! All the food found in her country kitchen had been sleepin' in the garden the night before. Fresh-picked corn, white-acre peas, little baby okra, speckled butter beans and the most beautiful, fat, red, juicy tomatoes you've ever tasted! I wrote this cookbook for US, you 'n' me. Cause' it just ain't no fun to cook alone. And, besides what good is a "right smart" of love if you got no one to share it with?" "Bobbi Jo's Southern Sunday Supper Cookbook" comes complete with recipes, family stories and even some space at the end for you to fill in your own Sunday Supper. Now, everyone can go back home and share a "RIGHT SMART" of love!"*

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When asked about her plans for the future, Bobbi Jo leaned on the wisdom of her grandfather, "Wow...I guess I'll be wise and take my Granddaddy Watson's advice. Once, when I was younger, and runnin' all around tryin' to make something of myself, he looked me in the eye, smiled, and said, 'Bobbi Jo...you need to slow down. ..'cause YOU livin' LIFE just ain't smart. But, lettin' LIFE live YOU, slows it down to an art.' So, I think I'm just gonna sit down...have that second piece of chocolate cake...and enjoy the ride."

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## Links

A complete listing of Bobbi Jo's TV Appearances:

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0490127/>

Amazon Link to Bobbi Jo's The Skillet Diva Cookbook

<https://www.amazon.com/Skillet-Diva-Cookbook-Bobbi-Lathan/dp/1928907083>

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