

Kathleen McCarthy

Born: Michigan

Currently: Skyhawk Therapeutics, Boston, Massachusetts



My parents are social justice activists. They really wanted to expose us to people and communities outside of mainstream America, so we moved around the country while they worked with miner communities of Appalachian Kentucky or migrant workers in central California. I grew up on a Catholic worker farm in Lexington, Michigan, in a house my father built – it was pretty idyllic.

We were always the odd family in town. It got me used to being different. At four years old, I started playing violin and soccer. I got really good at soccer and my mother would come to my games with her accordion and play popular sports anthems to cheer me on. My father encouraged us to do volunteer service on our spring breaks, so in high school, I went to the Dominican Republic with a non-profit. This was a huge

culture shock, as I was exposed to extreme poverty for the first time; it helped me fully appreciate my parent's passion for activist work. I returned to the Dominican Republic for my gap year after high school – working as a translator for medical groups and clinicians. At that moment, I got interested in science and public health.

In college, I studied pre-med and fell in love with organic chemistry. All I wanted to do was study that book. I got into medical school, but something didn't feel right. I knew I was more interested in the basic science than I was in the clinical side of things.

For the past 10 years, I have worked in drug development with only a bachelor's degree. In many ways, this has been an advantage for me. I don't mind being the naïve one. I can ask the questions no one else wants to ask. I don't mind being wrong because that's usually when I learn the most; sometimes it's the "stupid" question that ends up being the most important. Now I'm the Chief Scientific Officer at a very innovative Biotech.

The best science is done when you are vigorously debating and challenging the typical assumptions, working together to solve a problem. This is what I loved about soccer – I was a midfielder; it's the position that is really in control of the game. I didn't score much, but I loved to assist my teammates. This is how I see my role in the biotech. I am the bridge between scientific specialties – I see the whole picture and help everyone to do their best.