

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Monica Sanders Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Sanders, Monica

Interviewer Name: Trujillo, Dianne

Date of Interview: 03/16/2022

Location of Interview: Home in Little Rock, Arkansas (Remote Interview - Zoom Recording)

Acronyms:

DT = Dianne Trujillo (Interviewer)

MS= Monica Sanders (Narrator)

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

ASU= Arkansas State University

UofA= University of Arkansas

AP= Advanced Placement

ACT= American College Testing

ELF= Experiential Learning Funds

D.C.= District of Columbia

US= United States

U.= United Kingdom

LGBT= Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

LSAT= Law School Admission Test

LGBTQ= Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning

BFF= [Best Friend Forever]

### Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Monica Sanders conducted by Dianne Trujillo on March 16, 2022. This interview is part of the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

**DT [Dianne Trujillo]** [00:00:05] This is Diane Trujillo with the Schedler Honors College Oral History project. Today is March 16th, 2022 and I am interviewing Monica Sanders, who is in her home in Little Rock, Arkansas. We will be talking about Monica's experience leading up to during and after her time in the Schedler Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

**MS [Monica Sanders]** [00:00:25] I'm Monica Sanders and I'm 24.

**DT** [00:00:27] In what year did you graduate or enter the Honors College?

**MS** [00:00:31] I entered in 2015.

**DT** [00:00:33] And when did you graduate from honors?

**MS** [00:00:35] 2019.

**DT** [00:00:38] All right, Monica. So where are you originally from?

**MS** [00:00:42] I am originally from Cherokee Village, Arkansas. That's in Sharp County.

**DT** [00:00:48] And is that like a big or a small—

**MS** [00:00:50] Very small town. [Laugh]

**DT** [00:00:52] So what was it like to grow up there?

**MS** [00:00:54] I wouldn't say I enjoyed it a lot, but I graduated with about ninety six people. I graduated from Highland High School in Highland, Arkansas, and I pretty much from a young age was just trying everything I could do to get out of that town. That's why I worked really hard in school, and I always knew I wanted to. Most graduates from my high school would go to Arkansas State in Jonesboro because it's closer, and I always knew I didn't want to go there.

**DT** [00:01:29] Gotcha, so it was so small that y'all even had to go to like the next town? Is that right? Because you said it was in Highland, Arkansas?

**MS** [00:01:37] Yeah, they're like right next to each other. It wasn't a very— I think I lived seven minutes away from school, but it's just a conglomerate of small little towns that are basically all feel like the same town. But technically, I lived in Cherokee Village and I went to school in Highland.

**DT** [00:01:53] Gotcha, okay. You obviously said that you were trying to do everything added a plan to get out, but overall would you say it was at least or was it a good place to grow up in?

**MS** [00:02:07] Yes and no. I mean, I certainly— all my family lived there, so I was really close with my grandparents and my cousins and my aunts and uncles. That was really great. I definitely had some good friends. It was— I don't always like to share that I'm from there now because my high school, our mascot was the rebel man which is the same as Ole Miss and the school in Fort Smith. I can't remember the name of it.

We used to fly the Confederate flag at our school and at our football games and things like that, so the area has a bit of a reputation for that. I didn't know a lot of that growing up I mean I didn't really know any different. That's just the only thing I knew. I definitely learned a lot about where I came from once I got to UCA [University of Central Arkansas] and saw that not every town was like that and that was not acceptable behavior.

**DT** [00:03:11] Gotcha, ok. Was UCA the only school you had in mind or were there others that you were looking at?

**MS** [00:03:21] I originally I really wanted to go to Mizzou [University of Missouri] because I wanted to do journalism, and they have a great journalism program. But pretty quickly I figured out I would not be able to afford an out-of-state school, and once I started looking in Arkansas, I only wanted to go to UCA.

**DT** [00:03:39] OK, and why was that?

**MS** [00:03:43] Like I said, ASU [Arkansas State University] too many people, UofA [University of Arkansas] is too expensive, Hendrix [College] too expensive. I'd also— I went to governor's school [Arkansas Governor's School] and so I'd stayed on Hendrix campus, and I was like, "I don't want to stay here." I always knew UCA was the school for me, regardless of whether I got into honors or not. That's actually the only school I applied to.

**DT** [00:04:07] Oh, OK. How did you first hear about honors?

**MS** [00:04:10] So actually, at governor's school. I went to Arkansas Governor's School the summer of 2014 at Hendrix College, and I absolutely loved it. It was one of the first times I had been away from home for a long time. Pretty much by myself. I had some friends from my school that went there, but I kind of separated myself pretty quickly and found really good friends that I'm still friends with today.

I remember my—one of my—I was there for English, English Language Arts. One of my teachers, and I'm not going to be able to remember her name. I went up to her one day after class and I said, "How do I—" I said, "I love gov [governor] school, how do I get this in college?" I was like, "I want to do college the way the governor's school is." And she said, "You need to go to the UCA Honors College" because she had been an alum of the Honors College. From that moment on, I was like, "All right, that's what I'm going to do." And so that's—from there when senior year started, I pretty much just applied to UCA and I put all my effort into applying for honors.

**DT** [00:05:21] Whenever she told you about it, what did she include about her own experience or how did she describe it?

**MS** [00:05:28] Yeah, she basically—I loved—the things I loved about governor's school was the discussions, and we were learning things with deeper meaning. It was different from anything I had learned in high school. I just loved the interdisciplinary-ness of it. I loved getting to talk about—I loved having hard discussions. I loved, like not necessarily debating, but I just I loved being able to go around the room and hear what all of my classmates thought and be able to add my own opinion and like, "Well, why did you think that?" It was just—I loved it so much. I just loved getting to learn and getting to talk about things that I

wouldn't normally have been given room to talk about, especially as a seventeen year old. We were analyzing the movie *Aladdin*. And we were [laughs] writing poetry, that's what my teacher she was my poetry teacher. Gosh, I can't remember exactly what she said, but she was basically like the same sort of discussions that we have a governor's school you would have in honors.

**DT** [00:06:49] OK, I like that you had somebody to kind of tell you about it, so you kind of knew what you were kind of getting into right?

**MS** [00:06:57] Yeah, I did.

**DT** [00:06:58] OK. Do you remember what your application process was like and how you felt?

**MS** [00:07:05] Yeah, I was pretty— I was pretty, gosh what's the word? I don't know that was—I had my focus since that summer, I was like, I had my focus and I just did that, and I think I worked on that application for months like longer than I needed to, but I was kind of obsessed with it. I read that website over and over again, and I read my essays over and over again.

I did the— what is it? Peter Elbow reading right? I read that so many times because I just wanted everything to be exactly perfect, and I had my professors or my teachers in high school like my AP [Advanced Placement] literature teacher read it over. And I'll never forget she was giving me feedback on my Elbow essay. We did that, and then I was like, “OK, well, what did you think about the other essay? Any issues or something?” And she goes, “Oh, that

was perfect. I didn't have anything for that.” And she just kept going. But inside I was like, “Oh my gosh.” [Imitates gesture] [Laughs] I remember putting a lot of time into it and submitting it really early on I think. Yeah. Yeah. But there was some, some high jinks later on in my application that I can talk about if you want. [Laughs]

**DT** [00:08:31] Yeah, go ahead if you want to talk about it now.

**MS** [00:08:33] Yeah. Let me get it. [Pause] Yeah, so I got accepted to honors I don't remember when they sent that out, but I wasn't on a wait list, I got accepted on the front end. Then it was the weekend of my birthday, which is April 5th, and I had checked, all my stuff came to my parents email, on our family computer. I checked my email, and I had an email from Rick Scott. It was basically telling me—

So I not a very good test taker. I'm very bad at math, and I did not pass my math ACT [American College Testing]. I got right below passing, a seventeen or sixteen or something like that. We had been— I've been very upfront about it in my application. I had been assured over and over again, it didn't affect anything. They were like, “You'll have to take a remedial math course your first year that you don't get credit for, so you'll have more hours, but you can still do honors.” I was like [makes a thumbs up] I'll do it.

Well, apparently Rick Scott and Patricia, they apparently didn't know about this until later, but the provost of UCA at the time told them that I couldn't be eligible for my honors scholarship because I had to take a remedial math course. Rick Scott had to email me and give me options of what to do, and one of them was to drop out of honors and apply again as a second year or—[makes hand gestures]



**DT** [00:10:20] Track two student?

**MS** [00:10:22] Track two, thank you. Yeah. So give up my spot and then apply again as a track two which I knew would be a lot harder. He said I could continue to do honors but not get any of the scholarship money. I remember the third option they put down was go to another university, [laughs] and I was very upset as you can imagine.

Apparently my parents had read that email, and they didn't tell me about it. They were already— my mom was working for—she was a secretary at an attorney's office at the time, and she went to her boss and was like, “Is there anything we can do?” We went to him and he was very kind, and he helped us draft a letter to the president of UCA basically saying—cause I had already accepted my scholarship, I had already gone through the whole process. So we basically were like, you can't take this away after you've already said I could have it. And I got a presidential pardon from the president of UCA at the time, and I think it was—gosh, I can't remember his name now. There's one before Houston Davis. I can't remember his name, but he basically said, “Yeah, she's good.”

The agreement was that I finished the remedial class before school started, so that's what I did. I took a remedial math class over the summer and got my credit, and I think I tested out of it at one point. Then I was able to go through honors and get my scholarship.

**DT** [00:11:53] Yeah, that's great. I feel like you definitely had more obstacles than a lot of the students had to get here. So that must have been really rewarding, too— [crosstalk]

**MS** [00:12:03] – [crosstalk] It was. And I remember now that was one of the reasons that I loved honors so much too was because they did not put an emphasis on the ACT. And I hated the ACT, and I was not very good at it, but it was very clear that I had a very high reading and writing [score]. But math, I've always been really bad at math. So I appreciated that so much that they were willing to recognize like this number doesn't mean that you're a good or a bad student. To this day, I'm still very appreciative of that.

**DT** [00:12:38] I like that. Thank you for sharing that.

**MS** [00:12:41] Yeah.

**DT** [00:12:42] OK. Do you remember—you guys had an I-Squared Day, right? As—  
[Crosstalk]

**MS** [00:12:48] [Crosstalk]—Mhm—[Crosstalk]

**DT** [00:12:48] [Crosstalk]—Part of the process? So you already kind of knew what to expect as far as, what honors would be like. I'm curious, did you have any imposter syndrome prior to coming to honors within the application process?

**MS** [00:13:04] That's a good question.

**DT** [00:13:07] Or even what you remember from that day and maybe your thought process?

**MS** [00:13:12] Yeah, I definitely remember being a little intimidated. I did have a edge because I went to governor's school, and there's a direct [laughs] pipeline from governor's school to honors. At least there was at the time. So I actually had a lot of friends at I-Squared Day that I knew from governor's school, so we all got together and talked and we were like the little governor's school squad and were probably being really annoying.

I do remember being in that little group and talking with people I knew, and some of the students being like, "Yeah, this isn't really my first choice" or, "Yeah, I'm just kind of here, I just want the scholarship." And one kid telling me, "I'm only going to go here if Hendricks [College] doesn't take me in." Being really like cocky about it. I just remember sitting there and being like, "This is all I want" and being kind of almost frustrated at the idea of someone going to honors without it being their number one or without being really into it.

But looking back, I'm like, "It's not my place to tell anybody what to do." But at the time, I was just so driven to be in honors that I was like, "I don't want you to be here because you don't want to be here the way that I want to be here." And getting a little probably uppity about it. I do remember also being intimidated at the idea that they had all these other offers and some of them had the perfect ACT or something and was getting the presidential scholarship and so they were like, "Well I can go other places and still get money." And I again if it weren't for honors, I wouldn't have had any scholarships because of my remedial ACT at UCA or anywhere. So I was like, "This is the only chance I have to get money for school."

So, yeah, I do. I do remember being kind of intimidated by the other students, and they also went to bigger schools with more opportunities, and that was something I learned a lot in

governor's school too was just—not behind, but I just kind of had this realization that going to a really small rural school, I was definitely missing out on opportunities that other kids were getting. I didn't feel behind necessarily, but I remember being pretty jealous.

**DT** [00:15:38] Yeah, that's understandable. Being in a room with a bunch of people who feel—it could have felt like, “They have an advantage over me right now, and this is my number one.” Do you remember who interviewed you? Like which professor?

**MS** [00:15:54] Allison.

**DT** [00:15:56] Allison, OK. So did you end up having her for Core I?

**MS** [00:15:59] Yes, I did.

**DT** [00:16:00] OK.

**MS** [16:01] Yes.

**DT** [00:16:02] What do you remember from Core I and Core II, and what was that experience like? The whole search for self and search for community?

**MS** [00:16:10] Do you mind if I tell a story about the interview?

**DT** [00:16:12] Yeah go ahead.

**MS** [00:16:13] [Laughs]

**DT** [00:16:14] I'd love to hear it.

**MS** [00:16:15] Yeah. So I had Alison, and she's very intimidating. [Laughs] She's very nice. I love Alison, but she's very intimidating. I was so nervous. I was so nervous. She comes in, and we're supposed to talk about the Peter Elbow essay. She sits down, and she talks to us a little bit. Where we're from and what major we want to do. She's taking notes, and I'm just staring at her writing down things about me.

Then she goes, "Yeah, I know we're supposed to talk about that Elbow essay, but I don't really want to. Let's talk about Supreme Court cases." Just out of nowhere, and we were all just like, "Wow." She was like, "You guys heard of any recent Supreme Court cases going on?" And it was just silent. I was like [raises hand], and I was like, "There's that one about the bakery and they're not baking cakes for same sex couples." I was like, "I don't really remember a lot about it, but I remember hearing about that." I just remember her looking at me and I could tell I had said the right thing. You know what I mean? She was like, [nods head yes] "Alright." So we talked about that and then the discussion and eventually people started speaking up because they weren't as scared to talk, but I will say I was the only person from my interview to get into honors.

**DT** [00:17:43] Wow, that was— I feel like you just know having an answer for her must have been a boost of confidence for you, especially since you had said, "I was in this room with people and I was like," [motions hands] That's good— [Crosstalk]

**MS** [00:17:54] [Crosstalk] Yeah—

**MS** [00:17:55] Yeah. I realize now like she was wanting to test us being on our feet and also just to see if we were keeping up with current events. I was like, “thank goodness I remember this random Supreme Court case.” [Laughs and makes hand gesture]

**DT** [00:18:11] Okay so whenever you had her for Core I, what do you remember from that? Anything from large group lecture or just anything that you might remember want to talk about?

**MS** [00:18:26] I just remember absolutely loving it. I was just in my element. I definitely enjoyed Core II more, which I think most people do just because the Core I readings are a lot. But I really I just— they were difficult readings, but I was so happy to be reading them if that makes sense? I thought I was a freakin genius or something, just being able to read Plato and write something about it and my professors being like, “Yeah.” [Makes a thumbs up]

I do remember—I think it was one of the only threes I got on an essay was for *Allegory of The Cave* because I just missed the point. [Laughs] I just completely missed the point. That's something I really liked about Alison was she was not afraid to tell me when I was wrong. She told me when I was wrong and I was like, “OK,” [Laughs] but it made me better. It made me so much better, and I think that was good to get out freshman year, excuse me, because I have been a really good student in high school, and so I think getting that kind of fear of getting things wrong out of the way that very first semester was probably really good for me.

I also love large group. I still remember, Doug's—one of his first classes that he does, I think over like Plato or Socrates or one of those. I can't remember which one. I remember Donna's large group. I just was completely in my element. I just really, really enjoyed it.

**DT** [00:20:09] OK. And—What was I going to say? The big question in Core I is “where is the self?” What was your answer then and has that changed? What would be your answer today?

**MS** [00:20:23] Oh gosh. I honestly don't remember. [Laughs]

**DT** [00:20:28] What do you think for today? What would you answer that as?

**MS** [00:20:33] Oh gosh. I don't even know. I've been out of that mindset for so long that I'm kind of like, “what was that about again?”

**DT** [00:20:45] Yeah.

**MS** [00:20:45] I definitely had an answer at the time. I don't know if it was the best deepest answer, but I got there in the end. I could not tell you I could—[Laughs]

**DT** [00:20:53] [Makes hand gesture] I get it, but you're good. You're good, I was just curious—[unclear]

**MS** [00:20:56] No, that's perfectly fine. I wish I had an answer. I'd have to go read our essays again [laughs] and get back into—

**DT** [00:21:03] All of the journals.

**MS** [00:21:05] Yes, I remember later on wishing that I still had all of my Core I readings cause I'm pretty sure I just threw them away at the end of the semester. I was like, "Man, I really wish I had some of those to be able to go back and see what I was reading."

**DT** [00:21:18] So y'all had them printed out? Was that something that you print it out or were they printed for y'all?

**MS** [00:21:23] We had to print them. I think it was just Allison who basically required us to print them out and annotate them, so we spent a lot of nights at the Farris printer, and it was it was always broken, and it was always out of paper. We were just like, "It is 11:30, and I have to have this printed for class tomorrow." It was just always a struggle. But yeah, I remember I think I did have to print all of them. Yeah.

**DT** [00:21:54] OK, gotcha. Do you remember any classes that you took? Core III up until Capstone? Do any of them stand out to you that you might want to talk about?

**MS** [00:22:09] I really liked Core II with Conrad. That was really interesting. It's funny cause our classroom was in the most random place it was in that little annex off of the library. I don't even remember what it's called, but it's where all the international students studied. It was just a bunch of international students and then us. It was really cool because I got to meet a lot of international students, but it was just the weirdest little cinderblock room, but I really enjoyed Conrad.



He was a really he was a really good professor. He was very smart. And I really enjoyed the readings of that and my paper, my Core II paper I wrote about, broadly, sexism in food advertising and specifically unhealthy food. [Laughs] I'll never forget I had a page of images and it was– the Carl's Jr. ads [advertisements] where she had the burgers over her boobs and stuff. That's what I was talking about, and I'll never forget it. Conrad editing my essay on that page, he just wrote, “Yuck.” [Laughs] It was just the cutest, funniest thing.

He also used to bring his son to class, and that was really funny. He had a very young son. His son would just sit there playing on the iPad and we'd all just be like, “Alright.” [Laughs] In that class, our project was going to an organic–this woman running an organic strawberry farm. We learned about her process, and then we helped her plant strawberries all day, and he also brought his wife and his son. It just felt very, I don't know. It's like search for community. It really felt like community building. Just all of us out there just playing in the dirt.

**DT** [00:24:09] And I'm curious– Conrad is no longer a professor. So what was he like apart from– I hear that he was very comfortable bringing his family in class with y'all. But what else?

**MS** [00:24:24] He was very–hh, gosh. He was very well-spoken and he was very passionate. That's what I remember the most was in our discussions. You could tell that he really, genuinely cared about what we were discussing, and he had a lot of heart to his discussions because in Core II you talk about a lot of kind of heavy things.

Also what I really liked was one of his kind of area of expertise was American Indian Native American literature and history. So a lot of our discussions kind of came from that lens because that was his specialty. I feel like I learned so much and I got to learn so much about different cultures and things that I'd never heard of before.

He was just really smart, really nice and like a wise grandpa or something. He also was really good at commanding a classroom. I just remember because my class sometimes got kind of rowdy. We had some people in there who weren't as—because he was also really chill. He was really friendly, and he would let us kind of talk, and he would let us joke around with him. But sometimes the students would take it too far, and he was really good at being like, “All right stop. It's time to go now.” And they were always like, [makes surprised facial expression] and it was funny because I feel like in those moments we saw “Writing Professor Shumaker” and not “Conrad Honors Professor.” Yeah so that was really cool.

**DT** [00:26:11] OK are there any other classes that you took?

**MS** [00:26:15] My Core III or IV was a class about fashion. I can't remember the name, but I was actually looking—I was trying to find some of my old files on here to see because I can't remember his name because he was a guest professor.

**DT** [00:26:32] Was it Brad?

**MS** [00:26:33] Yes, yes, it was, Brad. Thank you. I was thinking Bryan in my head and I was like, I don't think it was Bryan. It was Brad. He was a great professor for just being a guest lecturer. I don't even know if he had—He taught a few other honors classes, I think, but he was

really cool and we had a lot of great discussions in that class. A lot of gender and expression and from that sexuality and also just the history of fashion and how it yeah—Looking at sociological things but through the lens of fashion, I think is what it was.

I just remember one of my favorite papers I wrote was for that class cause I did the history of Drag in Arkansas, and it was a very fun paper to research. I still, to this day, I want to go back and read this book I found of gay history of Arkansas or something like that because it was so cool. But yeah, that class was really fun.

I always—I didn't have a lot of my—I had a lot of repeat professors and I had a lot of guest lecturers, and so sometimes I was worried. I never had a class with Doug and I was like, “Oh, am I not having the best honors experience or something?” But I still really enjoyed all my classes, and actually, I just remembered, I don't know how I didn't mention this sooner. It was probably my favorite class of all time was “In Search of A Healthy Religion” with Donna. It was amazing. [Laughs] That was an amazing class. That was my only class I got to take with her, but I love Donna so much. I am assuming you haven't gotten her because you're only a sophomore, right?

**DT** [00:28:28] Yeah I actually had Donna for Core I!

**MS** [00:28:30] Oh OK so you understand. Yeah, that class was fabulous. It's funny cause that class is normally for students who were raised Christian and come to college and are kind of grappling with how to deal with their faith when they have all this new information, and they're learning things for the first time that they weren't told when they were growing up.

That's why it's called "In Search of A Healthy Religion" cause Donna is also very religious, but also an honors professor.

And just breaking down the Bible and looking at it from a historical lens was so cool because I was actually not raised religious. I never went to church growing up, still don't. So it is—so it was actually kind of a hard class because Donna and the other students had a prior knowledge of Christianity and the Bible just from being raised here. So they were starting here, [raises hand high] and I was down here [drops opposite hand lower]. I was like, "I don't know what y'all are talking about." My good friend, who was the only other non-Christian in that class she was raised Muslim, and we sat next to each other and half the time we were like, "What are we talking about?" [Laughs] "I don't know what this is in reference to." I don't know just a lot of biblical references that we didn't get.

But it was still a really, really fantastic class. And I still got to have my own kind of a journey through dealing with Christianity in a positive way because growing up in a really tiny town where you're the only non-Christian isn't always fun. [Laughs] Especially when you're also the only non-Christian in your family. I had a very negative connotation of Christianity growing up, and it definitely trickled through college as well. I was really able—I read the Bible for the first time in my class and—just it was just really cool to like be able to, I don't know, have a first experience with Christianity in a very academic historical way. I feel that's kind of special so.

**DT** [00:30:49] Yeah, I agree. I think that it's very interesting and it sounds like you took a good opportunity to kind of figure out what Christianity was, and I agree from a very unique lens there. OK. Were there any others that you wanted to talk about?

**MS** [00:31:13] No, I think those were the highlights for sure, right?

**DT** [00:31:17] Alright definitely going back to that Core IV class that you took with Brad.

I'm just curious, you said that you were kind of worried, "am I getting the right honors experience" cause this isn't one of the main honors professors. What was that like for you to branch out outside of the professors dedicated strictly to honors? What was that like?

**MS** [00:31:39] Yeah it's funny. I never meant to do that, but I was always just drawn to the classes that weren't necessarily being taught by the main people. Also it was a lot of scheduling stuff too because most, and I don't know if it's still this way, but I feel like most honor students are in the hard sciences.

I was a journalism major, and I was one of the few, if only journalism majors that was also an honors. I think there was maybe one. One other girl that I remember who was way older than me. Gosh, they—so a lot of it was just scheduling conflicts cause I feel they really tailored their schedules around the students who had 8 a.m. labs and stuff, whereas I had "4 p.m. I have to go work for the newspaper" type thing. A lot of it was just fitting in my schedule and just classes that were super popular. "Rainbow Rights" with Cindy, I definitely wanted to take that class, but it filled up [Snaps fingers] like that.

I was just drawn to those classes, and I never felt bad about it until later when my friends would be talking about how awesome Doug was or how great this class with Donna was. I would just be like, "Oh," I don't know, it's just one of those things where you feel like you're—

And also, I've never had a lot of classes with my friends. It was really interesting. I definitely had a few with my my roommates, and I had a really close group of friends through honors and they all had classes together because again, they were all within the same majors. So their schedules lined up and I was like [moves hand to the far right] over here. So I ended up having class with people in honors that I didn't always interact with. I still also think that was a benefit because I got to hear different opinions. I wasn't just in an echo chamber of like me and my friends cause sharing all the same opinions basically. Yeah.

**DT** [00:33:50] Okay, you mentioned something in there that I thought was very interesting. Cindy's class filling up so quick. So that has always been a thing? Kind of the competition to select the courses.

**MS** [00:34:04] Yeah.

**DT** [00:34:05] That's hilarious okay I love that.

**MS** [00:34:06] Oh and housing-[crosstalk]

**DT** [00:34:12] [crosstalk] [unclear] So--did you try to say in honors all four years, or what did that look like?

**MS** [00:34:17] Yeah, I did. A lot of people moved away from Farris, after the second or third year, but we really liked Farris and I had the same group of roommates. I didn't have a lot of roommate changes, so we were able to just stay in Farris. But I remember my senior year, I

did the Washington Center internship, so I was in Washington D.C. [District of Columbia], for the fall semester.

My friends were trying to get the apartments and [rests forehead on hand] they literally had to like camp out at the bottom of Farris, overnight. There were people setting up spaces and it was always drama. Every year, it was always “so and so cut in line,” and “so and so had her boyfriend come and hold her place.” And “they shouldn't be allowed to do that.” And then “well so and so got to sign up for the apartment, she wasn't here and she's not allowed to do that.” And it was just always, it was always drama.

Somehow, I always miss that. I was never one to camp out. I think maybe because we were usually only just trying to get a decent room in Farris. So we didn't have a lot of competition. And I think my my friends always just did it for me. But yeah, I remember that last year they were trying to get the bear- the apartments off campus, I can't remember the name now.

**DT** [00:35:38] I think it is Bears Den? I don't know. I know what you're talking about—  
[crosstalk]

**MS** [00:35:43] [crosstalk] Yeah— I thought it was Bears Den too but now that's the bar.  
[Laughs]

**DT** [00:35:46] Yeah that one is definitely the bar.

**MS** [00:35:47] Yeah.

**DT** [00:35:48] Bear Hall, I think it's just Bear Hall isn't it?

**MS** [00:35:50] Yes, yeah yeah-[crosstalk]

**DT** [00:35:53] [crosstalk] and you said they--were trying them out? So y'all did this in person?

**MS** [00:35:57] Yes, in person.

**DT** [00:35:58] OK, that's very different. See, we do ours online now so.

**MS** [00:36:01] So no, it was in person. So they were people literally in the lobby of Farris sleeping on the couches and staking out places to where they were in line to get apartments. And so it's funny because it was a very tense situation, but also kind of like a sleepover because everybody was just in the lobby together. And yeah I just remember there was always drama. Somebody was always mad at somebody else, and it was always going around who got which apartment and so-and-so, they had their friend come from another hall. Their friend isn't even in honors. They shouldn't be able to get these apartment [unclear] [laughs]

**DT** [00:36:48] Oh, wow, OK. That is very interesting. And did seniors get to go first, then juniors? Or was it first come first serve for everybody?

**MS** [00:36:58] Oh, you know, I think it was seniority.

**DT** [00:37:02] OK.



**MS** [00:37:03] Yeah, I think it was seniority, but it was still something—they would still get in line and try gosh—Now I can't remember cause there were definitely—Also that would be another thing too if the sophomore has got this apartment, we should have got this apartment because we're juniors. But gosh, I can't remember now if it was—I feel like it was a weird combination of both. I remember it being a very confusing system.

**DT** [00:37:30] Yeah, OK. I think maybe what it might have been is seniority plus who can fill up a room.

**MS** [00:37:35] Yeah.

**DT** [00:37:36] So if you could fill up a room then you've got this place. If not, you've gotta wait. OK.

**MS** [00:37:39] Yeah, I think that was it. I think that was it. Oh yeah, cause that was also one thing too was the night of people would lose roommates. They would come in with, “OK, we’re the four of us, we're going to get a room together.” And then one of them would be like, “Actually, no, I'm not.” And so then they would suddenly have three and they would be like, “No, what are we gonna do?”

**DT** [00:37:58] Oh, my goodness. Was this the same thing for classes? You guys had to go in person to sign up or?

**MS** [00:38:04] No classes were online.

**DT** [00:38:06] Gotcha.

**MS** [00:38:07] But we also had to wake up at five a.m. Which I don't know if you also have to do that, but that was always the dumbest thing was, why can't you open the classes at midnight? Why do you make them 5:00 a.m.

Every semester I'd have to set an alarm for 4:55am and then all my roommates would be just like "hi" [makes tired facial expression.] Then we would all go to our computer, and then we would try to get our classes just half asleep. Then my friends would come into the room and be like, "My internet isn't working!" And we would all just be half asleep on our laptops just stressing cause our laptops wouldn't load or we wouldn't get the classes we needed and then getting on a wait list.

And it was always just— it wasn't as bad for me because again I was in journalism, so I had a lot more leeway with when I could take classes and there were a lot more offerings. But my friends, chemistry and environmental science, it was I have to have this lab. And if I don't, I can't graduate on time. That happened to my friend actually, she was a chemistry major. And then they messed up her schedule. And so in order to graduate on time, she had to change majors to a general science degree so she could take a class so she could graduate on time.

**DT** [00:39:23] Oh, wow. That's terrible.

**MS** [00:39:25] Yeah, yeah.

**DT** [00:39:28] So I was just thinking along with the the whole rooming situations in Farris, you were already here when the University Scholars program was introduced. I know that you– Right? It was introduced–

**MS** [00:39:44] I remember– I think I was at the very tail end of it.

**DT** [00:39:47] Gotcha.

**MS** [00:39:48] It might have been announced the semester I was gone, and so I didn't really know exactly what was happening. But I think, yeah, I think that was it.

**DT** [00:40:00] OK, gotcha. All right. OK, so going back to those honors classes– curious to hear about your Capstone Project and what your experience was like with that?

**MS** [00:40:16] Yeah. Oh gosh, so it was a struggle. I originally like I said, I was in journalism. I was really into photography. And so my original capstone idea was a photography project, and I wanted to kind of document the immigrant experience in Central Arkansas. That was my thesis.

I knew of– Adam got me connected with El Zocalo, the Immigrant Resource Center here in Little Rock, and I went and volunteered with them for the semester of that I was doing Oxford [Oxford Tutorial], and the semester after. I think that whole year. And it ended up just not working. I was volunteering to try to get to know people at the organization and get to know the families that were coming to the events. It just never really ended up working out.

I couldn't— Which looking back, it's definitely not a project for someone like me to be able to do. I don't speak any other language. I am not a child of immigrants. I was just really passionate about the ideas. I wanted to try to make it work. So that ended up getting scrapped, which is fine.

And then I decided to do a paper about racial diversity in journalism in The Kerner Report, which I told you a little bit about. The frustrating thing was that all through Oxford, I was in the class for creative projects, so all of my training was for a creative project. Then I changed to a paper. [Laughs] And so I was going into it with—Because again, I was in journalism. I wasn't doing super heavy academic research papers. Gosh, sorry. Because of the type of classes that I had decided to take, they also ended up—They were papers, but they weren't as long and they weren't as—I don't know. None of it was as big as the Capstone Project, and so I went into my thesis feeling super unprepared, very unprepared. Oxford was not it for me.

I don't know if it would have been different if I had—Cause Allison split up our class, and I think they all do this. They split up our class with like creative projects and traditional papers. It might have been different if I had been in the traditional paper section, but [makes hand gesture] I just remember being very lost.

And then, of course, I decided to do a semester internship in D.C. my senior year, thinking that I would also definitely do research on my capstone while I was there. And I did not. [Laughs] Not because I was slacking off, but it was just a very stressful semester. I mean, I basically had a full time job at Voice of America in D.C., and then I had classes at night on Wednesdays, and then on Fridays, and it was very social atmosphere, so I was trying to make friends. And yeah, I did not. I just didn't do the research that I needed to.

So basically, I came into the spring so behind. So behind, and I was terrified. And I remember that first class because I had Whit for capstone in that first class. She wanted us—she's going around the room and was like, “Just give give me your basic, what your thesis is about, your elevator pitch for your thesis.” I was literally sitting there and I was shaking, and I felt like I was trying to throw up because I was like, I don't know. [Laughs] I was like, I am so far behind. I feel like I don't even have a thesis. I feel like I don't even have like— And I feel like there was some sort of requirement. We were supposed to have when we went into capstone. I don't remember exactly what it was. Maybe like a— What's that called? What's that called when you have all your sources and then you kind of —

**DT** [00:44:27] Like an annotated bibliography or something or?

**MS** [00:44:30] Thank you. Yes, like—

**DT** [00:44:31] A proposal as well?

**MS** [00:44:33] Yeah, yeah. We are supposed to— And I think I did have a proposal because I had to, but I had a half baked proposal, and I don't even think I had my annotated bib [bibliography] done when I started Capstone. And so I don't know. Whit was very kind [Laughs] because I think she could just sense the fear in me that I was so far behind. And that was a very stressful semester. I was very stressed. It was very difficult. I did not— I enjoyed the end product of my thesis. Now I look back on it and I'm really proud of it. Did not like it at the time. [Laughs] But I will— And I've told many people this. I would not have finished my capstone if it wasn't for Whit. It was the best class. She kept us on schedule. She had us

turning in drafts two weeks before all my other friends, who had different capstone teachers. And all my other friends were scrambling at the end of the semester to finish things up. They were having their readers add, tell them to add things. And they were like, “Bro, like, this is due next week,” kind of thing. So and I felt very ahead and very—By the end of the semester, I wasn't rushing. I mean, I was still stressed because of the presentation, which was a whole nother thing because I also I finished the paper just right on time, and I had—I left absolutely no time to prepare for my presentation. And so I basically did it all the night before, or maybe two days before. I think I stayed up till—That's probably the latest I've ever stayed up throughout college. I think I stayed up till like 3:00 a.m. or something because I never did the all nighter thing. And I was so anxious for my presentation. I remember going up to my boyfriend and being like, I am literally in pain. I'm literally having pain through my back cause I'm so nervous.

**DT** [00:46:37] Oh gosh.

**MS** [00:46:38] But it went really well, apparently, and a lot of my friends showed up to watch and other honors students who I didn't even ask to be there. They showed up cause they were just thought it was cool. So that was really awesome, and I'm so proud of myself for doing it. But yeah, I literally cannot think Whit enough cause she also—She gave me extensions on deadlines because I was trying so hard, but I was so anxious. I started going to therapy that semester because I was having so much anxiety. Yeah.

**DT** [00:47:11] OK. Well, it was all worth it. It definitely sounds like it was a struggle, but with the time you had, that was it was impressive, I can't imagine so.

**MS** [00:47:20] Yeah I can say I did like a twenty five-ish page thesis in basically one semester. [Laughs]

**DT** [00:47:27] Yeah, wow. [Laughs] So you mentioned that internship that you had in D.C. is that right?

**MS** [00:47:37] Mhm. [Nods yes]

**DT** [00:47:38] OK was that for the junior seminar that you mentioned in the pre-interview?

**MS** [00:47:41] [Nods yes]

**DT** [00:47:42] OK.

**MS** [00:47:43] Yeah.

**DT** [00:47:44] You want to talk a little bit about that. Like where? How did you hear about it? How'd you get there, and what did you do?

**MS** [00:47:50] Yeah. So I heard about it from other honors students who had done it, and my friends had done a shorter Washington experience over winter break or something. It was for the Inauguration, actually, which was hilarious because they didn't go to the Inauguration for reasons because they didn't like the president. But they did like a little seminar about it, so I knew of it. And I for journalism, we have to have, or at least we did, I don't know if they still have this, but we had to have an internship credit to graduate. And so you had to do an

internship at a— actual place. And so I was kind of like, Well, I can get my internship credit and my junior seminar credit out of the way. And I didn't really have a lot of other credits that I needed, and I could also be in D.C. and I was like, Cool, [Motions thumbs up] so I'm going to do that. And I got a ELF [Experiential Learning Funds] grant that basically covered the whole thing, which was really awesome. And yeah, I went to D.C. [District of Columbia] for the semester and I interned at Voice of America, which is the— It's part of the like U.S. [United States] agency of global media or something like that, but I think they changed their name. It's technically a government agency. Most Americans don't know about it because they aren't allowed to. It broadcasts to the US. It started as a way to combat Nazi propaganda and World War II. So it was a U.S. radio broadcasting agency. And it still does that today. It does a lot of radio, but for other countries. And so it's a really cool organization. It has had a lot of controversy in the past, but yeah, and so I was on a documentary project. It was a documentary called— [Laughs] [Sighs] Gosh it was about the opioid crisis

**DT** [00:50:02] Okay.

**MS** [00:50:03] In America. I can't remember the first little bit of the title. But yes it was about the opioid crisis, and so is a documentary film where our videographers went to Philadelphia in a town in North Carolina and another town that I can't remember. And they were basically following stories of people who were affected by the opioid epidemic and people who were working to fix it. And my job was to edit the footage, basically or not even to edit really, but organize the footage so they would go out and film and then give it to me and I would sit there and organize it and rename it. I really didn't like the internship. I was never into video journalism. That was never my thing. I always did written for photography, and there was a whole thing with that too. I was supposed to have another project and then



they changed me last minute. And it was a whole mess. So I did not really like my internship. I love the documentary. Very good documentary. Very important message. My name is in the credits of some of the episodes, which is pretty cool. And there were a lot of really nice journalists there, a lot of really nice people. I just never could really get my footing. Yeah, so it wasn't the best experience same with the Washington Center. I didn't have the best experience. I think I just had it too good in honors, to be honest with you. I was just— I was used to my friends. I was used to my honors classes, and it kind of felt like going back to freshman year at a new school. That's that's kind of what it felt like. Also, most people were younger than me, so that was slightly different. Then most of them were juniors or sophomores because you typically do the internship, your junior year. But I loved being in D.C., so that was really cool.

**DT** [00:52:04] OK. So you mentioned your boyfriend and was he in honors?

**MS** [00:52:13] Mhm.

**DT** [00:52:14] Yeah. OK. And you're married to him?

**MS** [00:52:20] Yes.

**DT** [00:52:21] So what was meeting him like in honors? And how do we get from there to—

[Hands signaling from left to right]

**MS** [00:52:28] [Laughs] Yeah. So yeah, so I was a freshman and he was a junior. Very scandalous. [Laughs] But yeah, so basically, Caleb Denton is my husband, and he had been a

mentor his sophomore year, and he loved it. And he claims to this day that he was one of his mentor classes was one of the best mentor classes in honors. And so he liked it so much, so even though his junior year he wasn't a mentor, he was kind of like doing mentor things anyway. And they they recommend the first few weeks to keep your door open so people can come in and say, hi. So we were doing that. I think it was literally like the first week of school. We had our door open and we were like cleaning, and him and his friend came by the door and said, hi to us. And [Laughs] I'll never forget, they just popped in and said, hi. And it was just these two juniors who look a lot older than they are because Caleb has a very deep voice. He had like a full beard. And then just us little freshman and we were like, "Who are these old men at our door? [Laughs] Who are you?" But then, of course, we ended up being friends, and he was friends with one of my roommates, and so he would come over a lot and hang out. And he was just ended up being in my room a lot and I thought he was cute.

[Laughs]

And I also definitely thought he was the cool upperclassmen because he was Environmental Science Chemistry major. So he was having classes with some of my friends, and he had done an internship in Germany and I was like, that's so cool. Oh my gosh, you've been to [Places hand over forehead] Europe [Laughs] like that. And yeah, and he was just he was hilarious and really cute. And so I definitely liked him. All my friends knew that I liked him. He did not know anything. He was just completely oblivious. And and we went to a bunch of events. We went to one of the murder mystery party events. I don't know if they still do those, but it was a little murder mystery party in McAllister and we went to that. I went with my friends, but he was there and so I talked to him a lot and we walked back to the dorm together and all my friends were behind me, like, Oh my God. And yeah, eventually, I think. Gosh, eventually, I think either I made it so obvious or someone told him that I liked him. And so he

asked me out to Blue Sail Coffee in Conway, and then we went to Blue Sail and we went to U.S. Pizza for dinner. And then after that, we went to Science Night at— Oh [Snaps fingers] what's the bar? [Unclear] is next to Blue Sail. Kings! We went to Science Night at Kings because Doug was speaking and Caleb was like, "Hey, I really want to go see Doug speak to you do you want to come with me?" And I was like, "Yes." And so we had like the longest first date ever. And yeah, I mean, I guess the rest is history, and we just kept dating and now we're married. [Laughs]

**DT** [00:55:48] Oh, that's a cute.

**MS** [00:55:50] Yeah.

**DT** [00:55:52] Little honors romance there.

**MS** [00:55:52] Yes.

**DT** [00:55:53] But you mentioned the murder mystery was it? I don't think we have that any more? And that raises the question of or raises a question. What did you all do? Events? Did y'all have tough talks by any chance?

**MS** [00:56:09] Tough talks?

**DT** [00:56:11] See, that's what we have now. So it's like [Puts hands over head] there's a lot of things that have changed, but they all drive the culture of the honors community. So what were some of those main things for y'all?

**MS** [00:56:22] Yeah, let me think. Well, we definitely had soapboxes, and I actually did two or three soapboxes in my time in honors. And we had Professors Pizza and Pie freshman year and mine was with Rick Scott, and that was really cool and really fun. And and let's see what else. Yeah, it was mainly like the mentors that put on a lot of it. It was either the mentors or the honors council that did it. Yeah, we had a few murder mystery parties. They stopped. That was the last one. Maybe they did one more and then they didn't do any more after that. But.

**DT** [00:57:04] And what was that? What did you all do?

**MS** [00:57:07] It was— Well, it's one of those things where we all dressed up like it was the 1920s and there was, I don't know, gangs the right word, but there was like the ladies and then like the guys or something and someone got murdered and you had to figure out who the murderer was. I honestly, I didn't even really play it. I just [Laughs] I was just there talking to my friends. So I don't exactly remember how they work because I basically didn't do it. I was just hanging out. But you had to kind of act and I wasn't into acting. I was too socially awkward to pretend to be a 20's lady. So I think I was just hanging out and making eyes at Caleb across the room, hoping [Laughs] he would notice me. But yeah, so there was that and they did human chess one time, which I didn't go to, but Caleb did. And it's exactly what it sounds like. He had a knight hat on or something. And yeah, the Halloween parties I remember I went to, like two three years, something like that. There was always the costume party. Gosh, I can't remember now. Of course, unfortunately, after freshman year, you kind of stopped going to things. It's mainly for the freshmen. Just a lot of— There was like an auction night or something. I don't remember what it was for, but I remember everybody being— Maybe it was like a Christmas thing. Where I just remember everybody being downstairs and

there was a bunch of gifts on the ping pong table. And I think they were drawing numbers and you got various things. It must have been for Christmas or something. And I think there was a Thanksgiving potluck for the people that didn't go home for Thanksgiving. I always went home, so I never went to it. But mainly soapboxes is what I remember the most. I would definitely went to a lot of soap boxes, especially freshman year. I just really enjoyed them. Yeah.

**DT** [00:59:22] And you said you had a few of them. Do you remember what you talked about?

**MS** [00:59:27] Yeah. One of them, I talked about voluntourism and how problematic it was, basically. And one of them, I talked about Florence And The Machine, which is one of my favorite bands. And she had come out with a music video and there— I kind of wanted to, analyze it. [Laughs] I remember so embarrassing. We were having tech issues, excuse me. And so the video was playing, but the audio wasn't so it was me, and two other people up there trying to figure it out and her music video. There is a brief moment where she doesn't have a top on, and I had written in my notes, “warn everyone about the nudity.” Well, the video was playing and I was doing tech stuff and so all of a sudden there's just the big breasts all over— [Laughs]

**DT** [01:00:19] Oh gosh.

**MS** [01:00:20] On the screen and everybody's like, “Whoa.” And I was like, “sorry sorry!” And I was like, I was gonna warn you. And Donna was there. [Laughs] And I was just like

[Makes wide eyes to the side] and I remember her kind of being like [Imitates expression]

She wasn't mad, but she was just kind of like, All right.

**DT** [01:00:37] [Laughs]

**MS** [01:00:39] And it went way over time. It was honestly kind of a terrible soapbox, but I think some of my friends were there, so I think they enjoyed it. And the other one I did was actually about the study abroad that I went on, which I should definitely talk about because I went on the “UCA in the UK: [United Kingdom], The Beatles and Popular Culture” trip. And it was the last time that Rick Scott taught the Beatles class, and I was on that study abroad trip to the U.K., which was awesome.

**DT** [01:01:10] Gosh it sounds like you got to do a lot of things in honors. I mean that alone and the internship, I mean, just going out and earlier you were talking about— You kind of wanted to explore what was outside of your hometown, get out and you went even further. So that's that's amazing. But—

**MS** [01:01:31] Yea it's funny I forgot about how much I had done until I started talking to you and I was like, “Oh yeah, I did that. Oh yeah, I went to see the U.K. with Rick Scott. Yeah.”

**DT** [01:01:40] What was a class led by Rick like? We don't have him right now either.

[Laughs]

**MS** [01:01:45] That's great. I just now realize you have no idea what I'm talking about. Yeah. So I think you know who Rick Scott is? He was the Dean before Patricia, and he was the Dean my freshman and sophomore year. My sophomore year it was his last year and basically every I think pretty much every year he had been an honors he had taught a class about the Beatles. That's like his thing. He knows so much about the Beatles, and he taught it with he taught it with, he co-taught it with Chad Terrell, who is actually a English teacher at Conway High, but he would guest lecture just for this class, basically. And so they taught the class every year, and it was it was again one of those classes, like rainbow rights or like where it was everybody wanted to do it. It was a very popular class because it was taught by Rick Scott, but it was also one of the hardest classes. It was known to be one of the most difficult. And it was also an evening class because Chad, being a high school English teacher, could only do it in the evening. So it was known as a very difficult class, but a very good class. And his last year he made it into a study abroad course. And so he basically condensed down one of the hardest classe, a semester long class into a couple of weeks of like a summer course. And so I did that and I also I remember I didn't— Me and my cousin actually who wasn't in honors, but she was at UCA cause anyone could do the the class. So there was two or three non honors people who did the class with us. And so my cousin did it with me and I didn't have any housing over the summer. So I slept on her couch for the the brief, like two three weeks that we did the class before we went to the U.K. And I had my homework was literally to listen to the Beatles. And if I had done all the homework, I would have listened to every Beatles song ever created. I didn't. [Laughs] It was a lot. We were also supposed to read this very huge book about the Beatles the semester before. And none of us— [Laughs]

**DT** [01:04:16] [Laughs]

**MS** [01:04:17] It was a lot, it was a lot. It was also a lot while we were there. So yeah we did that. We did the three week class and then we all shipped off to to England. We actually also went— It was a group of us mostly honor students and then like two or three non honors students and Rick and his wife and Chad Terrell. And then actually. Oh, I can't remember first name. But her name is Farris. That's her last name, I can't remember her first name, but Farris Honors Hall is named after her dad and she is on the UCA board of trustees or something. And she wanted to go with us. So she did, and her and her husband went with us. And she was so nice. It was so cool getting to just like, hang out with her. She was so sweet. And I'll never forget when I walked at graduation, she got up out of her seat and gave me a hug. It was just so sweet [Laughs] And I think we're Facebook friends? [Laughs] But anyway, sorry. We, gosh how long were we there? About two weeks maybe? We couldn't have been that long. I don't remember, but we flew into Manchester and so we were in Manchester for a few days and then we went to Liverpool and we were in Liverpool for a few days. And then we went to London a few days there, and then we went back to Manchester for a day or two and then we flew out. So yeah, it was a whirlwind of a trip, but that was my first time out of the country and I just freakin loved it. [Laughs]

**DT** [01:06:05] That's great. I think that honors definitely has opportunities to meet other people on campus. And I think Chad, actually, I think there's a class that he has a Core IV, and I'm pretty sure— I think it's the history of rock roll or something like that.

**MS** [01:06:24] Ahh.

**DT** [01:06:25] So he's definitely still around.



**MS** [01:06:27] Oh, that makes me happy. That's awesome. Yeah, I actually got to— That same summer after the study abroad, I worked at governor's school that summer and a bunch of the honor students that I was on the trip with and Chad, we all went from there straight to governor's school and worked together that summer.

**DT** [01:06:49] OK, and what was that like? I mean, did you have anybody asking you about honors at UCA or?

**MS** [01:06:57] Not me specifically because I didn't work directly with the students I worked in the office. So most of them didn't know who I was. I think that year, yeah, that year I worked as a photographer for the school and I made the yearbook, so they knew me a little bit more. But I'm almost positive that my other friend, he was a resident assistant, so I'm almost positive that he talked to the students about honors and the teachers, Chad and others who either went to UCA or were also in honors. It's a very, the groups overlap a lot. [Laughs]

**DT** [01:07:30] Gotcha. Okay.

**MS** [01:04:34] Oh, and Whit was also there. I'm sorry. Whit was also there— [crosstalk]

**DT** [01:07:36] [crosstalk] Oh really— Oh, okay. Oh my gosh, that's amazing. So I'm curious, other than having all these experiences and meeting your husband in honors, how else did honors impact your life after graduation?

**MS** [01:07:56] Oh goodness. I mean, all of my current friends, more or less are from honors or UCA broadly. But yeah, I just. Those first few years after school, I think are hard for

everyone just transitioning from school to real life. And I definitely struggled there for a bit with working and just trying to find my place on my own. But now that I'm going to be starting law school in the fall, I'm thinking about how much honors really prepared me. You know, having already written a thesis, having read difficult things and having a lot of reading from freshman year, just having tons of reading to do, and I'm really excited.

I mean, I'm scared of law school. I am, but I am really excited if it is even a fraction of what I was able to have an honors of reading and learning and having discussions and being in an academic environment again. I'm really excited, and it's prepared me so much. I mean, I when I was thinking of doing law school, I had a zoom with Cindy. I was like, Hey, can I talk to you? I don't know if I want to do this or not. And she zoomed with me one night and this was in 2020 and gave me a lot of really good advice, and Whit did one of my recommendation letters. Yeah, and I was able to put my thesis on my resume.

It just prepared me so well, and I'm really excited for one day being able to be in a position where I can help the honors college in some way. I feel like that's just one of the beauties of it is just always having something to go back to. Some sort of community. And I feel the same way with governor's school. I worked there for two summers because I just loved the place so much. And they both mean a lot to me. And so I'm really excited to be able to give back to honors again one day. I was an ambassador for honors while I was there, so that was also part of my way of trying to bring people into the fold. And I went back to my high school.

That was one thing I always did was go to my high school and try to talk to the kids there because I knew that there were people there like me who wanted to get out who were really smart, but weren't being told about all the opportunities they could have just because of how

the school was not having the resources. And this wasn't because of me, necessarily, but actually there was, I think, a— Yea the year after, no, two years after me, there was a girl, another girl from Highland, to come to honors, and she graduated from honors and had a fantastic time. And I say it wasn't because of me because she was on the tennis team at Highland, and I don't remember exactly how it came up. But she was talking about school and she was talking about honors. And my aunt is the tennis coach at Highland High School. And my aunt said, “My niece is there. She loves that you need to go there.”[Laughs]

**DT** [1:11:34] Mhm.

**MS** [1:11:35] And she apparently, set her up, told her where to go and told her all about it. And so then when I went to my school to do the talk and I was like, Is anyone interested? And she was like, Oh yeah, I've already done my application. I already want to go there. And it just made me so happy.

**DT** [01:11:55] Really great. Yes.

**MS** [01:11:57] Yes.

**DT** [01:11:58] OK, so I'm curious since you were an ambassador and you obviously had a great experience and honors. If anybody asked you today, a high school senior say, what is honors that you like? How would you describe it to them?

**MS** [01:12:15] This is always the hard thing. I feel like I never have the right words. I try to learn the buzzwords to be able to explain it. And it's so difficult. But I— Gosh, I feel I would

just— I sometimes describe it to people as a small, liberal arts school in the middle of a state, a big state school cause I feel like that's kind of what it is. It feels like a college within a college. And I really think it's the best of both worlds because there's so much benefit to a liberal arts education. But at the same time, there's a lot of benefit to going to a state school and getting those resources and having access to majors. Cause the health sciences is huge at UCA. They have a fantastic programs. But at the same time, if you are just doing that, you're missing so much more. I feel like integral education and learning that I feel honors can give you.

Yeah, I just— I feel like if I ever met a student who seemed to have the same just love for learning, I feel like that's where I would send them. I think honors is the best when you are just in love with learning and you just want to know everything you possibly can and you will never be satiated. Yeah. Yeah. And just I don't know, it's just a really good community. I remember freshman year, I was really frustrated. I saw a huge disconnect actually with my honors classes on my journalism classes, and I saw that throughout my whole time at UCA. Just I could tell that there was just such a difference in the education level that I was getting.

I remember freshman year, I remember calling my mom like on the way to class and I was like, Mom, if I wasn't an honors, I would not be going to school here. I would not be in school right now, at least not for journalism because I felt like I wasn't getting a very awesome education. At least at the beginning. Later on my my upper level journalism classes were actually very great, but my my freshman sophomore level classes were not it. Yeah, I even knew then I was like, school would be so different for me if I wasn't in honors, and I think about that when I think about my younger sibling is going to UCA they're not in honors. And it's it's a very different school and I wish that. I wish that more students had the

resources and the community to fall back on like we did an honors. I wish there was more funding.

I remember Cindy telling us that there were people within honors who wanted to change it from a full tuition scholarship, so that way more students at UCA broadly could get more money. And it would help overall being able to give— Oh there's a fire truck outside. [Laughs] Being able to give half tuition scholarships to more students. And I was honestly, I was like, I think I kind of agree with that because I know and especially now looking at my future law school debt and wanting to grow up. [Laughs] Not having that financial burden is completely different for your education. I genuinely don't think you can learn as well if you're thinking about all the debt you're accruing, especially if again, like I told my mom, if I was paying for this and having these journals classes, it would not be worth it at all. So, yeah, I think I know that I was very lucky and privileged to have all the things I did in honors and I feel all I want is that for every student. You know what I mean? Yeah, I don't know if that answered your question. [Laughs]

**DT** [01:16:50] No yeah you did, You answered it very well, too. And I like that you say you feel like everybody should have or yeah, should have the opportunity to experience what you did in honors. And what we're all able to get through it. And I wanted to talk a little bit about you and law school. So where is it? Was this your plan in majoring in journalism or how did this come to be?

**MS** [01:17:13] Not at all. Even though I didn't enjoy my journalism classes, I still thought I wanted to be a journalist because I still am very passionate about good journalism and good media and how it can— It's a very vital thing to have good media and good information.

After—When I had my internship in D.C., and I was able to work closely with journalists, and I saw what their life was like basically, and how difficult it was. I also went to D.C. thinking, I want to get a job here. That was also one of my goals was, I'm going to do this internship. I'm going to make some connections. Then after graduation, I can move to D.C. and be a journalist. I got there and I was like, “No, that is not what I want. That is not what I want.”

So I graduated college not knowing, not knowing whatsoever, what I wanted to do. It just so happened that the first job I got out of undergrad was a legal assistant at a law firm here in Little Rock. I really enjoyed it pre-pandemic [Laughs] I started working there the summer, yeah of the summer of 2019, and I really enjoyed it. I thought the law was really interesting. All I wanted was to just like. I don't know, I just it was again, it was that thing is I wanted to learn. I was like, “I don't understand what's going on here and I want to know what's going on here.” I was doing work for, “Oh, call this insurance company and get this” or “oh, collect these medical bills.” And I didn't know why I was doing those things.

That's all I wanted to do was learn how and my bosses were really great about teaching me a lot about how the law worked. Unfortunately, when the pandemic hit and I was working at home, I didn't get to learn any more. Basically, I just was doing the kind of menial tasks, and it really started to weigh on me. And eventually I was actually fired from that job because of my health. Basically, I wasn't doing very well and I kept missing work and they were like, “We just can't do this anymore.” And so I got fired. [Laughs]

**DT** [1:19:42] Sorry to hear that.

**MS** [1:19:43] Yeah but I think everybody should be fired at least once in their life. [Laughs] It's a good experience to have. [Laughs] But yeah, and ever since then, I was looking into law and and actually even before that, I should say. Cause that actually wasn't even the beginning. I thought it was but it wasn't.

The actual beginning of me being interested in law was the gender and justice class I took with Cindy and Whit my senior year. That was my last senior seminar that I had to take. And I wasn't— I was interested in it, but I was also kind of like, I need a seminar. And I also never had a class with Cindy and so I was really wanted to have her, and I fricking love that class. I loved it so much. And I— I think I told you this in the pre-interview, but I was working on my thesis and doing this class where we had a paper for that class at the same time. I found myself wanting to work on the paper for gender injustice and wanting to do the research about paper and not my thesis. [Laughs] And the paper was about anti LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender] laws in Arkansas. Broadly, I won't go into all of it because it's actually debunked now because of a Supreme Court case. All the research I did is not even relevant anymore because the Supreme Court overruled everything but. But again, that's I think it's so cool.

Yeah so I really enjoyed learning about the law then, but I spent a very long time convincing myself that I couldn't do law school, basically. Or that it wasn't the right choice. Or, you hear all the time about people having a bachelor's degree and then realizing that it prepared them for nothing and then just going and getting a grad degree just because. And I was like, I don't want to do that. I don't want that to be me. But eventually I stopped being afraid of it and I was like, I have literally been researching law and law jobs and law schools throughout this entire pandemic. I just got to freakin do it. So I started studying for the LSAT [Law School

Admission Test] 2021. Yeah, yeah. And I took it in April, and then I applied and I finally heard back from all my schools at the beginning of March. And I think I pretty much decided where I want to go, but I'm still waiting on a scholarship to fully [Unclear]

**DT** [01:22:34] OK. And where would that be?

**MS** [01:22:37] Vermont law school.

**DT** [01:22:39] OK.

**MS** [01:22:40] Yeah.

**DT** [01:22:41] And what kind of lawyerr were you thinking of or what with law school? I mean.

**MS** [01:22:50] Yeah. So the paper that I did for gender injustice, I was looking at a local law that had passed in Arkansas. Basically saying that that cities and counties couldn't create a protected class for LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning] people because it wasn't in the state constitution. And the reason it's overruled is because the Supreme Court ruled that LGBTQ people are considered a protected class. And so everything was moot. But at the time when I was researching it, I found the law that where they said that. And it was the worst written law. It was two pages. It had a very misleading title, it was the Interstate Commerce Improvement Act. And their whole thing was like, Well, if each city and county can make their own laws, then the interstate commerce will be disrupted or confused or something. And it upset me so much because, here were these legislators basically saying



LGBTQ people couldn't have protections. And they were doing it— and the fact that the bill was so poorly written and researched and you could tell that they just didn't care. And it just made me so angry that this two page horrible bill could affect so many people's lives in a terrible way.

I remember reading it and thinking I could write something better than this. And I think ever since then, it just kind of, dinged in there that I was like, it would be really cool to be able to write the bills that I actually want to see pass in local governments. And so that was one of the things I looked at when I was looking at law schools, clinics where you could get real world experience working on capitol hills and doing legislation. And actually, Vermont Law School has a class where you go to the capital of Vermont and and I don't know all the specifics, but it's a legislation clinic. And yeah, and that's one of— I'm interested in a lot of different things. I'm also interested in labor law. I'm a big fan of unions, and I think it's very important right now. And there's also a trend of a lot more unions have been being formed lately. Starbucks in particular. And so I feel like there's going to be a lot of movement in the labor law field in the future. So I think that would be a good place to be.

**DT** [01:25:45] OK, yeah, definitely sounds like a very big thing, and it sounds great. I feel like that's a great opportunity for you to get back to a lot of people in a lot of different ways. Is there anything else you would like to share that you didn't get a chance to?

**MS** [01:26:01] Well, I was actually I was going to go off of that. It's funny because I didn't think about this at the time, but when I was looking at schools, one of the reasons I was drawn to Vermont so much was it's a very small school and it is a lot different. You hear law school and you think like like Elle Woods at Harvard, really cut throat and in this school is

not it. It's in the middle of our Vermont. It's super chill. It's a town full of hippies, it's not— And I've heard from students it's not competitive. It's very congenial. Everybody's friends and I was like— And I'm realizing that like it was that community that honors community, that governor's school community. It's the thing that I've always searched for. I don't want to be in a competitive educational place. I want to be somewhere where I can discuss things and talk about things and learn from my classmates and not compete with them for who has the top grade.

Also the school, like they're one of the top environmental law schools in the country. And they also have restorative justice initiatives like wanting to reform the criminal justice system and environmental justice, helping people who have been affected by like environmental disasters. I think it really all goes back to that honor's idea of doing good, the citizen scholar, right? You're a scholar .You're a scholar, but you're a citizen first, and I feel like that's always going to define what I do in life.

That was one of the main things that I find that finally made me decide to go to law school because I was like, I will never be satisfied, just doing any old job. I just won't be. I have to be doing something that is doing good for somebody else, [Laughs] or just making some sort of difference. Yeah. And I feel that probably started before honors, but I feel honors gave me the vocabulary and the people. Sometimes I tell people about me going to law school and they're like, Oh, isn't that expensive or like, why do you want to do that? They don't really get it.

Then just the other day, some friends who were also in honors came down to run the Little Rock marathon, and we all went out to eat and I was telling them about the law

school, basically what I just told you. And they were like, Yeah, that sounds awesome. They really do. I completely get it, and I just had this. I realize I was like, these are my people.

[Laughs] People who understand that drive to learn and to do good and to have a job that is actually meaningful to you and.

**DT** [01:29:09] OK is there anything else?

**MS** [01:29:12] I don't think so. Um well depending on what to talk about. There was one sad thing. I don't know if it's my— I don't know so I'll see how this goes and then I might— I don't know because I don't know if it's my place to talk about it, but. So my capstone class is a very simple class and we all had partner readings. And there was a girl in my class, and you might have heard her name I don't know, but her name was Shelby Tulley. And then Shelby Dodd, do you know who I'm talking about?

**DT** [01:29:55] Yes, I think so. It was an accident, correct? On Campus? [There was a miscommunication between the narrator and interviewer, this is not the same event.]

**MS** [01:30:01] Yes. Yeah. So she was my partner reader in my capstone class. She was one of the people that I traded papers with, and I read her thesis, and she read mine. And it's not like we were BFFs [Best Friends Forver] or anything. But I just— we had been together in honors for the whole time. I knew her the whole time. I think she lived down the hall from me, and it was just one of those things. That last semester, I just realized how kind she was, and I just remember her being so excited to start working as a teacher, and I remember her being so excited that she was getting her house. I remember when she got married.

So hearing the news about that was pretty devastating. It was very, very difficult. Yeah, it's always really jarring when someone who is so similar to you in so many ways, and someone who had so much life ahead of them puts so much potential. Just gone. And in such a horrible way, it was really tough. Every once in a while, I still just remember her and then I'm just kind of sad through the day.

That was the only other thing I was going to mention was, I'm really grateful too I got to read her thesis. I know that might be like a really tiny thing, but her thesis was so good. Hers was about—she made a business plan for a restaurant because she worked at David's Burgers through school, and she actually really liked it, and she learned so much about how restaurants were run. Her thesis was like a business plan to run her own restaurant and she was so—She basically had finished her thesis by the time capstone started. I was so mad cause I was so behind [Laughs] and I was so worried, too, because she was reading mine. I'm talking about stuff that sometimes people don't always agree with. You know how the journalism media has been and is very racist. Many in many experiences. And so, you get a little worried when people read that how their reaction is going to be, but she was always like, “Yeah, this is really good.” Always was really— She was really pumped about my thesis. I was really pumped about her thesis. I told her I was like, You have to open this restaurant like, you know that right? Like, you need to go open this. And we all said that whenever she presented to us, we were like, When are you going to open it? And I remember her saying she was like, Well, I don't know, maybe I will. And yeah, it's just, it sucks. It sucks. And I'm always— I thought I was like, I want someone to go open her restaurant. I want someone to go find her thesis and open her restaurant. That would be really great.

**DT** [01:33:02] Well, I'm really glad you shared that because I definitely think that a lot of us have heard of her. But just of that and we'd never— I've never heard, that she had this goal of opening this restaurant. So I'm really glad that you decided to share that because I don't know. I think it's one of those things just like we don't know about Norb we don't know about Rick or— all these.

**MS** [01:33:25] Yeah.

**DT** [01:33:26] I appreciate you sharing that because now we have learned more about her.

**MS** [01:33:29] So that makes me happy. I like the idea that y'all know who she is. That makes me happy.

**DT** [01:33:34] Is there anything else you would like to share?

**MS** [01:33:39] Well, I'm close to tears, so [laughs] I know— Actually, I think that pretty much, I mean, gosh, I could talk about honors for hours. It was, I mean, it was a huge part of my life. Those four years five, if you count senior year me applying. Yeah, I'm just so happy that I got to have my honors experience and I'm so excited for you and for you all who are getting to experience right now. And I just hope that you have the best time. I know it's stressful. College is so stressful, and especially y'all who did it during the pandemic. Please know that you are the strongest human for being able to do that. I mean, I— My sibling, took the year off when COVID hit. They didn't go to school like it was just not. They weren't going to be able to do it. But those of you all who did school during that freaking strong, I just want you to know that you.

**DT** [01:34:37] Thank you. Yeah, I really appreciate that. OK, thank you so much for your time, Monica, and this concludes our interview.