

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Sarah Simers Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Sarah Simers

Interviewer Name: Ray, Brooklyn

Date of Interview: 03/14/2022

Location of Interview: Remote Interview - Zoom Recording

Acronyms:

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

TAG = Travel Abroad Grant

URGE = Undergraduate Research Grant for Education

ELF = Experiential Learning Funds

SURF = Student Undergraduate Research Fellowship

Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sarah Simers conducted by Brooklyn Ray on March 14, 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.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:02] Okay, so I have a little intro I'm going to do. This is Brooklyn Ray with the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Today is March 14th, 2022, and I'm interviewing Sarah Simers who is at I'm assuming her home. We're interviewing on Zoom. We will be talking about Sarah's experience leading up to, during and after her time in the Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

Sarah Simers [00:00:38] Sarah E. Simers, S-I-M-E-R-S, Sarah with an H and my age is thirty eight years.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:46] What year did you enter the Honors College?

Sarah Simers [00:00:49] Fall 2001.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:54] When did you graduate from the honors college?

Sarah Simers [00:00:46] May 2006. Do you want to see my diploma?

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:01] Sure!

Sarah Simers [00:01:05] [holds up UCA diploma] Yeah, it's a little flexing here. This is what you get.

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:05] Is it purple? I can't really tell.

Sarah Simers [00:01:07] Yes, it is really dark purple, [opens diploma] and then there you go. That is what you get.

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:07] Oh, wow.

Sarah Simers [00:01:07] Yeah, it has Lou Hardin's signature. 2006. Okay, I'm a little proud of it. This is what I got for finishing my thesis. [holds up Honors College Certificate]

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:23] Oh, cool, I didn't know about that.

Sarah Simers [00:01:29] I don't know if they still do it.

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:31] Do you know what the greek letters at the bottom—do you know what that means?

Sarah Simers [00:01:35] It was for...

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:39] I just remember from last semester they told us it stands for "Arete" which I think I'm not exactly sure—

Sarah Simers [00:01:47] It has a tree and then this is the logo because it's based on the windows in McAllister Hall and shows a student reading.

Brooklyn Ray [00:02:00] Well, we want to get some background about you. So where are you from?

Sarah Simers [00:02:06] I grew up in Salem, Arkansas, 72576. And you're like, why did she give the zip code? Because there's more than one Salem, Arkansas in Arkansas. It's

in north central Arkansas. It's about 20 minutes from the Missouri state line. And in Fulton County, which is one of the smaller counties. So my parents still live there. My dad lived in Fulton County his entire life. And my sister had one sister, Katy Simers, now Turbeville. And she is also a graduate of UCA honors as well. She did not want to do the interviews. I need to be careful to mention other people. She opted out. She just said, "I didn't want—" and I was like, "Okay." And so, yeah, that's where I grew up there. And Salem is a small town, even though it's a county seat. I think with the last census it was like sixteen hundred t seems to get a little more each census, but it's still a small town, so it's small. I went to a small rural public high school. And for those of you who do not know, the case in many parts of Arkansas, there is no junior high or middle school, so it's K through six and seven through 12. So Honors was a welcome change.

Brooklyn Ray [00:03:31] I can only imagine. That was going to be something I asked you too, how was moving to college? How was that like? Was it a big change?

Sarah Simers [00:03:39] No, My mom is actually an alumna of UCA as well, but not the honors college. So she went to UCA from 1968 to 1971, which the reason why these years are important because that's when the name kept changing. Her last year there was the first year it was called University of Central Arkansas, but the first year it was still State Teachers College and it has some names on it. So anyways, I did have the benefit of having one parent who had been to college. She was an educator. Actually, she did her masters at UCA later in summers. So I actually had the benefit of a parent who was— my dad is extremely smart, but one of the smartest and ethical, but I did not realize as a teenager, I was like, what does my dad know? He knows a lot, I don't want to discredit him, but I was really fortunate that I had parents who realized there's more to life, like yes, be in band and go to the Friday Night Football games, but there's more life than just— so

the transition to college was not so bad because any time I had opportunities to do things like band camp, which I didn't go to band camp at UCA, but UCA Dixieland Band Camp, is apparently supposed to be really good. Band camp or we used to have programs called AEGIS programs.] I wish Katy had done the interviews. You have to ask Whit to pressure, Katy Turbeville, Tricia Smith, Cindy, I forget Cindy's last name. They all know Katy Turbeville. Anyways, pressure her to do it, and AEGIS programs was things where we stayed the night in dorms like basketball camp when I was much younger. So the point being is that college was not scary for me. Like I understood what it would take to live in the dorms. This was back before, like I had transitioned from having a bag phone in the car to having a brick Motorola phone, which actually was a really good phone. But everyone was into the small Nokias. And so I ended up getting a different phone, but getting a cell phone was a big deal. It was a huge transition. Oh, I muted myself. No, I didn't mute myself, why did the mute button come up?

Brooklyn Ray [00:06:10] Oh, I don't know. I can still hear you.

Sarah Simers [00:06:14] OK. So anyways, the point being, we were on cell phones. I forgot what I was going to tell you. Oh! People called 1-800 collect. It was a real thing. Dime in the pay phone, 1-800 collect you could get on, talk to your momma. It was a real thing. I know, right? Because now you just text or FaceTime if you're both on iPhones. It's something I realize now, especially being in higher-ed and working in academic services, how much first year students don't know they don't know. And how much privilege, I had privilege to realizing- you see, UCA was not my first choice. It wasn't my last choice. It was just in the middle. I didn't have a good reason to not go to UCA. It was the only college and the application that time that did not ask, "Do you have a family member who is an alum?" I don't know if they do it now, but that's how egalitarian UCA as a whole was at the

time, is that they didn't really care if you had a legacy or not, who are you. Did you take the ACT? Did you show up for class in high school and the GPA range? Does that answer, that's a long answer.

Brooklyn Ray [00:07:44] Oh no, it's fine. Since you said you applied to other places, what was your interview process like? If there even was an interview process to get to the honors college? Like what was the application process to the Honors College like?

Sarah Simers [00:07:54] I remember, so Lyon College broke my heart. My seventeen year old heart by offering me a partial scholarship, and I thought I was a shoe-in for one of their big ones. Which I quickly learned after being at UCA, especially in Honors, and now looking back, like I was not a shoe-in. [laughter] But it broke my heart. And so I was like, I don't need to miss any more deadlines with UCA. And so we called in Glenda Middleton, which Glenda Middleton, the admin at the time, the Glenda Middleton— like you can call it the Norb Schedler Honors College, but it's really Glenda Middleton's. Glenda Middleton's really, and Norb would acknowledge that too. Have you heard of Glenda Middleton? She ran things.

Brooklyn Ray [00:08:49] I've heard of her. I saw that you did a work study with her. But we can talk about that because it seems like something that is really important to you.

Sarah Simers [00:09:01] I did not go to her retirement party and that was stupid of me, in 2011 I didn't go. They were wondering, where did you go? I was like, it was stupid, just go to people's retirement party. Go to weddings, go to funerals, and show up for those things. I don't know. So I hope Glenda is well. Anyway, she was like, "Yeah, we have your application here. We have the letter. Just come on in." So we were supposed to get the

letter and then schedule. But she had it on file, all my stuff. So I went into the interview with no prep. With no prep. It was Donna. Donna was pregnant with Archer at the time, her oldest child, because it's been 20 years. I don't know if Archer goes to the UCA or if he goes somewhere else. She was pregnant with Archer at the time. Who else was it? Was it just Donna? Or was there someone else? I think there was someone else who was like in and out of honors that year before, but that's not someone I remember. I remember Donna being there. There were two other kids in the interview. And also, I cannot emphasize enough how much I went to a small, rural public high school. So I guess there was no interview prep, I had no guidance which is why I'm kind of flexing about it, it was probably one of the best interviews I ever gave in my life. Because I had been reading C.S. Lewis, not just Narnia like I've finally sat down and read the Narnia series The Chronicles of Narnia. I finally read that my senior year of high school, it's really more for kids like that. But I also read other things by C.S. Lewis this, and I'm looking around seeing if I have anything in here, it's kind of chaotic. It is probably at my parents' house. I had seen the movie about C.S. Lewis' life, autobiography or biographical called Shadowlands. Anthony Hopkins is in it, but no one remembers, and Debra Winger, but every time you mention Anthony Hopkins, people think Silence of the Lambs and C.S. Lewis and Hannibal Lecter are not the same person. So anyways, but I had read enough about it that we just talked about it. And I remember the other people in the interview were like, "Uhh," and again it's been 21 years ago, Donna may remember it differently, but yeah, we did have to give an interview. I did really well. So I just talked about things. Versus the Lyon College interview for the fellowship. They asked us, "Why did you not take college algebra for college credit? How do you think you can step back?" And I was like, I wasn't setback, not realizing I was competing with people who had taken AP classes in high school. AP was just becoming a thing. I didn't know that, but this was more conversational. It was more like what we did in core one and core two. And Donna, as you know is a theologian, she knows C.S. Lewis.

She's read CS Lewis, she knows things. I think it was just refreshing. Shadowlands is a really hard movie to find, and frequently, people ask my favorite movie, I tell them it's Forrest Gump, because that's the movie I've seen the most amount of times because when I was 11, I thought it was brilliant, but it probably Shadowlands or True Grit, the Coen Brothers version. It's not Forrest Gump, that I can quote for, and my cat's back.

Brooklyn Ray [00:12:54] So you said Donna interviewed you. Did you have her for core one?

Sarah Simers [00:13:00] I had her for core two.

Brooklyn Ray [00:13:04] So who did you have for core one, do you remember?

Sarah Simers [00:13:05] Philip Melton.

Brooklyn Ray [00:13:09] So core one and core two are kind of the classes where students, I don't know, like, find themselves. Was there anything that totally flipped about, I don't know, any of your views or just like how you saw the world, or did anything totally change after taking those classes?

Sarah Simers [00:13:24] No. [laughter] [crosstalk] It should have. Yeah, so actually the person who had been my gifted and talented coordinator from kindergarten to eleventh grade. She died suddenly, something kidney related, gallbladder related. And she was not a fan of Honors. It had gotten a reputation by then as being, like it changes kids to give up on Christianity. But she wasn't super religious. She's probably more Republican, now than I did looking back than at the time. But anyway, maybe I'm mentally ill, but I have not had a

problem reconciling Christianity and readings. Maybe Christianity's wrong on some things. Maybe there's things they need to change slightly. New ideas don't really bother me. But so, maybe I missed the point. Maybe I missed a point. But so I didn't really have this huge moment of things, a lot of people do. So a lot of people have this phase of "oh no I didn't know that." I didn't have that really, but I was also really mindful of it. I wasn't really mindful of being like, really being mindful of it, The experience. I was really involved with Chi Alpha at the time, which is probably odd because that's not the denomination I grew up with or anything, but at the time a lot of people were involved in it. It seemed progressive to eighteen-year old me at the time, so I got involved and I knew a lot of people who did that. So, yeah I feel like I didn't really have a huge shift in thinking. Maybe I did. But let me show you the books I read and got later on that I wouldn't have gotten had I not been in Honors. So what I was called, if I show you the book, do I have to give it to Whit? I just realized something, like she can't have my diploma—

Brooklyn Ray [00:16:02] No, no, no.

Sarah Simers [00:16:04] So this is called "On Bullshit."

Brooklyn Ray [00:16:05] I've actually read part of that. We had to read that when we were in Oxford tutorial, I remember that now.

Sarah Simers [00:16:10] Because they made a joke when I was doing Oxford Tutorial and thesis, like, "oh y'all maybe we should have this" because people were obviously turning things that were just— My thesis was not great. I finished it. It was a novella. I finished it, I hope no one ever reads it. Please don't look for it. So this one, this is funny, this is what I read in grad school. Hurt my head, hurt my head, I think some classes may, I

think Rick Scott taught a class, might use it. It's Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble." So I think it's more like Honors, which to me is like planting seeds. So we talked about some people that have this huge transition like a bulldozer goes in, knocks down all their trees and they put in different trees. Mine was more like gardening. Another book I bought is Immanuel Kant's "Lecture of Ethics." Have I pulled it off the bookshelf since I bought it? No, it goes in and out of the box. Do I keep saying I'm going to take it back to the bookstore and resell it? Yes, but it is here. And this is not the readings we had for core one and core two. We're taking from things like this, like Kant's Ethics, and they would put small snippets, they would have it copyrighted. Or, I guess, if it was copyrighted it was approved because the font all looked the same. And it would have it, and we had readings and we had them in a binder or a folder. I kept it at my parents' house for some time, I don't know if it's still there. Who knows. So I think [sighs], it more planted seeds to answer your question.

Brooklyn Ray [00:18:08] Okay, cool! So do you want to talk about your capstone at all? I did try to look up the capstone. I wasn't going to go in and read the whole thing, but it wasn't available on the honors portal. I could just see the name of it. So now if you want to talk about it, you can go ahead and just tell me whatever you want.

Brooklyn Ray [00:18:28] My thesis or my capstone seminar with Doug?

Brooklyn Ray [00:18:32] Well, I guess we kind of use capstone and thesis interchangeably, but your thesis, "The Slave: A Historical Fiction Novella."

Sarah Simers [00:18:42] Yeah. So maybe a little too literal me, nineteen, twenty year old me was really baffled as how you would create something original. And it's part of "The Lively Experiment." You had to create something original for your thesis and I was like,

“How do you create something really original?” So my major was in history, and so many history papers say the same thing. They say the same thing it sounds like plagiarism. I was like, “how do I create something original?” This is a little flex. I am pretty sure I was the first person to do a historical fiction piece because it was original, how you created it. It's completely creative. I know that because my thesis advisor, who was Dr. Lauren Foote in the history department— so at that time faculty wanted to be on thesis committees. I don't know if they still do. They wanted to be on undergrad thesis committees because it was considered service in research for them as well. So she's in the history department. She's now at Texas A&M and she was like, “I've never done one before.” And so she had other people do it afterwards. So if someone did it before I did, I am welcome to be more than wrong. One thing you learn in honors is maybe you're wrong and I'm welcome to be wrong, but if it was, neither I nor Dr. Foote knew that at the time. So that's how it was different. Jane Simonsson, I think she left UCA about the time I graduated. I want to say she went to a small, liberal arts in Iowa. She was the honors person on my committee and then my capstone seminar was separate, I actually did that with Doug. Doug Corbitt, I think he is still there. And these are two of the books I kept from his class. [holds up books] One is the *Ethics of Authenticity* and the other one was *My Grandfather's Blessings*. So this one [referring to *My Grandfather's Blessings*] has some really good stories in it. Dean and Katy, my sister and brother-in-law, I think they took almost all their classes with Doug. I did the opposite. A lot of people would do that, they would be like, “I'm team Doug,” or “Team Donna,” or “Team Phillip.” But they took classes with the same people and I tried to spread it out. So I had one with Donna, two with Phillip, and that's why I took capstone— Jane was probably the person, because I had core three, Oxford tutorial and then she was on my committee. And the other one is called *Ethics of Authenticity*. I don't remember reading it, but it makes me laugh. The reason I kept it is because it identifies how to be a hipster before people knew hipster was a thing. Because the whole point of being a hipster is they

are trying to be ethical and authentic. They're trying to live out what this guy told them to do. They may not even know it but that's what they're trying. Yes, I realize no one ever calls themselves a hipster because it's an insult. Yes, so ask Doug, did you know you were training kids to be hipsters? *My Grandfather's Blessings*, the lady who wrote it, does something in health care, and I remember she has Crohn's disease, I forgot what she did in health care. That's there. But she had Crohn's disease, which is some sort of intestinal thing. But she talks a lot about, she reconciles her struggles in life, her chronic illness with her grandfather's blessings. Her grandfather was a rabbi. I don't remember which branch of Judaism he was, but he was very devout. But her parents were not devout, but they were okay with her being around him being stories and like learning from him, but not actually being fully Jewish, so anyways, it's a good one. This is a good one. I don't know if this is a good one, [referring to the *Ethics of Authenticity*] but I haven't let go of it, so there's that. So, yeah, capstone for me was separate from my thesis. So I didn't actually finish my thesis, even though it says on there that they signed off on it, class of 2006, I actually finished mine in May 2005. So I was on track because I did a fifth year and to finish— I was actually doing a double major and I kept switching majors, so I was a history major all the way through, but then I kept adding things like writing, journalism, public admin, so I ended up staying a fifth year. At that time, getting funding to stay a fifth year was not hard to do, so that's why this capstone, I actually did it my last semester and I was in Doug's class. Having your thesis and your capstone together makes more sense logically. So this new system is probably better.

Brooklyn Ray [00:24:10] Yeah, I guess I kind of use that interchangeably because when we take capstone, that's when you write your honors thesis. Is there anything that you want to talk about, about your thesis, like why you decided to do that or anything like that?

Sarah Simers [00:24:30] I was original, I originally at one point thought it was going to be a research paper over the transcendentalists. And there's a lot of transcendentalists in the abolitionist movement. Instead I made a bad fiction piece. [Laughter] I talked about growing up, like a character in the book ends up having tuberculosis and they throw up blood. If you're throwing up blood from tuberculosis, you're in the final stages. You're not doing this on the doorstep. It's not good. There's better fiction in the world. Like this one. This is better fiction. This is what UCA used to have a common reading, and this was it. *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*, this is better fiction than what I turned in for my thesis. But I applied for a SURF grant, I didn't— I did not get the SURF grant. Somewhere on the internet it says I did and I didn't. I applied for a SURF grant to go to Boston and research about transcendentalists. So the idea was like, I was going to have this fiction piece and then do this history paper kind of explaining like what was true and what was not. Then I was like, "That's really ambitious. I just need to finish." So I did. So that's not very inspirational. Other people did way cooler thesis projects than I did. My sister, but then I don't know if I can talk about my sister. My sister did something with education reform and made a film. Way cooler. I don't know if you got the email, Jennie McNulty-Strange, but she did like a ballet piece dance about her life. It was like autobiographical and reflective. I say way cooler, there were people that had— They were toying with the idea of us having to do more volunteer projects and having it like having this common theme all the way through. Which I think is something they do now to have y'all do, something like a common theme. So we didn't really have that, it was something that I remember people talking about and they talked a lot about on the forum. The Honors College Forum, do they still do that?

Brooklyn Ray [00:26:53] We don't have the forum anymore. For core two, search for community, our community projects do kind of have a theme.

Sarah Simers [00:27:04] So my first semester of college was also the first semester of Jane Simonson, and I mentioned Doug and Allison Wallace. It was all their first semesters. Are Doug and Allison still there?

Brooklyn Ray [00:27:20] Yes!

Sarah Simers [00:27:22] I thought so. The last time I had been around was pre-pandemic 2018, 2019 they still were. So yeah, that was their first semester, so it was kind of a huge shift in faculty. Also there were some new things that we tried, especially with core two, we did different types of communities, like I was in a group that was democracy. There's a group that was like pure tribalism, one that was more fascist. So to stay true to those concepts. I don't think anyone else did core two like that after us. I think there's a lot of things that kind of evolved like, here's what worked and what didn't. So I like the idea of having this continuous theme because it feels like it'd be more useful in the long run.

Brooklyn Ray [00:28:17] Do you want to talk about the work study you did with Glenda Middleton?

Sarah Simers [00:28:22] Yeah. So I asked Glenda, "Hey, can I work in the Honors office?" And she said, "Sure!" It was that simple! She said sure. It was for my fifth year. I think I had asked about other extra scholarships. And she's like, "Well, there's this tuition thing that you can get," and then I was like, "Can I just work in the office there?" So she's like, "Sure." So it is that simple. At the time, I think there had been work study positions that weren't tied to financial aid, Is my voice memo still going? Yeah. So they set it up. I worked in the office my fifth year as well. It was Monday, Wednesday, Friday mornings. It's why I don't

have a double major because I didn't realize that the writing degree, there was a rhetoric class that was fall only. I thought I could do it in the spring and it was fall only and it was like 8:00 AM. Well, that was right when I was working in the Honors office. And by the time I realized I was like, guess I'm getting a minor. I'm getting another minor. So the amount of minors I have are ridiculous. What I liked about it is, since I already finished a thesis, I got to help people with formatting their thesis because there's a certain way of doing that. Just being in the office, just kind of fun. Stephanie Crane was also an admin there and then Tom Bertram. It was just fun. It was probably the most I was around Norb because I didn't take a class with Norb. By the time I came around for core three, you had to interview and be pre-approved for his core three class, which I think that's the class people had really changed and shifted people. I remember being intimidated being like, no, that's not for me. Which is kind of sad. What was kind of sad about it is like one of the things he did was Myer Briggs. I don't know why that was threatening, why I thought that would be threatening. I should've done Myers-Briggs, but that's a question of like Cindy or Trish, are they doing these interviews too? Are any of the faculty or staff doing interviews?

Brooklyn Ray [00:30:47] Yes. Are you talking about—

Sarah Simers [00:30:50] Tricia, the Dean? I can't think of her last name.

Brooklyn Ray [00:30:58] Patricia Smith.

Sarah Simers [00:30:59] Smith, yeah.

Brooklyn Ray [00:31:01] Yeah, I'm interviewing her tomorrow.

Sarah Simers [00:31:06] Tell her that Sarah Simers said to ask you and she'll be like, she will send me an email, "What are you doing?" You can ask her, or Cindy. At some point, there was a shift from where everybody had to take it to where you had an interview to be in Norb's class. But anyway, so being in the work study, I'd be like, "Hey Norb, I need you to sign this thing," and he was like, "Is it ethical for me to sign off on this?" He was like, "You can sign for me," and I'm like, "Okay," but he was like, "is it ethical for you to sign my signature?" Like you just said I could do this, and I got to get this form in and we need to go to class. But it was just fun. But yeah, it's true. Should you just sign something because someone said you can sign it? Is it really ethical? So just things like that. It was fun. So that's a long tangent from work study to Norb's class.

Brooklyn Ray [00:32:05] Oh that's fine. I was going to ask if you had any kind of relationship with Norb.

Sarah Simers [00:32:10] Yeah, it was more towards the end. I didn't know him. [pauses] He can be really intimidating. He can be really intimidating. And he would just be intimidating. He had the stare. But then Norb was somebody who was really thoughtful and compassionate, he was concerned about the ethics of a situation. Nothing is at face value. That was really helpful. There are so many other people who are closer to him than I was, but he always recognized me, he was always kind to me, even when the last time I saw him. He had Parkinson's, and yet he still recognized me, so that was really nice. He knew my name. I think he was at his heart a really kind person and he was into the civil rights movement, some part of it. I think people were afraid, and I was one of the people who's kind of afraid at the time, I guess that it was more like garden planting seeds rather than bulldozing, running down and starting over. I was afraid of him calling on me, in big large group, and being like, "Why do you think that way?" And he never did. Like, if he called

you the large group is because— He wasn't cruel, I don't think he was cruel. It took me a while to realize that professors can have a stage face of intimidation and not necessarily be cruel.

Brooklyn Ray [00:34:10] Yeah, were there any other honors faculty that you were closer with?

Sarah Simers [00:34:17] Oh goodness, I guess Jane was probably the closest. I did an independent study with Allison, because I signed up for the class and it didn't make, so we just did it as an independent study. It was about nature writing. So I read a lot of Thoreau and [it which actually inspired my thesis on transcendentalists. I read a lot of Thoreau with her. Henry David Thoreau, Emerson, what else did we read? I should look for some of those books, but I cannot find them. [pause] I cannot find it. Amy Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinkers Creek*, there's another one about the desert, about a guy who lived in one of the national parks as a park ranger. *Desert Abby*, maybe, I can't find it. I'm sorry, I keep looking, I can visualize the book cover in my head, it has a big desert on it. So as far as the closest, I don't know if I was closer to one or the other. [pause] I was kind of close to Phillip, because I was close to his son, Dylan, for a while. but not really. Not really, not more than I was with Jane or Doug. I feel like I got along with everybody. I knew Adam Frank at the end, his first year was my last year there and then Phil Frana, but they were there towards the end. I think Adam is still there. Phil Frana is doing something administrative somewhere else. We were LinkedIn friends at one point, but I don't keep up with. Yeah, that was my approach to life then. Be friends with everybody and you're going to know everybody.

Brooklyn Ray [00:36:48] So I guess I was kind of wondering, when I was looking at the years or when you told me when you entered the Honors College, and it's kind of flipping the conversation. But 2001, the fall of 2001 specifically, 9/11 happened. How did that affect you? Did it affect you personally? And did you guys talk about it a lot in the Honors College?

Sarah Simers [00:37:17] We did talk about it. Philip had served in the armed forces during peacetime in the 80s, so he had what I call the fun version of being in the army. Like, you go through boot camp and I think he lived in Germany. He may not call it fun. I think he's deceased now. I think Phillip is deceased. You can ask him or ask of his family members or someone close to him. I don't know if he'd call it fun because he became a lawyer who's very adamant about human rights and individual rights, which is not something you associate with the army. But so back to 9/11, I remember that. Yes, we did talk about it very much. I remember the day it happened. I was actually at the HPER when it happened because I was excited about how to use hand weights. So I was in one of those classes for noncredit. It was in the morning and so you did circuit training. It sounds so basic now, like, "Oh, you did circuit weight training, you thought that was innovative?" 2001, eighteen year old Sarah, I thought I was innovative. So they had the TVs. And I remember seeing footage that you don't see very often of the first plane hitting and people thinking it was a movie. Like, I thought it was a movie trailer, like what movie trailer is that? And then it happened the second time. It's not a movie. It's real life. And as a shock of it, because, like the Bush administration at that point, hadn't really done anything. It was like, we're still living in the Clinton era in 2001. But then after that I had the world history class and the world history professor was like, "hey, we need to stay focused," because she taught world history one, and you need to stay focused, and blah, blah. But I remember the rest of the day, I just remembered things dominoed that day. I remember this sky being really blue

because all the flights were shut down. Like, the weather was amazingly beautiful, but all the flights were shut down. I remember people talking the day of, like they're not going to hit Conway, just statistically speaking, like where it's going, because then it kept happening like there's a plane in Pennsylvania, the Pentagon, part of the Pentagon got hit, things like that. So they're strategically— they might hit Little Rock, maybe, but not Conway. We have food. We're going to be safe. But the thing I remember the most is my car was in the shop because I rear ended somebody Labor Day weekend. I was rubbernecking at a high school football game, and I literally did this after driving for three hours and my sister was like, "Go faster." I'm like, "No, I want to see what the score is," and then crash, boom. So that was the week, so my car was in the shop. The good thing about that is I wasn't part of the panic rush to go to fill up gas. So there was the gas gouging. I don't know if you heard about that. Gas prices went up and there were lawsuits about it, and there were entire gas stations that went out of business because they illegally spiked gas prices. So people were that panicky about, they didn't know what was going to happen. I remember I got a hold of my mom on that brick cell phone. I called her at the elementary school and she was like, because it was in the middle of the day and then the cell phone services were shut down. So I just happened to get a hold of her. So the afternoon of September 11th was a state of chaos because like the gas prices were gouging and skyrocketing, so actually being on campus, I was in the Wingo Hall, Wingo Hall, which now is the president's office, right? So bizarre, looks much nicer than when I lived there, but it was still a beautiful building. But it's actually safer being on campus actually, and having the car in the shop was probably the safest place I could be at that time. It was the shock of it, it was a shock of not knowing what was going to happen. It was a shock to me, like who would attack the US? It was things like that that kind of hit home for people. There was a vigil a couple of days later, they started the trend of wearing yellow ribbons. I don't know if you remember that, you probably would have been a kid, people had ribbons for this, and ribbons for that, support

this, it started there with the yellow ribbon. But the yellow ribbon is a support for military, it's an old tradition, but usually ties a rope like a ribbon. People talked about possibly going into the military, people who were dating people in the military had to make decisions about their relationship. So that it was a watershed moment. I remembered the time when they voted to go to war in Afghanistan, to go to war with Afghanistan in January 2002. Like, it was seen as political unity, like everyone's kind of on board with it, but then as things kept evolving, the Bush administration was just not really handling things well. I guess it is more the shock of it and the unknown. We hadn't really had anything like that, so I was born in '83 to put it in context. And so since then, fall 2001 to now, obviously the pandemic's ending. Maybe, knocking on wood. Maybe not, but we've had the pandemic, we've had the Great Recession, we've had some— there's not this idea that we're invincible. But in September 2001, there was this idea that we were invincible. And it definitely poked some holes in that. So did they tie it? There's also a sense of patriotism that you didn't see before. At that time period, but then things began to wane. Homeland Security Department was created with the guy in charge, it was John Ashcroft, so he came up a lot. Oh, you became your profile picture. So he came up a lot in discussion because of his violation of human rights in the civil rights. Some of the things that were just— so that came up more often in this discussion. People tried at some point to be like, “Oh, this is like our Vietnam,” but it wasn't. It wasn't like that. I don't know how old you would have been when it happened. I'm assuming people in college now were either babies are born at the time, like they have no living memory of it.

Brooklyn Ray [00:45:06] Yeah, I wasn't born yet. I was born a couple of months later.

Well, you mentioned that you lived in Wingo, that's a lot different from now? So did you live in Wingo like all four years?

Sarah Simers [00:45:26] I lived in Wingo freshman year, because it was a freshman girl's dorm, and in sophomore year, I was in Denney. Yes, Denney was the girl side and Short was the boys side. Then junior year I was in Baridon, I have to make sure I have the right name. I think it's the health center now. No, the health center is next to it. I was in Baridon with the suites and then my fourth year I went back to Denney. I got one of the private rooms. I asked for that, I got one of the private rooms and then the fifth year I was in the apartments, the Mountain Street, Mountain Trail–Conway's flat as a pancake by campus. There were no mountains everywhere, I rode my bike everywhere, frequently. Mountain something apartments. But yeah, so my junior year, before you had a special dorm place where you all live together now, I cannot think of the name of it again. I've been in the building, but I cannot think of the name of it.

Brooklyn Ray [00:46:35] Farris.

Sarah Simers [00:45:39] Farris, okay. Before you had Farris, between my sophomore year between Farris, they had to start putting people in apartments all over Conway. I was one of the people that didn't end up. I was one of the people that did end up getting to live on campus. But it was a different experience that was just part of the need, why they had the need for the forum and trying to do things of having a sense of community. Oh something else again. So freshman year in the traditional dorms and everybody was in a traditional dorm. We each had our own intramural teams. Definitely by my junior year, the last three years, the intramural teams, they just had dorms, all the dorms represented and an honors was just one. And we made up a little song that I want to sing to you. Are you ready for it? Has anyone ever told you about the Herds of Nerds?

Brooklyn Ray [00:47:58] No, but go ahead. [laughter]

Sarah Simers [00:48:] It is an auditory delight to hear me sing. I mentioned this to people, and I was like, “should I mention anything?” And they’re like, “no,” and like, “I’m going to sing Herds of Nerds.” Okay. Now I’m really embarrassed because I’m recording myself and you’re recording me. [begins singing and clapping] “We are the herds of nerds! We know some real big words. We like assiduously, get real dirty!” I messed that up. “When we get out to play, better get out our way, because we are the Herds of Nerds!” The head bob is mine. The second lyric is about something assiduously and get real dirty. But I can’t remember that one. So ask anyone who was in intramurals between 2002 and 2006. Yeah, 2006 was when they didn’t want to move them to New Hall. So anyone from that period should know the herds of nerds chant, better than I did. It’s important social history, right there.

Brooklyn Ray [00:49:03] I like it. [crosstalk] Well, I like the chant. We don't have anything like that now

Sarah Simers [00:49:11] Do y’all still do intramurals? That’s what was funny about it. I remember I was going to do softball, but it’s not my sport. Look at my small arms. I can’t throw hard. But they were like, “you should go ahead and do it.” I was like, “Okay.” And so I was one of the people that ended up– I can bat really well, ironically, but throwing long distances from right field. So I always get right field or left field. But it was fun and we still won. So we kind of dominated those years because it was whoever wanted to play. I can run. Oh, I know why I played, because I was the runner. What’s it called in softball? I can’t think of it now. Pitch runner. Pitch hit, no. We had people who had torn ACLs, other things, and so they would hit and then I would run for them. Intramurals had some substitution

thing. That's what I did. But then I had to play a certain amount of time in the infield. It's not my thing. [crosstalk] Go ahead.

Brooklyn Ray [00:50:28] I was going to ask, what other kinds of things, like you said you were involved in Chi Alpha, and I guess you did intramurals. Was there anything else you were involved in?

Sarah Simers [00:50:35] Oh, let's see, I did Chi Alpha really heavily freshman, sophomore, junior year and then junior year I was like, "maybe we should go different ways." And the person who was over me was like, "Maybe we should." I didn't like how they were spending their money at the time, so they didn't like me asking. They were like "maybe just different ways." I had some people who came in as part of my small group, who they needed professional— it was my first encounter with people who were struggling with mental illness, some really big struggles and I was like, "I'm a history major. I'm not even a psych major. I'm a history major. I do not know how to do this." This was more than just, let's hang out and be friends. And so I parted ways. I went briefly after that, occasionally. I did write some things with the Echo. I did write some things for the Vino. Again, I was trying to figure out career wise what to do, still haven't figured out career wise what to do, just in academic advising. So I was involved with the Vino pretty heavily for two years. What else did I do, I feel like I didn't do anything. Phi Alpha Theta was the history honor society. I think I worked on the vortex a little bit, which was a writing, creative writing zene. But yeah, I kept my grades up, went to Stoby's a lot. That's not really an extracurricular, it kind of is, but not really. I feel like I'm missing something super obvious. [pause] I can't think of any anything else I was involved in. That's a lot. I was accidentally in a pro-life group. I said accidentally. Oh, I think that was one of the seeds, Honors for me was like a garden of seeds. As I remember, I took Phillip's Bioethics class in the summer

and I had the courage to ask, “How long have abortions been illegal before Roe versus Wade, how long were they illegal before that? Historically, for the context.” And it was like, it's a completely different story than what I just told at a church camp as a thirteen, fourteen year old. So that was kind of a shift, but it was a small shift and it was something I could handle. Why not just go straight for the jugular on controversial things, just go poof! Right there? So yeah, I did Circle K sometimes, like I wasn't dedicatedly involved. I was somewhat involved. I did J Board one year. I think it was my senior year. I was auditioned to do RA stuff, I did the whole interview process, my senior year I was going to be off campus because for that time I waited too long. I was much more hyper as an eighteen, nineteen year old than I was at twenty one. Which was more like, the R.A. being involved, so they were gonna have me be an R.A. in one of the apartments that was non-honors, it was off campus, not honors. And I knew from J board, it was one of the apartments that was constantly being busted for pot smoking and smoking black and tans. So it's like a way of disguising smoking pot. Oh, it's a black and tan, you can't tell the difference in like. I probably still can't tell the difference. Let's be real. So I didn't do that one, I actually didn't do that one. I did a lot of stuff. Oh I did publics and some public administration stuff, mixers and networking things. So, yeah, I did a lot of stuff. A lot of random, it seems random now, I was just trying out— the search for self I took seriously. I just don't know how focused it was.

Brooklyn Ray [00:55:20] So did you meet anybody that were in honors that you stayed really close with or that you're still close with now?

Sarah Simers [00:55:27] Like, I wouldn't have any friends if I hadn't been in honors. [laughter] I'm being serious. No, honors, that's where it's kind of like this oasis, anytime I'm like, “what's wrong with me?” I'm just like, Sarah, my closest friends in life are people I met

in honors. Those are the people I was like, “remember Herds of Nerds?” and they’re like, “no.” They were like they had one person chose not to do the interviews, another person didn't know, but said they probably wouldn't talk much anyway. They were like, the people who were overwhelmingly the best part of Honors. You had the same readings, everyone had some similar core values, even if they had different political— everyone having different— so I was very moderate at the time, probably like moderate. As I said, I was accidentally in a pro-life group and then asked, like, “what is the historical context of abortion?” So like right there in the middle. But I think people had a lot of the same values, and I didn't see that in grad school. Like, I saw people who were like- they just had different endgames, but it's like everyone who was an honors, even though they had different political views, they were still people who were driven, they were still fairly responsible. There were people who I say driven— They were driven and ambitious, not necessarily unethical about it. I think most people valued, like getting school paid for was important, like keeping scholarships is important, things like that. And you're like, “Well, why would that not be important?” But it's just having a culture of that, probably more so. But then again, I just thought it was more like, I'm going to get along with everybody, no matter what. That's how I remember it. Maybe other people remember it differently. I said I wouldn't have any friends, I have a few, but friendships didn't come as easily as they did then. So like I met Whit, or Dr. Barringer, that is her full title and a doctorate is not an easy thing to come by. It is a psychologically draining process, so kudos Dr. Barringer. But her freshman year was my fifth year, so she was someone I met. I'm not going to say we're super close. I've not been on Facebook since early 2020. So I was toying with being off of Facebook for a while, and then finally, I just said, “I'm not doing this,” then the pandemic started and I was like, “Best decision on my life, woot!” But I remember Facebook starting because back then before Facebook, like from 1996 to Facebook starting, people brought entire photo albums and people doing things. They'd be like, “Oh, you had the thumb on

the photo.” You have probably seen them on Instagram. There's BuzzFeed articles. I can send you one. Maybe there's one of the photo on it. Poor quality photos. Here's one of Wingo Hall. [holds up picture in Wingo Hall] It just looks creepy, but that's the quality photos you had before cell phones, before you had camera phones, or iPhones and androids. And anyway, sorry, I feel like I'm rambling now. While I'm talking about photos—oh, Facebook, yeah, so people did the photo albums thing instead of having things on Facebook, I remember it started— it actually was Dylan, Dylan Melton was the person who told me like, “Hey, you need to be on Facebook so you can see all these photos from so-and-so's party.” And I was like, “I didn't go to so-and-so's party.” He was like, “No, but the photos are on there, so it was like you were there!” I was like, “That's cool,” Which is hilarious because one of the first life lessons people learn about Facebook was don't post all of the party pictures on Facebook because they'll come back to haunt you, and things like that. It was like, “Oh, okay,” but it was just this neat thing, and you had to have a college email address to be on it, and it was a happier, simpler time. MySpace was a thing. I don't think I was on MySpace. I was on Zanga. I was on Zanga which is a blog, Z-A-N-G-A.

Brooklyn Ray [01:00:45] I haven't heard of that one. [laughter]

Sarah Simers [01:00:48] Progress. Obviously, Facebook stock and Zanga flew away, went away. Alright, something else? Do you have any questions, I feel like I'm rambling and I do have to be mindful of rambling.

Brooklyn Ray [01:01:07] No, you're fine. So when you went to graduate school, like the Honors College is really just kind of a unique place, like a unique community. It's not like

your other classes in college or whatever. So going from the honors community to graduate school, was that like a big change at all or—

Sarah Simers [01:01:27] It was huge. I should've realized the grad program I went to was not a good fit. Instead, I was like— this is going to sound arrogant, arrogant, but it's true. Honors prepared me to do really well in grad school. Because the seminar style, you're used to reading, having a book a week and writing about it and coming prepared to talk about it, you're not just sitting there being like, "I wonder what Doug has to say about Ethics of Authenticity." Doug does not care that you regurgitate what Doug says. Doug was probably very proud of the fact that I'm like, "this is pre-hipster hipsters," or that I even kept it. Plus, another one, that I even bought Kant, on my own. Grad school, part of it was the program I went to, it was a knee jerk reaction to go to it. It was to settle a fight that I never should have with my parents. I even had Honors faculty be like, "Could you consider other options?" And I was like, "Well, I'll consider it." Now, looking back, it could've done it differently, but we didn't know. It was one of those things of like, it just happened. My sister did things differently. But anyways, I didn't mean to talk about that. Long story short, Honors prepared me to be an excellent grad student. If I was successful in grad school it's because Honors prepared me. Any success I had in grad school is because Honors prepared me for that. And I was also taken aback— One thing Honors had is that everyone kind of has— again it goes back to the egalitarian nature, even though UCA at the time had similar scholarships. Right? So some people might have gotten more money if they had the governor's challenge scholarship from the state. The Lottery scholarship did not exist at the time. The scholarship existed before I went to college, but then they had to cut back, so I was in the era when they had to cut back and then the lottery expanded back out again to provide more for people. Most people didn't have that. But the governor's challenge was something that people had, I think my sister had a governor's challenge

later. Some people who were in band and they had extra like band or orchestra scholarships they were funded. But most people, for the most part, had very similar levels of funding. If you were in Honors, Glenda fought for you to have housing somewhere in the city of Conway, you were going to be housed if you couldn't be on campus. And it was good housing, too. A lot of people talked about or joked about being in Honors because of the housing. But I really liked the readings, I really did. That's a really long story.

Brooklyn Ray [01:04:34] That's fine. That's what that's what we want to hear. We want to hear your stories and everything. I guess like now that we've kind of just gone through your entire time in the honors college, it's just kind of more of a reflection now. Is there anything else that you want to talk about, like any more like stories you want to tell? Or any funny stories? Or did your class do any pranks or anything like that? Just things like that.

Sarah Simers [01:05:16] I know. Yes, there was. People did pranks. You're not going to have a group of bright kids together without some pranks. [searching for a photo] Where is it? I hadn't looked at this photo album in years until I got it out 30 minutes before the phone call. So it's very exciting for future historians to be watching through this. I was so close the first time! [holds up picture] It says, "tape this door, I dare you." What does the other one say? "Gotcha, ha ha ha!" That's eighteen year old me. And some cow print, I had cow print, cow print was a thing? So somethings happened. Are you interviewing someone named Jared Tibbey?

Brooklyn Ray [01:06:40] I'm not.

Sarah Simers [01:06:46] If people want to hear prank stories they should interview Jared Tibbey or Lindsay Stewart. Lindsay Stewart, the last time I heard, works in DC, which is

her goal. She double majored in things like French and Econ, maybe Poli-Sci. There's some pranksters. Oh, and you know who encouraged pranks? Their name may or may not rhyme with "Loug Lorbutt." That is all. That was just us being silly. I'm trying to find some others. I don't want to share other people's information if they didn't want to do this or they didn't know about it. Yeah, sometimes I just took pictures of people, like at random, it's like they didn't ask me to take a picture of them walking. Don't do that. It's uncool. Things we learn in college. I think now people are more just because it's on a cell phone, right, and it was on the internet and things like that, but that time is like, maybe the picture developed, maybe it won't. I would say it's a simpler time. They're just different problems, really.

Brooklyn Ray [01:08:11] Do you have anything else you want to talk about?

Sarah Simers [01:08:15] I bought a lot of books now.

Brooklyn Ray [01:08:21] That's fine, we just ask at the end if you have anything else you want to talk about?

Sarah Simers [01:08:29] Herds of Nerds preserved for all eternity, but then I missed the second verse.

Brooklyn Ray [01:08:36] That's okay! Well, I guess I do want to ask you one more question: is there anything that you learned from the honors college that still applies to your life now?

Sarah Simers [01:08:57] Everything. Everything. My husband was trying to help me find some of the books. They were just all over. Some were just some that we had in a box, like

we hadn't unpacked yet because we ran out of bookshelves. Here's my journal. It's just everything. My sister and brother in law went to the program. Some of my closest friends are the people who I met through it. Like I said, any success I had in grad school is because of honors. It's what I thought college was going to be. When I had imagined college in high school, like check all the boxes and maybe I want to be a college professor and be in college forever. There are some days in academic advising like, "why did I think that?" but it's because I don't always work with Honors students, I work with students of all backgrounds and all abilities and different sets of circumstances than what I saw. Yeah, everything. I had it summed up earlier to my husband, it feels like we drug him to a couple of Honors events before we got married. Me, my sister, and brother in law drug him to some. And he's like, I feel like I went to college at UCA, even though they were at different times, because they were right after. He just heard a lot about it. It shaped everything. [crosstalk] a huge bulldozer of a moment, I didn't really have that. Yeah.

Brooklyn Ray [01:11:16] Well, if you don't have anything else you really want to talk about—

Sarah Simers [01:11:23] Actually I worked on an oral history project at UCA, in my fifth year as well. I told you, Brooklyn! I forget something obvious! I wrote an oral history project, The Irby Project, I don't know what they still have that. And I was one of the interviewers. We did consent forms, but not like the one I'm about to sign.

Brooklyn Ray [01:11:54] The deed of gift.

Sarah Simers [01:11:55] Deed of gift. Or if we did, I do not remember administering that. I remember I was like, "Oh, this is a really good idea. That would have been useful 15 years

ago.” I don’t remember doing that. I was with Dr.Bolter, in the writing department, and many people loved it. I liked doing it. Well, oral history is really valuable for information, it’s also valuable, like, if you have if all 50 people talk about, “this is what I read in core one” and then that’s a paper, it’s a paper it’s or just don’t know how other people can use it. Which is also why I don’t want to share stories about other people if they weren’t aware of the project or they chose not to be in it. I put my sister out there. [laughter] She’ll be fine. But yeah, I don’t know if other people really want to– don’t want to embarrass other people. No, I don’t. I really don’t. So I hope Whit keeps doing this and I hope it is a good experience so people can be like, this is what I feel comfortable sharing. This is what I feel comfortable recording for all posterity, things like that. It’s the second best five years of my life. I say the best five years of my life, and my sister was like, “What about the time of Peter?” Peter is my husband and I was like, “Yes, oh crap. It’s the second best years.” And now the cat has come back. [talking to cat] Am I done? [cat meows] She says I’m done. [laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [01:13:50] Well, if you have nothing else, then I guess we can go ahead and end the interview. So thank you for your time, Sarah. This concludes our interview.