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RD [00:00:02] This is Reed Dodson with the Schedler Honors College Oral History project. Today is March 24th, 2022, and I am interviewing Shawn Oakley, who is—Where are you right now?

SO [00:00:15] I'm in Little Rock, Arkansas.

RD [00:00:17] Are you in your house?

SO [00:00:20] No, I'm in my office.

RD [00:00:22] We will be talking about Sean's experience leading up to, during, and after his time in the honors college. Please state your name and age for the recording.

SO [00:00:34] Shawn Oakley, 34

RD [00:00:37] What year did you enter the Honors College?

SO [00:00:40] 2005.

RD [00:00:42] What year did you graduate from college?

SO [00:00:44] 2009

RD [00:00:51] You're from Little Rock. Is that where you grew up?

SO [00:00:55] I grew up in Cabot, Arkansas. We moved there when I was eight years old, so that's pretty much my hometown. Before that, we were in the very outer Chicago suburbs, kind of where the suburbs turn into the cornfields. Then we moved here, so I'm pretty much an Arkansan.

RD [00:01:23] How was it growing up in Cabot?

SO [00:01:27] It was pretty good, actually. If people are listening to this, they're familiar with Central Arkansas, and they might know Cabot gets a pretty bad reputation for good reason. I actually had a good time growing up there, mostly because I was involved in band and that was a nice little bubble to be in. You know, that was like my life in junior high and high school. I was a total band kid.

RD [00:02:10] Did you do band in college?

SO [00:02:13] No. Even though I liked it, it was too extreme in college and I wanted to do—Originally, I was going to be a pre-med major, so there was no way I could do band at the same time.

RD [00:02:53] What do your parents do for a living?

SO [00:02:59] Oh my—

RD [00:03:00] When you were growing up?

SO [00:03:02] When I was growing up? Yeah, it has changed. My mom's always kind of hopped around different jobs. It was my dad's job that moved us down to Arkansas from Illinois. He actually worked for a company that made VHS tapes. They would get the film like a film reel from a movie and copy that onto the VHS tapes and then ship those two stories to video rental places. Obviously that didn't last, so they switched over to DVDs. They would also make the film reels that were sent to movie theaters as well. The company was called Deluxe. Their main competitor was Technicolor, which more people have heard of. At the end of a movie, you might see a credit that says "Color by Technicolor" or "Deluxe," and that means the actual film print.

RD [00:04:16] I've never really thought about what those companies are.

SO [00:04:19] I would not have known about it. Part of his job was making sure each batch of copies of the film was good. He would have to watch the movie. He saw Jurassic Park, I think he said, like hundreds of times. There were some movies that he will never watch again [laughing].

RD [00:04:42] Do you have any siblings?

SO [00:04:47] Yeah, I have a younger sister. She's two years younger.

RD [00:04:50] How was growing up with a sister that close in age?

SO [00:04:55] Pretty good. On the surface, we're different. She's super extroverted and energetic, and I was the more shy, quiet kid. But we're very similar at our core. We have the same sense of humor. We could communicate pretty easily. We got along very well. There was the typical sibling fighting here and there, but overall we were pretty close growing up.

RD [00:05:31] What made you decide to go to UCA?

SO [00:05:35] I desperately wanted to go out of state. I was a quiet, weird gay kid living in Cabot, Arkansas. So I was like, "I've got to get out of here," even though my life wasn't really that bad. Being a band kid, there was like a sort of insulated bubble there. I looked at a few colleges out of state, but then to be safe, I was like, *I should think about in-state schools too*. So I went to UCA and they were like, "Oh, well, you should check out the honors college there," which I didn't know was a thing. I had no idea that existed, and so they introduced me to some of the current honors students there and the honors professors, and I really liked them. They were like, "you should apply to this." I qualified with my GPA. They were like, "with the level you're at, you could get a full ride and your own room." I was like, *Oh, OK*. I thought about it and I liked the vibe there. It was practical to go there and get a scholarship. So I applied and got in and was like, *I think I'm going to do that*. I think a part of me wasn't quite ready to move so far away either.

RD [00:07:25] How would you describe your high school experience? Being in band, I'm sure you were busy, but how was it?

SO [00:07:41] It's interesting now because high school seems very distant, very far away now. Even though time has gone by super fast, it almost feels like in my memory there is high school and everything before and then college and everything after. There's like a big sort of "memory division" and high school memories have gotten kind of hazy. But overall, I would say it was pretty good. I wasn't out as gay. I think there was a certain anxiety and

maybe a little bit of depression that came from that unknowingly. Looking back, I can see how not being fully comfortable with myself made it not as good as life would eventually become. My time and energy was really consumed by being in marching band, jazz band, I played saxophone. I did the spring musicals. That was a lot of fun. My parents being from the North were culturally different from a lot of my friends' parents. There's not really this tie to religion and evangelical values in the working class Chicago suburbs, which is where my parents come from. A bunch of their friends followed us down here. So there was a group of ex-Chicagoans down here. The culture up there is very drinking-happy and kind of wild. My parents and their friends have lots of parties. Wild gatherings were the home environment I grew up in, which was fun. School life; I was consumed by band, I was a high academic achiever. I like to do well in that and home life was fun. My parents are not super educated, but they're very intelligent and good people. Life was not that bad, but it would get better.

RD [00:10:50] How was College then? As a whole?

SO [00:11:00] It was awesome. I made the right choice. Freshman year was one of the best years of my life.

RD [00:11:14] Was freshman year the year that you came out?

SO [00:11:19] It was, yeah. As soon as I got to UCA in the first few weeks and like the people I met – I was in Baridon, I don't know if that's still there. I don't think it's an honors dorm anymore.

RD [00:11:37] No, I did not know it was. It was an Honors dorm back then?

SO [00:11:40] Yes. I think it was like a freshman dorm. Baridon and Short and Denny, too.

RD [00:11:54] When you came to honors, did they have the retreat?

SO [00:12:03] They did. Yes.

RD [00:12:05] How was the retreat for you?

SO [00:12:07] The retreat was fun. Honestly, I don't remember much from my retreats, I remember talking to a lot of people and getting to know a few people, but I don't have any vivid memories that stand out. Later, as a senior, I was a mentor and I went on that retreat with that current crop of freshmen. I remember that one much better because I was involved with the activities and helping run them.

RD [00:12:42] Do you remember, did they have an i-squared day?

SO [00:12:51] I think so.

RD [00:12:54] How was the interview process for it?

SO [00:12:59] For..?

RD [00:13:00] Getting into honors?

SO [00:13:02] It was very relaxed. I think my interview was with Rick Scott. The former Dean, and are you familiar with him?

RD [00:13:22] I've heard a little bit about him, but he left before I ever got there, so I've only seen glimpses of him. They have a bunch of swings dedicated to him outside of the courtyard. I think it's super interesting to hear that you got interviewed by him. I'm still trying to wrap my head around that, like he's an active member of the honors community.

SO [00:13:48] Yeah. It's kind of intimidating because he's the dean of the Honors College basketball, the super. He was he was probably one of the most chill, relaxed like professors that I've ever seen. But they interview him. It was he wanted to really just talk about music, movies because I had to write a paper or like, just, you know, submit a paper that we wrote and what I wrote about the filmmaking process. Mm-Hmm. And I don't know why I submitted that one for. But he wanted to talk about that and movies. I remember, he said, that his favorite movie of all time was tremors. You know, that movie?

RD [00:14:36] I don't think I do.

SO [00:14:38] It's not like it has Reba McEntire and Kevin Bacon.

RD [00:14:43] That thing, Reba, that just brought it to the surface. I know exactly what you're talking about, you know? Never seen it, but I know Rob is in it.

SO [00:14:52] So I grew up watching that. That came on like MTV all the time. Mm hmm. It's a really fun and completely ridiculous movie. And the fact that the dean of the Arts College said that that was his favorite movie. I was like, Man, you know, this could be a fun place. And so the interview process was super relaxed. He talked to my parents about, like 70s rock bands for a long time.

RD [00:15:21] So it was. So was it like I was? It was like a you and your parents, just you and I like Scott.

SO [00:15:29] Yeah, it was just the four of them. My parents were there. I don't know if that was normal. I think they just invited them in. Huh. I don't know. It didn't it wasn't what I expected. Mm hmm. It was just very casual we talked about we did talk about my high school experience, what I wanted in college. Mm hmm. To get out of college and then my my filmmaking paper. And then we just talked about movies and music. And then he was like, OK, you're you're in. And I was like, Oh, OK, then

RD [00:16:01] that's really interesting, especially in comparison to like what the like square dance like. Just like a phone interview competition's almost like, really?

SO [00:16:10] What would you have to do?

RD [00:16:12] So I was in an interview, a group of like four or five people with Alison. And like, she was asking us questions. This was after we submitted an ad to all of us wrote on the same essay we like. In the interview we had to answer like it was like an honors class, like a mini honors class with like five of us. It felt really competitive knowing what you had to beat the other people to get in there. It was. Yeah, it sounds like a very nice interview.

SO [00:16:46] You know, I like that you guys had to write the same paper.

RD [00:16:52] Yes, I did. I don't think the believing in doubting game. I don't think that was that a part of the honors curriculum?

SO [00:17:00] Yes, we did. Oh yeah. I think that was part of our core one, maybe or with that came up at some point. But and also with our papers, we could submit anything. We just need to submit a paper. Aha. It can be about anything.

RD [00:17:25] So like, it's so interesting. Such like it sounds like such a relaxed process and then eventually became more of a competition. I do like that. So when you came to amnesia? Did you like have your major set in stone in your mind?

SO [00:17:43] Yeah. I wasn't sure if I wanted to do pre-med. Yeah, but I like I'll. I'll just do biology. And then I very quickly decided. Do you hear the yard people out there

RD [00:18:00] just faintly, but I only really notice them when you said something

SO [00:18:03] you tell? Yes. Yes. Well, so. Wait, what was the question, sorry?

RD [00:18:13] So you're all good, I guess, I mean, it was kind of a rough way, I asked, but I was asking if you're major, like if you were like, set in stone that you wanted to do like pre-med?

SO [00:18:23] Yeah. So no, it was not. But I started off with biology and then I quickly decided, You know what? I don't want to go the medical. I want to do environmental science. I was very big on nature and wanted to be a part of that. So that's an environmental science major for. Freshman and sophomore year, and then I. I discovered gas, you know what that is.

RD [00:18:56] I do not know it is

SO [00:18:57] not, so it's geographical information systems. It's basically creating maps and delivering information in the maps and that I kind of slid from environmental science into geography. Mm-Hmm. And did I did a lot of gas, so my nature ended up being geography with a pretty heavy emphasis in gas, and that's what I graduated with. So going in thinking I was going to be a doctor coming out. Uh-Huh. Geography major.

RD [00:19:29] Yeah. Pretty, pretty drastic shift.

SO [00:19:33] And now I work as a therapist, so.

RD [00:19:35] Oh, well, I guess not. I guess not too far off them, right? So when you came to U.S.A., were you homesick very much when you first got here?

SO [00:19:46] No, I I mean, I liked my home and my parents, but it was just so much excitement about meeting new people. I had a lot of social anxiety growing up, and I did, you know, as a freshman there. But us all being new together, I kind of worked through that and it was just kind of exciting. The potential everything felt possible, you know, like meeting. You people like going to new places and so like homeless an hour away, so I could easily go there, but I didn't really that often.

RD [00:20:33] Mm hmm. So how so when it comes to housing? Did you stay out on campus all four years?

SO [00:20:42] I did, yeah.

RD [00:20:44] So where did you go after Barreta?

SO [00:20:48] So after better than. I Ferris was built. OK. Yeah. So first was being built my freshman year. Mm hmm. I think Nouvel was just built. And so fairness was brand new in sophomore year. That's where we went.

RD [00:21:14] OK, OK. So you stated in fairness for senior year then?

SO [00:21:20] Yes. And that was because my senior year, I would say. Like I mentioned a mentor and they wanted us to be on campus, so otherwise I may have lived off campus my senior year.

RD [00:21:36] So was it nice living with like? What does he get along with your roommates?

SO [00:21:43] I did, yeah, my first roommate. So it was kind of like buried in and we had our own separate room within a common area, kind of like a pair of. And that my first year roommate, the same man, and he was great. They stayed friends with their state, roommates with them the whole time, except for the last year when I was a.

RD [00:22:11] Did he, I guess, did not end up going off campus on?

SO [00:22:16] I don't think so. I think he was still Ferris, too, but they wanted the mentors to live together.

RD [00:22:21] Oh yeah, yeah, that doesn't make sense.

SO [00:22:26] I'm still in touch with him. He lives in Oklahoma now.

RD [00:22:29] Oh, well, that's nice. You're still in touch.

SO [00:22:34] Let's see. Actually actually met with with Berger, and I will send occasionally. I don't know why this is. We just have like a Lord of the Rings man group chat where that's all we do is like once a month or so, once one of us will send a Lord of the Rings means. And I don't know why know that, but it's me, Matt, and with your instructor.

RD [00:23:03] So what was what was in your coworker, right?

SO [00:23:06] Yeah, she was there from 05 to

RD [00:23:10] I love Webb

SO [00:23:11] on the fifth grade. Yes, she is great. She was always one of the best people to have a conversation with about anything.

RD [00:23:20] And so were you friends with like, I mean, like, so I want to make the whole thing about with, but I'm very curious. Were you friends with like during all four years or like, when did you get posture?

SO [00:23:33] I remember meeting freshman year and we would talk occasionally, but we got close their sophomore year. Our sort of friend groups kind of came together and and went and with roommates were next to me and my roommates in Paris somewhere. Oh, every next door. So there was a lot of like back and forth hanging out in each other's dorm rooms. Mm-Hmm.

RD [00:24:04] Let's see. So we're going to move into some actual honor specific questions about like the actual program. So as a whole, do you think the Honors College changed your world view? Do you think it like? I guess, do you think Donna's college kind of changed that? I don't make sense the way I always did it. Sorry, I'm anxiety.

SO [00:24:33] It certainly did. Yeah. And they're sort of like two components to that. One is the actual academic part of it. Mm hmm. You know, being exposed to, you know, the honors core classes were really like a crash course in philosophy, you know, they're in. And I had never really explored a lot of different ideas like that. And so there was just the pure academic part of it being interdis disciplinary studies. You know, you're kind of hopping around with these different viewpoints. Hmm. So, so on some level, that got me that changed, by the way, I looked at things. Mm hmm. Just because I was exposed through the curriculum to different ideas and different voices. But then there was the the lived sort of social component. When I came out, I was comfortable being gay, but I think this was because I realized that you can be yourself even in a place like Arkansas. You know, most of the students there were from Arkansas, and it was a reminder that I was not one of them. And and so in some ways, it makes me appreciate where I'm from more and that I can have a good sense of community and a good education in a place like Arkansas. You know, a lot of times. The South kind of gets dismissed, and states like Arkansas are seen as like a backwater and. But that's not that's not really true. There's there's people. Everywhere that have that are capable and, you know, insightful and thoughtful. And so being there, having such a great experience that really kind of made me appreciate. Being here more.

RD [00:26:46] Hmm. No, I think I mean, I haven't got good answer. Let's see. That question do. Sorry, I am. OK, let's see core one and core two. Do you remember like, do you remember how your professors were then? I do, yeah. I never talked about it in the pre-interview, but it's been a it's been a week.

SO [00:27:18] Yeah, and I'm sure you've talked to a lot of people, but a core one was Phil Front. Mm-Hmm. And he's not there anymore. I checked. I was curious, so I looked him up, and I think he was that U.S.A. from 2001 to 2013. Mm-Hmm. But he was my former one professor and he was great.

RD [00:27:44] Oh God. And who was it for you?

SO [00:27:48] Her name is Jane, and I cannot remember her last name, but she was also great.

RD [00:27:54] Do you remember what you did for the community service project for that class? And if not, it is totally unfair.

SO [00:28:05] I do not. And I'm wondering if we even have one, huh?

RD [00:28:11] You know, I didn't think about that at all. Let's see, Encore one was, did you guys get the big question at the beginning of the year? Where is the self located? And if so, where? Where did you say yourself was located somewhere?

SO [00:28:31] If I remember, I remember. But I thought, I remember that really standing out as being like the first. I don't know if they call them journals anymore or journal assignment. I don't remember what I said, I wonder what I would say now, oh. Because they're really kind of depends on your cultural lens. Aha! But I don't know what I said, I probably.

RD [00:29:12] When when I went around the room afterward, I'm sure they had everyone else like to share their answers, were you one of the ones who? Or did you share yours?

SO [00:29:22] Yeah. Yeah, I think we had to.

RD [00:29:27] But I mean, how many people were in your class?

SO [00:29:35] 15.

RD [00:29:36] And that that, yeah, that makes that makes all of it being forced to like share. That makes it more feasible. Definitely.

SO [00:29:47] Well, it may have been less, even because we sat at a small table. The room was small, but it was good for like having conversations.

RD [00:29:58] I guess thinking about how many honest professors were there and total like, do you like how many like how many people when your core one classes, if there were only about 15 or so total?

SO [00:30:10] Um, how many how many professors were there? Yeah.

RD [00:30:16] So I asked multiple questions all at once. How many professors were there?

SO [00:30:20] So, OK, so there was Phil, Jane, Donna, Rick, A. Philip. The Adam. Cindy. And then sometimes more he would do like an occasional class. So I would say about nine or 10, and I know there were some a few other professors that would come in from outside others.

RD [00:30:56] How many people were in those like individual classes?

SO [00:31:00] I would say probably like. I would say probably on average, like 15. That's what it felt like to me.

RD [00:31:08] Uh huh.. So when you have the where is the self question? Was that like it was an olive honors discussion, or was that individual classes?

SO [00:31:19] So it was in our individual class? Oh, OK. OK. But we all have like every class.

RD [00:31:29] OK, OK. I when we do that, where is the self question we have like and all, like all of us are like in a classroom listening to Donna speak?

SO [00:31:39] OK.

RD [00:31:40] So that's what I was like. Oh, I was trying to. I was like trying to wrap my head around like. How many people were like ever? I was

SO [00:31:48] OK. So that was weird. And so we had we did have those they call them, like large groups. Uh-Huh. Lectures. Is that how they still do it, where you have like your main man?

RD [00:32:02] And I like, completely forgot about those until this interview? Honestly.

SO [00:32:06] OK. OK, so.

RD [00:32:08] Yes. So I didn't even I didn't think that they would like. I thought that was always like a large group.

SO [00:32:16] And it may have been. It may have been. But I remember talking about it first in our small aha.

RD [00:32:23] So. Oh, neat. So did that. So they did have the sophomore matriculation process, right?

SO [00:32:33] Yeah. Where we give the sophomore lecture.

RD [00:32:36] Aha. And do you remember your sophomore lecture?

SO [00:32:39] I do. Yeah, it was on an shoegaze music. Do you know what that is?

RD [00:32:47] I don't. I'm very curious.

SO [00:32:50] It was a type of. It kind of arose in the late 80s, early 90s in in the UK. Mm-Hmm. And it's like kind of dreamy. It's kind of like using a lot of like guitar noise, but not really a harsh sound, but a. A sort of like blankets of. Sound that it's kind of hard to explain, Dream Pop is a close adjacent. It. But the shoegaze is a little heavier, I guess. But but it's not heavy. It's hard. I talked about the band My Bloody Valentine, not bullet for my Valentine. Aha. It's an Irish band and they have an album called Loveless. And that was what I talked about, mostly because that's kind of like the icon of shoegaze. Mm-Hmm.

RD [00:33:49] I have heard of my bloody Valentine. Have I heard the music? I think I'm going to have to go. I want to say it once again.

SO [00:33:57] Loveless, as what's called,

RD [00:34:00] OK, I'm going to have to I'm going to do some more research on shoegaze because it sounds kind of interesting. Let's see. Here's a fun question if you could change something about the Honors College from like your time, what would you have changed? Hmm.

SO [00:34:23] About the program itself,

RD [00:34:26] I think, as a whole. If you were like May, if you were suddenly like Rick Scott Dean in charge of it, or you could just say we're doing something like executive order

essentially and honors, what would you like anything you could change the curriculum? Like the core values of it.

SO [00:34:55] You know, it's hard to say because I I really liked my experience so much. That I can't really think of what I would have changed because I didn't have anything that that bothered me, I guess.

RD [00:35:14] I think that's a really good thing. I think that

SO [00:35:17] I do kind of think what they're doing now, where there is more focus on like community stuff is good. I think that's a good change.

RD [00:35:27] So this is I think it is good to give back in some ways. Do you remember any syllabus readings that stuck out to you? Or any of the summer readings that you had.

SO [00:35:45] Yeah. You know, there's a few I. Though first, there was one that I were scaring me and it was kind of about. I don't know if this was about this, but was talking about nano machines essentially self-replicating and replicating so much that just everything turns into. All of these nanomachines that I call it, like the Gray Goose scenario where everything gets taken over by narrow. And I don't remember why we were reading about this, but I like reading about that terrifies me.

RD [00:36:30] I mean, it does sound like horrifying.

SO [00:36:33] So, yeah, that sticks out. But of course, there were like the Atlantic for one sticks out to me kind of like skimming. The different philosophy is. You know, I remember. Of course, we would have to compare them, and some are a little bit more nihilistic than others. And it's just kind of helps you sort of navigate how how am I going to find meaning in my own life? So I guess in that way, start with like the dread of choosing things kind of stuck out to me. Hmm. Because there's always that fear that you're making a quote unquote wrong choice or you're in the wrong timeline or what is the right choice. But you know, objectively, there isn't really a right or wrong scheme of things, but so like stuff like that stands out to me. I remember Don and talking about your card and a large group. Lecture and that standing out because she got very into it and pretty emotional. And. I took a lot of classes with Alison later on. And they were food, food classes and an organic gardening class. We read a lot of Michael Pollan in those classes are familiar with him, but I loved his books. You know, thinking about the whole process. The system of food, from farming to distribution to the evolution of plants and animals and how we eat them. You know, I think I had three three food classes with Alison, who

RD [00:38:40] seems like a fun time. Food and animals, because ever was there ever actual like food there?

SO [00:38:48] Yeah, yeah. We so in our organic gardening class, we created a garden. And then for the final, we harvested the food and cooked it at our house.

RD [00:39:00] Oh, it's fun.

SO [00:39:02] Yeah.

RD [00:39:06] Let's see. So when it came point, OK, so once I. Capstone project, do you remember, like all that you did for what your project was about?

SO [00:39:22] Yeah. The senior thesis? Yes, yes. Yeah, mine was about kind of exploring queer spirituality, you know, different viewpoints from different cultures and over history of like, how do you know people who don't who aren't following in the the gender or straight labels like him? How are they interacting with spirituality? And so it was able about that.

RD [00:40:02] Interesting. All right. Let's see who was your adviser for

SO [00:40:10] Cindy

RD [00:40:11] on Cindy?

SO [00:40:13] She was great. Yeah, Cindy. Yeah. I spent a lot of time with her because she was my adviser and she was like the mentor program. Mm-Hmm. So my senior year, I saw Cindy constantly.

RD [00:40:33] That's that's like the best year I can imagine.

SO [00:40:36] Yeah, my second.

RD [00:40:38] And you're also the second. Are you the second person I've interviewed today? And she also had Cindy as her adviser for her capstone project. Oh, wow. Cool. And I really hope my next person has some detail. Yes, I have a good feeling on that one. Let's see. Did they have challenge week back then?

SO [00:40:59] Challenge what is that

RD [00:41:02] sort of challenge, which is like just a week where they have like a certain theme like like climate change and they'll have like a like a just a bunch of different guests come in. I know our freshman year it was on our sophomore year, it was on a voting and Joyce Elliott came in. I don't get like all my big boy, famous people come in. I think that's pretty. It's fun. Yeah. So I was wondering if they had that. So they did.

SO [00:41:36] I don't think so tragic. Yeah, we missed out.

RD [00:41:43] How well did you know?

SO [00:41:44] Nor I didn't know him very well. I, you know, I talked to him a few times and I don't know. So do they have the the forum like the the actual physical space?

RD [00:41:59] I yes, they do.

SO [00:42:01] Do people go there? Is that like used?

RD [00:42:04] It was it was really. It was really booming freshman year, sophomore year. But then COVID happened. So we really we can't really hang out in there very much. Unfortunately, I would love to go in there. It seemed like such a nice place. Did you go on to forum a lot?

SO [00:42:22] Yeah, I mean, we would have like little. Sometimes it is nice up there to read, but sometimes that would be like. And kind of just hanging out with the professors

kind of things and sometimes in the work would do that. And I would go to those. And but I never took any of his classes.

RD [00:42:45] Mm-Hmm. Did you were you friends with people who did take his classes like you get insight like? Did you? I'm trying to figure out the best way to phrase this. Was there anything like that you heard like through the grapevine that Norb said kind of stuck with you, like you like, like you heard like from someone's oh, Norbert said so-and-so in class or like you think like.

SO [00:43:13] Oh, gosh. Wet told me something that he said to her, but stuck out. But I cannot remember what it is. It was some it was not even that it was one of the classes interaction with happened in McAllister. So I'm I'm I'm of no use

RD [00:43:41] that, you know, that is OK, but that maybe what still remembers, I hope that stuck with her, that insight.

SO [00:43:49] Yeah. She also like, you know, she's moving to Baltimore and she's still teaching the course.

RD [00:43:57] Yes, we are about what we are going to move online. Next thing she's like moving like, I think she's moving in like today. Yeah, it's insane.

SO [00:44:05] It is.

RD [00:44:06] It's insane that we're going to have like class with her on Monday. And actually,

SO [00:44:09] oh yeah, that is insane for.

RD [00:44:16] Let's see. Did you apply for any of the URL or tag grants if I have that?

SO [00:44:23] Yeah, they did. Yeah, I did, and I went to South Africa. So that was when I was still an environmental science major, and I took an ecology course through the University of Pretoria for a summer and we kind of just camped out in this place called Kruger National Park. It's kind of what you picture when you think there's like an African savanna. Mm hmm. And so we just kind of camped out there learning about the animals, the plants, and they were like, fine,

RD [00:45:02] yeah, like camp out in tents and everything.

SO [00:45:06] Yeah, yeah. There were some, some moments we were in buildings, but yeah, what

RD [00:45:13] were you looking for? Like Rory? Like something that happened, like in like a national park?

SO [00:45:19] Yeah. So there was one one day where there was like we woke up and in the tree above our tents to the Black Mamba, which is one of the most venomous snakes in the world. And one time there was a huge spider in the tent with me. I didn't know it was in there. I was having like a deep conversation with the guy who was sharing a tent with just kind of talking about everything and all of a sudden, this thing just goes down my shirt. And I freaked out. And it was a huge spider. It came out. And yeah, I actually, like, freaked

out so much that I was passed out. But but no, but we saw, you know, elephants drive up close lions. My favorite animal was a cat called a Serbian who was really cool, drove. It was, yeah.

RD [00:46:19] I'll see what was like the main like form of communication between like like your friends and everything, like what was like the social media that you guys would use.

SO [00:46:32] Oh, OK. So my freshman year, Facebook became a thing. Mm-Hmm. And we actually had a meeting in our dorm about it, and I had no idea what Facebook was like. There's this thing that you still have to have a dot edu email address then. So we started for Facebook, and that was like the thing, but it was only in the college network, so we used it to kind of connect with students. And there was no parents, no siblings, nothing. It was just the college interest. So it was very different than what Facebook has become, which is essentially just like a propaganda machine.

RD [00:47:18] But it's fun to get on there for drama.

SO [00:47:23] I love it, right? Yes, drama. But back then it was actually it was a lot of fun. And MySpace was big back then. Mm-Hmm. Smartphones were not yesterday's thing. Yeah, we had put phones. Then in honors college, there was the online forum. Mm-Hmm. I don't know if you've heard about that

RD [00:47:51] or I was actually just about to ask about age call.

SO [00:47:55] Yeah, called. That's what it was called. But just hearing it pronounced like that, that's just like took me back.

RD [00:48:01] I learned it. I learned it from wit. Yeah, we we did a whole lot that was like our whole service project, almost half of it working on its fall.

SO [00:48:11] Oh, wow. Yeah. So that was probably, I think the prime of age call was like two thousand five, six seven. In fact, I remember there was like a thing that would say most users was ever online at once was. And the date was like, I think, sometime in 2006. And it stayed that way. But that was a ton of fun to get on there with dominated. He was on there constantly and so no, I always

RD [00:48:50] loved hearing about it from her. So what are you saying?

SO [00:48:53] Oh yeah, no. I was just thinking because we had like our, you know, we could create our avatar. You know, everybody had like a little quote at the bottom of all their posts and. I think I have a token quote at the bottom line, but. Yeah, I wasn't there, I didn't post super awkward. I mostly just read the threads, but it's probably fun.

RD [00:49:21] Oh, well, that's good. So I guess you are still in contact with their friends from honors.

SO [00:49:32] Yeah, with with a good chunk of them, not everyone. And I. But I didn't see Whit as much as I would have liked and. You know, and as you know, COVID made everything weird and but, you know, we were in contact via text set up like that, but we didn't see each other too often. But then in the last few years?

RD [00:50:09] It's not good that you're still in touch with some. How did you guys access your readings for honors or did you guys get your ratings on each call or was it just.

SO [00:50:22] I think so. Yeah, I think we had a separate area for four classes and they would upload the readings to that. And then we got our our little IBM laptops to use.

RD [00:50:38] Uh-Huh, so how were those how was working on those laptops? I mean,

SO [00:50:45] it was good. Um yeah, I. So is actually freshman year was my first experience with broadband internet. Mm-Hmm. We had dial-up at home that when I moved to the UK is when my parents got broadband at home. And so I just getting that laptop and having a broadband connection. I was like, Whoa, like I can just get on the internet and it doesn't have to do the normal dial up thing about tying up a phone line. So. Huh?

RD [00:51:26] Let's see. We're going to go on to the in the last few minutes that we have left on the diversity in the honors college portion. So was the Honors College like was it still a diverse accepting place then

SO [00:51:46] in terms of race? No, there was. It was mostly white kids. Uh-Huh. But in terms of sexuality, yeah, there was a lot of gay people. You know, somewhere in the queer spectrum. Yeah. And that's and that was helpful for me. But I think it's gotten better at being more diverse racially as what I've seen. So that's good.

RD [00:52:19] So you said I'm. So I know that I'm like going to college and honors did help you come out was. I just was that. Did you get any of that encouragement more from like the Honors College, like in the people in the Honors College? Or was it just more of like a just a being in like just a new area, just a general college thing?

SO [00:52:41] Um. I would say it's probably both, but more of the honors college students. I mean, the professors were supportive too, but like the students like because I met a lot of people who were out. And so it just made it easier to kind of do that and. You know, I think the first. One of the first nights, my drummer. We just were hanging out in the lobby, a few people dressed in drag and sang songs from Little Mermaid and it's like, OK, like, I'm still in Arkansas. You know, we can. This can be a thing, so.

RD [00:53:31] Was Cindy still just like a champion for gay rights that she is?

SO [00:53:37] Yes, though, though she didn't have what's her class called the rainbow rainbow right? Yeah. So that started. Either when I was a junior or senior. But yes, she was, and that's why that's why she is my thesis adviser.

RD [00:53:58] Did an attendee like was she like a part of like, what did she end up like helping you in in your coming out process?

SO [00:54:06] So. No, because I didn't really know Cindy freshman year and then so I came out freshman year. It really was that the other students that that sort of catalyzed that. Uh-Huh. But she did help, you know, later on when I was writing my thesis. She helped. Kind of provide a space for me to explore the idea, you know, what does it mean? And in a broader societal way? Mm hmm. So sort of like the students that was just personal, like, Oh, I'm in an environment with peers where I can be this way. And Cindy

was more like a. OK, now weaving that into like. I guess as more zoomed out, picture that, I don't know if that makes sense, but I

RD [00:55:00] kind of get that. I know for me personally, like Cindy was definitely like just like the way she talked about it, like during group lectures on stuff like the way she talked about, like safety and everything. I texted her like right after I came off, my parents like, Well, I just think she's like, I just think silly. So cool. She loves Cindy.

SO [00:55:23] Yes. Yes, we do. Oh, no, that's great. I think I think, you know, back even then, in the mid 2000s, it wasn't that there wasn't yet that conversation of preemptively creating a safe space. It was kind of like developing them. And Cindy became that. And it was almost like retroactively like, you're out and then the people see you out and they're like, OK, so here is a safe space instead of announcing it kind of front end. Does that make

RD [00:56:03] sense? Yeah, yeah. I I totally get what you mean. Like, I was like, I was like, very cautious. Like I was like, even through all of freshman year, I was like, kind of like sneaking my way through and I would throw it into a conversation with someone like it was. So I don't want to go I don't want to move on a bit too much. Let's see in diversity in the honors college, do you think? Do you think they could have a do you think there could have been improvements on that? I mean, I know you said race was a big like.

SO [00:56:36] Yeah.

RD [00:56:37] Was it mean? Was it like, I want to like, like a charged question, but like, was it like a race or was it just like a bunch of white people or was like b like program like racially like, divisive in any way?

SO [00:56:53] I don't think the program was. I think it was part of a broader system of, you know, people who had the access to apply to the Honors College. Uh-Huh. We're part of a bigger system that is inherently racist in some ways. Hmm. And but you know that. Even then, in 2005, that was it as part of the conversation as it is now. Oh. Again, I say I feel like that was what it was like gaining momentum. You know, I didn't think about it until probably like my senior year, and I was like, Whoa, there is a lot of white people here, and I didn't I wasn't conscious of that. I was so kind of focused on my own experience. And you know, like I said, my sophomore lecture was about an album and and most of our sophomore lectures were about stuff like that. I've come back to be to help out, you know, like, I guess, great or whatever you call it, some of the stuff I notice over time, they got more and more heavy than there are now about genocides and things like that. And, you know, we were kind of. You know, I think in my area of orders, we were a little bit more. But I don't know if carefree is the word, but know the world didn't feel it wasn't quite as heavy. I know.

RD [00:58:39] Yeah, I know what you mean. Yeah, I think most of the sophomore lectures that I saw were pretty like they were pretty heavy hitters. So I mean, I guess it is. I guess the Honors College has taken a pretty or you said they have embraced diversity pretty well,

SO [00:58:56] but I guess it was because we had the privilege to be that way. You know, it wasn't.

RD [00:59:03] So we are running like right on the hour and I don't want to hold you for too long after. But I guess my last big question would be, did being an honors shape your life for the better?

SO [00:59:22] Definitely, yeah. So not only was there the big, more comfortable, big day and meeting all the great people. I just remember going through even something like music, you know? Then people stored their music on iPods and on iTunes and sharing an internet network, you can share your iTunes library so you can have potential access to everybody's music library in the dorms. But I would just somebody just go through people's music libraries and discover tons of new music that way. And that just kind of feels like the whole experience, like I was just. Connected and exposed to all these different people and. And ideas and and things, you know, experience and that's changed my life for the better because it, you know, I was exposed to more things that it helped me be more comfortable with myself and also know what I like and don't like.

RD [01:00:41] And that's a really good way to put it. Now I really do like. Thank you so much for this interview. If you just if you just have more, we can always get another one, but I'm going to go ahead and say this of puzzling thing unless you have anything else you want, unless you are really big stories that just you just wanted to get off your chest.

SO [01:01:09] So there's a lot of like there's a lot of stories, but no like.

RD [01:01:17] All right. All right. Well, thank you so much for your time, John. And this concludes our interview.