

**This transcript has been approved by the narrator as of 4/21/22.**

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ron Walter Oral History Interview Transcription

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Interviewer Name: El-Houri, Noor

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Location of Interview: Remote Interview - Zoom Recording

Acronyms:

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

ACT = American College Test

UALR = University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Ron Walter conducted by Noor El-Houri on March 20, 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.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:02] All right, welcome. This is Noor El-Houro with the Schedler Honors College oral history project and today is March 20th, 2022 and I am interviewing Ron Walter today through Zoom. We will be talking about his experiences leading up to and during his time at the Honors College. Would you go ahead and please state your name for me?

**Speaker 2** [00:00:24] My name is Ron Walter.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:26] All right, so welcome. We're just going to start with a couple of questions just to get to know you and some background before we dive into the college part of it. All right, so your pronouns, I think I saw them. You go by he/him, correct?

**Speaker 2** [00:00:44] I do go by he/him.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:46] All right, perfect. So where are you from, Ron?

**Speaker 2** [00:00:50] Originally, I am from southern New Jersey, but when I was a kid, we moved to Arkansas. That's where I went to college.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:57] How did you go from New Jersey to Arkansas?

**Speaker 2** [00:01:01] It is a rather long story, but for sake of time, let's just say that my parents grew up in southern New Jersey. They did not like it, and they wanted to move somewhere that reminded them of their childhood, which was kind of the middle of nowhere, and college was not affordable in the Northeast whatsoever. They wanted to move somewhere where college was affordable and in a real state education system, which is why they chose Arkansas. We ended up here.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:36] Yes, I guess college is a little bit cheaper here.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:41] You can actually get scholarships here. You cannot get a scholarship in New Jersey. Colleges are expensive everywhere, but it is a lot cheaper in the South.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:53] So, in New Jersey, was it a big town or a small town?

**Speaker 2** [00:01:58] It was a small place. It is a small town. It was the 90's. It was a good time to grow up. You can probably hear my dogs barking now.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:16] It is okay. [laughs] How old were you when you came from New Jersey to Arkansas?

**Speaker 2** [00:02:22] We moved when I was 15, and it was a little conservative, in the Middle America kind of way. Then when we moved, we moved to a smaller town in Arkansas, that was very "churchy", and Christian, and conservative, so a bit of a culture shock, but I feel it has gotten better now.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:45] What town did you move to in Arkansas?

**Speaker 2** [00:02:49] Mountain Home, Arkansas.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:50] I have heard of that. A lot of people in the honors college are from smaller towns, so I have heard a lot of people that are from there.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:03] Yes, it is an interesting place. [laughs]

**Speaker 1** [00:03:06] You were born in New Jersey or somewhere else?

**Speaker 2** [00:03:10] I was born in New Jersey, yes. Then we lived there until I was 15, and we relocated to Arkansas. I have been here, more or less, most of the rest of my life.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:21] You moved as a teenager?

**Speaker 2** Yes.

**speaker 1** Was that rough, having to pick up and move away from friends?

**Speaker 2** [00:03:30] That is an interesting question, because my parents first were like, “we want to move to Arkansas”, and then I said, “I am going to miss all my friends.” Then, I realized I did not have any friends. So, the move was pretty easy. I didn't really make friends until high school and college, so it was pretty easy.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:45] I am sure you are very interesting.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:53] That is nice of you. [shakes head in disagreement]

**Speaker 1** [00:03:55] Listen, do not talk about yourself negatively like that. [laughs] So, what are your parents' names?

**Speaker 2** [00:04:01] My parents' names are Harold, or Hal (?) and Gail.(?)

**Speaker 1** [00:04:07] Is that the short version of Harold? I have not heard that one.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:13] Hal is short for Harold. There's a lot of 60's Hal's out there.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:21] And what do they do for a living?

**Speaker 2** [00:04:23] My mom has always been a nurse, used to be an ER nurse for the last almost 20 years. She has been a nurse anesthetist. Those are the people that give you anesthesia during surgeries. Then my dad used to be a contractor doing all kinds of weird things, but then when we moved to Arkansas, he decided he wanted to be a farmer. That was interesting. I don't know if he's good at it, but that is what he was doing on and off.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:53] Is he still farming to this day?

**Speaker 2** [00:04:55] Yes, they still own a farm in Mountain Home, and it's fine. That's what he had done more or less for the last 20 years, is “be a farmer”.

**Speaker 1** [00:05:07] What does his farming consist of? Do you know what he does? Does he have cattle?

**Speaker 2** [00:05:15] We do have cattle. We sell cattle. We had pigs. We had horses. Grew a lot of hay. Will not get into the specifics of why, because it will make more sense as we get down the list of things. Why did farming more or less work out for him? I think he

just has a lot of undiagnosed ADHD and is not really good at working for other people and needs to be able to do his own thing. Farming is a convenient vehicle for that. Horrible! Do not ever own a farm! Not very commercially viable, but good for that reason.

**Speaker 1** [00:05:52] I do not think I would, but I the idea of it, that is for sure.

**Speaker 2** [00:05:57] I have been there. I was 15 when I was told and having a farm would be a good idea. [shakes head] I grew up a farm kid, not a farmer.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:10] Were you the only child or you had brothers and sisters?

**Speaker 2** [00:06:14] I was not. I had a younger brother and a younger sister. My sister's three years younger than me. My brother is four years younger than me. My sister's name is Emily. My brother's name is Raymond(?), or Ray.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:26] How did your parents influence you and your siblings' education?

**Speaker 2** [00:06:37] Quick note, just because it is part of this whole thing, my brother has a very debilitating illness called Duchenne muscular dystrophy. I do not know if you know what that is. You do not have to know.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:51] My uncle has it and my grandmother's last husband died from it.

**Speaker 2** [00:06:59] There you go, you know what that is. So as you know, it sucks. And my brother, un a lot of kids, was diagnosed from an early age. Probably that compared to your uncle, or other people, well, I do not know how old your uncle is, but, late 80's, 90's, they were diagnosing kids at an early age, and they caught it early in my brother. My parents emphasized education in our household because they realized my brother was not ever going to be able to do much of anything that was not academic related, so they pushed him really hard into academics. A big reason why we wanted to make college affordable was because we knew that if my brother was ever going to have any kind of future, it was going to be through education. He has a PHD, and I think 2 master's degrees? I don't know. Maybe I've lost count of how many master's degrees he has. I think he was working on a PhD number two.

**Speaker 1** [00:07:52] Is there a cure? They can't stop muscular dystrophy, right?

**Speaker 2** [00:07:59] There is technically no cure. There are experimental procedures. That are in effect right now. The FDA approved trials, so that they can basically inject you with stem cells, and the stem cells are able to massively lessen the effect of muscular dystrophy because it can emulate the genes and generate dystrophin, which is the thing that helps you build muscle. The thing is, they only let kids go through the trials, which makes sense from an ethical medical perspective. It just kind of blows. But for future generations of kids that have muscular dystrophy in their genetic sequencing, I hope that disease is eliminated. I think probably within the next generation it will be. So it is a really promising thing, and unfortunately, my brother will not see any of it, but he's made peace with that.

**Speaker 1** [00:09:05] How old is he now?

**Speaker 2** [00:09:08] Shit, I don't even know. How old am I? Thirty two? So, he is 28? He's about twenty eight.

**Speaker 1** [00:09:14] My uncle is in his 50's, and it is very rough. So, I get it, but yes, science is definitely evolving. I mean, I took biology last semester. We talked all about stem cell regeneration and stuff like that. So, you know, hopefully in the future, things will get better.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:39] There has already been a lot of promising research within the last five years. I honestly think within a generation it could be [inaudible]. It would make me very excited. I would be so happy to hear that.

**Speaker 1** [00:09:50] Yes, for sure. So, how was your high school experience?

**Speaker 2** [00:09:58] So, Mountain Home was...very Christian, very Christian, very Christian. Nice place, it reminds me of Stranger Things, when I grew up in the 90's. Mountain Home is a more Christian version of Stranger Things, but fine, perfectly normal. You just do not want to be black or gay, which you know, some people do not have a choice over. Otherwise, it, for me, with my glistening white privilege, was a fine place to grow up, but I quickly just wanted to get out of there because it is a small town. It is fine, it's weird. It's just a little, you know, a little football town in the south. Our mascot was a B-52 bomber, which is weird. Enola Gay, the guy that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, that was our mascot. Literally, when you pull into the school, there is a gigantic model plane. We were the Mountain Home bombers, and it was , "this is the plane that killed people", and it was , "that's weird", but that was our mascot.

**Speaker 1** [00:11:05] Wasn't that the start of a World War?

**Speaker 2** [00:11:08] Technically the official end of the World War.

**Speaker 1** [00:11:13] Oh yes, because that was the final "stop".

**Speaker 2** [00:11:19] Yeah, they literally have a thing that is , "this is the model of the plane that killed thousands of people in Japan", and I was , "cool, that's something I want", [sarcastically] It was not the "The Wildcats" or the "Timberwolves", it was "the machine that killed people". That gives you an idea of the vibes there.

**Speaker 1** [00:11:42] I am picking up what you're putting down.

Were you very religious?

**Speaker 2** [00:11:53] Hell no, oh god, no. My dad is actually a very weirdly staunch atheist, almost in a bad way. He is a very weird libertarian. There are a lot of things going on, but he was not. He was not religious. He was very anti-religious, so we did not grow up in a very religious household.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:10] What about your mom? Was she on that train too?

**Speaker 2** [00:12:14] She is an RN. She doesn't care about anything but working and being a good mom. Again, Stranger Things mom. She is very nice in that way. I love my mom. She is great, but politics, religion, she is too busy for that.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:30] I understand that. It is just two, very complicated, controversial subjects, you know?

**Speaker 2** [00:12:37] Yes.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:38] So what was your dream job growing up?

**Speaker 2** [00:12:41] Oh, man, I actually wanted to be a writer. I went to film school in hopes that I would be a director, but that did not pan out that way. That was the dream, that I would actually write, or that I would do screenplays, but... did not work out. So that was the hope and the dream, at one point. That was pre-recession, things seemed possible.

**Speaker 1** [00:13:05] We were all young and we had big dreams and big goals. Sometimes they work out, sometimes they don't. But that is no problem.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:16] My kid is playing with my Roomba charger, "hey buddy, how are you?" [waves]

[00:13:24] You can grab him if you would , he's just going to cause chaos [speaks to wife].

**Speaker 1** How old is he?

**Speaker 2** He is about to be 13 months old.

**Speaker 1** [00:13:36] Why do parents do that? Just say a year [laughs].

**Speaker 2** [00:13:39] I usually say a year, but the leaps and bounds between those months are weirdly important. The difference between a one year old and a 14 month old weirdly having children...

**Speaker 1** [00:13:50] more advanced?

**Speaker 2** [00:13:53] Yes, because the difference between my baby is a sack of potatoes and my baby is ambulatory, so you kind of get that to your kid walking your kids almost walking, I know where you're at.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:03] Okay, see, I always wondered why parents did that.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:06] It is developmental milestones. It is not just weird parents. It's the difference between, my kid can smile and my kid can babble. My kid can cry and have preferences. That's the reason. That's the main factor.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:23] I get it. Thanks for breaking it down because I have always been , " why do they say that? Why do they go by months?"

**Speaker 2** [00:14:29] You think it is just some weird, kitschy, fake Instagram thing that people say, but then, unfortunately, it does make sense.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:38] All right. So Mountain Home, how far is that from UCA?

**Speaker 2** [00:14:44] Two and a half, three hours, it's three hours from Conway.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:48] So how did you get into UCA? What was the process? How did you find out about it?

**Speaker 2** [00:14:57] I was looking for colleges and sadly, I wanted to be a film major and there is only one film program in the state. I think there are more now, but I was , “Oh, okay, UCA is probably the school I want to go to then.” So I chose it based on that, I actually went to Boys State in 2007 and stayed at UCA for a week. I was ,”it’s okay, it’s fine.” I only applied to 2 schools. I was like, “hopefully this works out.” I didn’t want to go to U of A because it seemed too “broey”.. So I didn’t even apply there.

**Speaker 1** [00:15:29] How do you find out about the Honors College?

**Speaker 2** [00:15:35] So that is the interesting part. I actually did not apply to the Honors College. I actually got in through the back door, so I applied to UCA, didn’t even think about honors, then I kind of knew it existed. I had friends at my school that were in it, but I was , I don’t really care about that because I was not super motivated. Then, my freshman year, a kid I met at Boys State, who by coincidence is now my best friend. Literally, he officiated my wedding. I officiated his wedding, we talk all the time, and he lives in Little Rock. He is awesome. He was in honors and I went to visit him at Farris Hall, and it was like a college pamphlet, everyone was super cool and everyone was super nice and super fraternal and everyone was friends and the dorms were nice compared to where I was.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:32] Farris was built during your time-your stay at the Honors College?

**Speaker 2** [00:16:37] It was, yes. I don’t know how long it had been there, but it was there and I was , Oh, this is the vibe. This is where I should be , I want to be in this place. And so I was , “Oh, how do I get them here?” I found out you could apply and get in. So actually, I was not even in honors my first semester. I missed core one.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:01] I was going to ask you that because I saw-I was looking at the questions that you answered on you say your name, and then it was , “Do you remember or your core one teacher?” You wrote down, “did not take core one”, and I am , “How did you skip core I?”

**Speaker 2** [00:17:22] All the things that people see as foundational aspects that influence and make them remember Honors, I missed out on about half of that. I came in second semester.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:30] So is that track 2? Is that a traditional? That is kind of nontraditional?

**Speaker 2** [00:17:38] I don’t know. It wasn’t very systemic when we did it. It was more just , “you want in?” and we were , “Yeah.” So they just kicked us up. I don’t know if there was a track 2, or nontraditional. They only took, I think, maybe 8 students that got in through the back door, which maybe is not the way to say that, but that is what I called it. It was , “Hey, your ACT score probably wasn’t that good, but, you got straight A’s and so, you’re good enough to get in.”

**Speaker 1** [00:18:10] So how was that application process that way? going to the back door?

**Speaker 2** [00:18:17] I honestly think it was the same thing, really. It was just on a much smaller scale. We still had the interview and Cindy Lee, she was my interviewer, I love

Cindy. Actually I am almost positive the reason I got was because Cindy gave me a dope review and said, "this kid is cool." We still had to write the two essays. We still had to interview, and then we had to be accepted. So I think it was probably a similar process. It is just with such a smaller pool that , if anything, I probably stood out more because I was not competing with half the kids for a scholarship.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:54] So, what was your experience looking at the honors college before you got in versus after you were in?

**Speaker 2** [00:19:34] I got in and anecdotally, it just seemed the place-I remember I came in and I met all these kids and they were all just white hipsters like me. And so it was great that I could come in and I could-this is going to age me so hard, but, I saw guys with Sufjan Stevens shirts and I was , Oh dude, you're cool. Because I want to talk about your Sufjan Stevens, and my best friend was , "Yeah, let's talk about the strokes until 3:00 a.m." I was just , "This is the vibe." This is the prototypical fantastic version of college, which the first semester was not my vibe. I was in a concrete door, but my roommate, who I could talk about later-I was , "no, this is, This is actually cool. This is actually fun." And I worked my ass off to get straight A's to make sure I got it in there. The vibe was very friendly. It was communal on a level that I did not see in other parts of campus and I am extroverted to a fault, so I knew I wanted that and I wanted to have a million friends and I did that. So that is why I really wanted to be in it. That was the outlook from the outset. I love the idea of indie movie screenings, and talking about philosophy, and the whole thing that when people romanticize the first year of college, that was what I wanted.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:05] Yes. And that is what the Honors College was for you?

**Speaker 2** [00:21:09] Oh, 100 percent. That is what it was. It was a pamphlet. And I was , "I am not going to miss out on this. I am getting in", and I did, which was convenient. It changed over time, but that is how college is. I don't know what you are. Are you a junior right now?

**Speaker 1** Yes.

**Speaker 2** I mean, your perception of college changes over time. The beginning is the best part because you are still in that exploratory phase. You have not really gotten into the hard classes of your major. You are still learning things, you are still making friends, it is still fun. I think the back half of college is just different because you are more stressed or your friends change, or you are sleeping less, and your classes are harder, or more involved, you are a little bit less-I guess I would say in the beginning, people are less siloed because as you become caught up in your major, you have become a little bit more siloed and the people you spend time with-

**Speaker 1** [00:22:09] You don't have much time to do that anymore.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:11] Yes, so the emphasis becomes more on the courses and the interactions to help you with the success of that weird stuff you are actually starting to maybe think about what you are going to do after college, which was not my concern, which says a lot about me. But I think at the beginning, yes, but I would say it is in step with every other college experience at the beginning, more than ly is awesome because everything is new. Then the shine kind of wears off and you're , "it's a typical experience versus the beginning of something." I don't know. Maybe that's just how I painted at the beginning of things a lot more than the end.



**Speaker 1** [00:22:51] I agree because I am in that stage where I am to myself, crying, mental breakdown, stress, trying to figure out my thesis is, you know? [laughs]

**Speaker 2** [00:23:04] I have notes about that too. [laughs]

**Speaker 1** [00:23:06] Yes, we are going to get to that, but I have one question. I have a lot of questions, but here is one of my many. So you said you saw a lot of, "cool white people." So, did you have any black friends or minority friends or how was diversity while you went over there?

**Speaker 2** [00:23:23] Oh I have notes on this! I am going to preface this by saying that I love the Honors College and they have actually been very good to me. I am going to preface that by saying this, I actually lost my scholarship at one point. When I got into honors. I did not get a scholarship. I did not get a full ride. And that is the thing that kind of sucked, they were like, "Yeah, you can get into honors, but we don't give you a full ride." You just had you carry over whatever scholarship you had

**Speaker 1** [00:23:52] So they did not give you any scholarship at all?

**Speaker 2** [00:23:55] Not at the beginning. Eventually, I think they did change that policy, but they changed that policy my junior year. There has always been talks about-Patricia and I think everyone had been doing this review process. So they decided, "Okay, we're going to formally review each student that doesn't have a scholarship that wants to get a full ride." And they ended up giving me one, which was convenient because I had a mental breakdown and lost my scholarships, and then the next day they gave me one. So they showed up, and they were really awesome. They were really great people. So I am going to say that about them, that I love my experience with them. They were really good to me. Having said that, when you think about certain aspects of honors, I don't think that you can talk about it without talking about some notable issues, at least from my experience, it is white, white as hell, at least when I was a kid, it was very white. I do not know if it has gotten better. I have seen the list of names from kids that get into the honors program. It seems less white, but I am not familiar with other students. It was very white. Obviously had its drawbacks. I know my best friend who I was talking about. He's asian, he is Korean. I had BIPOC friends, I had gay friends, but they were not the majority of honors students. The majority were me. They were white, middle class, upper middle class kids. So, I would also say that I know Honor's is taking intentional steps to improve that. I also think that I don't envy admissions decisions because they fucking suck, and I know I am being recorded, but that's the way I feel. It fucking sucks to have to say, "how do we make a documented policy of how to actually introduce equity into our admissions program?" I would not want to be the person having that discussion. I know what I would want, which is to increase equity and increase diversity. It is just, how you would actually formulate that plan that would suck. I don't want that job. I know that is an effort on their part. But you know, it was white as hell, and I think it impacted the diversity. And I know I had BIPOC friends that were like, "Yeah, this is super white and sort of uncomfortable."

**Speaker 1** [00:26:23] kind of felt that experience too.

**Speaker 2** It is hard not to.

**Speaker 1** I came in there and I was , "Okay, I see about 10 tops."

**Speaker 2** [00:26:43] At least in my experience, there were only, I think black kids. People don't know that UCA, among the major state school systems, maybe excluding Pine Bluff, has either the largest black population, or by total students it has the largest black population. By percentage, it is still one or two, but that was not representative of Honors. There is a huge black population in Honors and UCA, but it was not represented in Honors. It was not representative in the sense that, like, "more black kids go to UCA." They do, but they just do not get into Honors. It was noticeable, and it was hard not to notice it.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:29] Yes, for sure. Still, probably a little bit of an issue, but-

**Speaker 2** [00:27:34] I would be amazed if. It has been 10 years since I graduated, so I can't imagine you can make such a huge shift in 10 years.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:45] It definitely takes time for sure. So, when you joined the Honors College, it was your second semester freshman year?

**Speaker 2** [00:27:56] Yes, I was officially an honor student spring of 2009, that was my spring freshman year.

**Speaker 1** [00:28:02] So did you live on campus before you joined honors?

**Speaker 2** [00:28:07] I did. I lived in New. No, not New Hall. God, man, I can't remember. What was it called? It was another one.

**Speaker 1** [00:28:15] There is a lot things: Arkansas Hall, State, Baridon-

**Speaker 2** [00:28:23] It was another one. I can't even remember now.

**Speaker 1** Hughes?

**Speaker 2** No, it was another one. It was right by that big bear sculpture.

**Speaker 1** [00:28:32] Oh, you are not talking about Donaghy.

**Speaker 2** [00:28:39] No, because that had just been built my junior year. I can't remember, but I was only there-I'll text my friend. It is actually kind of weird. So, my freshman year I had a roommate in a dorm, a tiny one. We did not really like each other, but I was like, "I am going to apply to Honors and probably leave if I get it." He was like, "Oh, that's funny that you say that because I am also doing that, and if I get the Honors, I will also probably leave." And as luck would have it, we both got into Honors second semester, and we were both like, "Oh, I guess we can live together?" Then, there were not any rooms available. So they were just, "Hey, do you want to live in this handicapped room on the first floor? It would only be two people instead of four, but it is the same size as the room?" It was an equity issue. Again, Honors did not have any handicapped kids, so there were no disabled children attending honors, which is another thing, but there weren't any. So this room was just filled and they were like, "do you just want to live in this room with the two of you?" Well, we don't like each other, but we know how to live with each other, and now we actually have doors we can close, so in theory, it would be better. So, we lived on campus and then we moved into dorms on the first floor together. We lived together again sophomore year in New Hall. We hated each other so much at the end of sophomore year that we did not live together. I technically lived in an apartment, on paper,

but I actually slept in my girlfriend's room, in Farris, with her three roommates junior year. Then we lived in that same room again, the same handicap room my last year, so theoretically we lived in on campus housing all four years.

**Speaker 1** [00:30:45] So you lived with a guy you could not stand for basically all those four years?

**Speaker 2** [00:30:51] Yes. Well, we had to take a break.

**Speaker 1** [00:30:54] It was like a relationship?

**Speaker 2** [00:30:57] Literally, we broke up. It was so bad because he was so disgusting, and I don't feel bad saying that on camera. He has apologized since then. What is funny is that he has since become one of my best friends.

**Speaker 1** [00:31:10] I was going to ask that.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:11] He lives in Little Rock. He is a really great guy. We are still super great friends. It is hilarious that we just kept up. I went to his wedding, he went to my wedding. We are super close. We talk all the time. We got lunch about two weeks ago. So we are great friends. We realized we should never live together. The dynamic was kind of like we were brothers that hated each other, but now we are grown up and we don't hate each other and we like each other, illegitimately.

**Speaker 1** [00:31:42] A sibling relationship. When you are younger, you fight a lot, but as you grow older, you learn to just love each other.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:49] Yes, when you don't live in the same house and share the same stuff, it's funny how you realize that you like them when you don't have to share dishes with them. So, I did live in Honors housing. I lived with one guy, basically my entire time in Honors. All of college, which is weird because a lot of people do not do that.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:07] True. A lot of people go to apartments or move out at some point, but some people love Farris' amenities. It is still the nicest dorm on campus till this day.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:21] Oh really, even the newer ones, like Bear Hall? I think that is what it was called when they built it.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:29] Oh yeah, the one next to the football field.

**Speaker 2** Yes.

**Speaker 1** That one-Those are nice, but only if you live alone. Other than that, it is basically like a dorm. You have two beds in one room. Farris is the only one-Farris and New Hall are the only two dorm buildings-actually Farris New Hall are both kind of equally-They are very similar, except New Hall-

**Speaker 2** [00:33:02] New Hall is a concrete cell. Farris is much nicer than New Hall. I can't imagine New Hall has been updated, but it was a concrete holding cell. We used to joke that it was where they put people in jail, like they would just lock people in rooms like it was an asylum.

**Speaker 1** [00:33:20] Maybe they remodeled it since then, but I don't know because it is very similar to Farris for me. The walls are different. Yes, Farris has cleaner walls. They have those popcorn ceilings in New Hall.

**Speaker 2** [00:33:36] I think it's been remodeled. If the walls are not made of concrete and there's nothing on them, it has been removed.

**Speaker 1** [00:33:42] Oh yeah, it has been remodeled.

**Speaker 2** [00:33:43] You could literally yell and the room would echo.

**Speaker 1** [00:33:47] Oh, I am pretty sure it has been remodeled then because it is very similar to Farris, but it has-It is kind of that handicapped room they were telling me about. It has two rooms instead of four. So yes, it is a smaller version of Farris, but you each have your own room, and you share a bathroom, and there is a living room area.

**Speaker 2** [00:34:09] Yes, that is all the same. I remember that. It would not normally be associated with where Farris was.

**Speaker 1** [00:34:17] Farris came with a little kitchen nook area and a refrigerator. New Hall does not. So that is kind of the only thing that's different.

So what was your experience in the dorms? Was it all they could imagine, you enjoyed it, or were there times you wanted to get off campus?

**Speaker 2** [00:34:44] No, because Conway is pretty lame. Yeah, sadly, the stuff to do was on campus. UCA was fun, you just had to make fun of it, it was not like Hendrix, where I would walk around and it was all a bunch of rich kids popping molly, but it was still like you had friends, so we would make fun. Again, each class had a different dynamic. My class-my wife so lovingly referred to as a cult because we all were friends and we would whenever we get together, it's 50 people. I am still friends with all those people. My crew in Little Rock are still all people I went to college with and it was really fun. I mean, it's just random things you only have time to do in college, like, "hey, let's stay up till 2:00 in the morning watching movies", or "listen to music", or "go to Shipleys at 3 a.m", because they open up at 3 a.m. We would go through the dorms and they rally people and, "If you're awake, let's go get donuts right now." That was one of our favorite things. Looking for any excuse to just hang out with a ton of people and have fun. So it was great. It was a wonderfully super positive experience for me at least. Not sure it was like that for everybody, but again, if you had a lot of friends,

**Speaker 1** [00:36:13] It is how you make it at the end of the day. So if that is what you wanted out of your college experience, you got it.

**Speaker 2** [00:36:21] Yeah, I was not one of the kids that studied super hard. I wanted to go do things. I wanted to have fun, and I did that.

**Speaker 1** [00:36:33] So, you skipped core one. You said you had Cindy for Core two?

**Speaker 2** I did

**Speaker 1** Do you remember your core two class at all? How is your first Honors class experience, especially being that you missed out on that first half and just being thrown into Core II? How was that?

**Speaker 2** [00:36:53] Lame. It was really lame. Everyone said the core two is much more lame than core one. Core one is the fun one, because it is all these weird kids that have been raised Christian-what about communism? “Well I don’t know, my dad says communism is a bad thing”, and, there is all these weird interpersonal dynamics where people are still figuring stuff out, and you are reading and talking in a way in the Socratic method that probably is a little bit unusual for people. Core one is fun. Core two, at least when I took it, was, “Let’s talk about politics...sort of”, and core two always felt a little bit less defined. Each professor does it differently. Cindy was great. I loved Cindy, and she tried to really bring it. She relied on the class to drive the discussion, and unfortunately, I had a class that was sort of not motivated, and I felt I literally talked two thirds of the time. I was probably the annoying kid in class that talked too much, but..

**Speaker 1** [00:37:51] You carried the class discussion. That is a good thing.

**Speaker 2** [00:37:57] Everyone was just kind of like, “I don’t want to talk about politics.” It is not-Whit makes it interesting, I see the stuff that she writes and I am, “Oh, you understand power dynamics, you understand how to craft this conversation.” My class was not ready for that. Maybe it was just a different time, but I feel like kids were not nearly as woke, and did not think about things like that as much.

**Speaker 1** [00:38:22] So what Professor in the Honors College has the most influence on you?

**Speaker 2** [00:38:28] I would say my favorite course I ever had was with Rick Scott, who took the countercultures class.

**Speaker 1** [00:38:35] He was still there while you were there? He’s not here anymore?

**Speaker 2** [00:38:41] Rick was awesome. He was a Deadhead. All he would ever talk about is The Grateful Dead and music in the 60’s and transcendentalism. Super- just a really chill laid back guy. He had a class that was specifically about- it was a three hour class every Wednesday for a semester, and we would just talk about the history of counterculture and different aspects of counter culture. I still talk to a bunch of people from my cohorts, and people around that time. Everyone I talked to that was in that class was like, “that was my favorite class of college.” It was the most “colleggy class” that you could take It was like, “we’re going to study the history of counter cultured and talk about what that means.” It’s just a very, very dude centric, very “colleggy” kind of class. It was very fun because you got to think about things in new dimensions and discuss it. That was cool, Rick was a really great guy. Cindy was a great teacher. I didn’t really get to take some of the other classes that I went to.

**Speaker 1** Was Norb still there?

**Speaker 2** Norb was kind of on his way out. He taught one class. I think he had a one class he taught, which was kind of like Rick’s class. It was like the inverse to it. We talked about religion and the history of religion. Everyone was like, “I want to take a class with Norb”, but that class-I was super burnt out junior year, and I did not want to do shit. So I actually took a class that was just watching Stephen Sondheim plays. That is all I did that year. It was just one of the classes you took to get A’s, but it was-I watched a bunch of

Stephen Sondheim. That was cool. I did not take the Norb class. That was right when he was getting Parkinson's. It was right when- I do not know if you know anything about Parkinson's. It is right to the point where they know they have Parkinson's, and they know they are mentally quiet, but they're still cognitively all there. I think that is right where Norb was.

**Speaker 1** [00:40:45] Norb got Parkinson's?

**Speaker 2** [00:40:49] He did. I probably should not say this on a recording, but is Norb- I think he died?

**Speaker 1** Yes.

**Speaker 2** Okay. I thought he died.

**Speaker 1** [00:40:58] I think he died the year I started Honors. 2019 I think. Sometime from fall to spring. It was 2019, yes.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:13] Yes. That was kind of- I got it right near the end, so I would not say I was close to Norb. A lot of my classes- I was not super close to him. He just was not around nearly as much. Super cool, dude though.

Allen Ginsberg. There is a story about him and Allen Ginsberg that Rick always liked to tell. Allen Ginsberg saw Norb and said that, "Norb had a really amazing aura." I always liked that story. Those were just some of the guys that I always liked. I love those professors. Those were some of the ones I was closest to.

**Speaker 1** [00:41:44] They were just really cool?

**Speaker 2** [00:41:46] Yes, they were supportive. Cindy did a lot of work with advocacy, especially in the LGBTQ spaces on campus. I wasn't out at the time. I am bisexual. I did not know I was bisexual at the time, although in retrospect a lot of things kind of make sense. I was like, "I just want to talk to everyone about gay things." They would be like, "are you gay?" [Ron] "No."

**Speaker 1** [00:42:14] Hiding behind the closet

**Speaker 2** [00:42:16] I was very much- I wasn't even aware at the time. I was like, "Oh, I just think that queer people are great and I want to be a great ally." And then- as soon as I left college I was like, "Oh no, I'm definitely not straight." So Cindy was always a great person because she actually would talk about LGBTQ issues, which there was really not much of that at all. So it was nice to actually have her there.

**Speaker 1** [00:42:36] Was it your time at UCA and with Cindy and other professors that kind of helped you realize that about yourself? Or, you came to that conclusion yourself?

**Speaker 2** [00:42:45] No, I came to that conclusion when I broke up with my girlfriend and realized that I was probably just always sort of probably gay. It definitely was nice to have a safe space to actually be able to talk about those things. Because let me tell you, I don't know if UCA has changed, but it is not what I could call- I would not say it is not progressive because I have been to places that are not progressive. I would say it is more neutral. There are definitely a heavy presence of people that are not progressive on campus, at least when I was a kid. There is a lot of Christian organizations that kind of P.C.

and cool looking, but at the end of the day, they are actually extremely homophobic, and their members were nice but extremely homophobic. It was nice to at least have a space where people were not like that. It was the Obama years, so it was not as awful. I think the Trump era might have been different.

**Speaker 1** [00:43:48] Were you in college when Obama got elected?

**Speaker 2** [00:43:53] He got elected the fall of my freshman year.

**Speaker 1** [00:43:56] How was that?

**Speaker 2** [00:43:58] Oh, dude, it was crazy. It was nuts.

**Speaker 1** [00:44:03] It was the first black president. I know that was crazy.

**Speaker 2** [00:44:06] Everyone was like, "We have to talk about the president!" which in retrospect is, "We have to talk about the fact that a black man is the President." It was a huge thing. There was a lot of positivity, and that waned over time. I think about the class that I was in college the fall Trump got elected. I painted their entire college experience. I was like, "Oh man, very different."

**Speaker 1** [00:44:33] It was bad times, for sure. Everyone was terrified.

**Speaker 2** [00:44:40] Yes, I could imagine. I would not doubt that. I mean, just to say that having a safe space to talk about things, even if I wasn't out to myself, even anyone else, it was my professors that were always super supportive. I went all over with that answer but-

**Speaker 1** [00:44:56] No, we got back to it. We went in a big circle, but we ended where we started.

So talk about your thesis a little bit. Do you remember it? It is a short documentary. You documented the aftermath and recovery of two southern towns after being hit by tornadoes. That's interesting.

**Speaker 2** [00:45:20] I did. I was a film major, and I really liked the intersection of nerd cinema and documentary film, which is the most pretentious thing I have heard, but that, at the time, was my thing. That wasn't my thesis. I actually, for a year, did prep for another thesis where I was going to travel around and do an exploratory documentary about the Arkansas economy and what the economy is and how it touches different people's lives and how different parts of the state have vastly different focuses. It was all very thought provoking, and even now, I think it's a really cool idea. But I was also mentally unstable, and I was completely incapable of doing that at the time. I have intense ADHD and so, at the time, that was not the project I needed. I planned this thing for a year. The summer I was supposed to get off the ground, I had a mental breakdown and then just didn't do it. I was just, "I am just not going to do my thesis." Then a friend of mine-This huge swell of tornadoes hit the southern United States and completely decimated several towns, one of which was Joplin, Missouri. I knew people in Joplin, Missouri, and I was like, "Hey, so my friend is in Joplin, and the whole town was on fire yesterday because there was just a gas station exploded from downed power lines." It was fucking insane. There wasn't running water. The hospital and the school had been destroyed. The entire town was completely destroyed and I was just like, "That's what I am going to do. I am going to go out there with a camera and film things and turn it into a thesis." I went up there, filmed it-Still, an incredible experience- came back-literally ghosted my advisor for a year, did not talk to

him. The only reason I-he found me in the film building one day and was like, “Hey, remember that documentary you were going to make. You have not talked to me in a year about it.” I was like, “Yeah, we should talk about that.” I threw some shit together and made a documentary, which I am still proud of, even if it really is not technically that good. But it was still a really incredible experience because I got to travel and talk with people that had lived through death. So it was very eye-opening and kind of a really cool experience just to see what people cared about in the aftermath of abject poverty and destruction-was really crazy.

**Speaker 1** [00:47:56] You still have that documentary?

**Speaker 2** [00:47:59] I do, but I don't share it with people because it is so bad. I did not know how to work sound. I had my girlfriend do the sound for me. That was the worst decision of my life.

**Speaker 1** [00:48:08] You were a film major!

**Speaker 2** [00:48:12] Yes, but I could not run a camera and sound at the same time, and it was badly planned. I lost half the footage because of an SD card error, so I had to make shit up of how I was going to cobble the narrative together. It turned out okay. I was still happy with it, but that was the last documentary I ever made.

**Speaker 1** [00:48:33] At least got your thesis done. You went from not deciding not to do it to having something.

**Speaker 2** [00:48:41] No, I went from having a plan ,to crying and just saying, “I’m just not going to do it”, and then not telling anybody about it for seven months. Yeah, I just didn't do it. I was like, “well, yeah, I am just not going to do that.” That is bad.

Whenever Donna Bowman does how to prepare for a thesis, she was like, “Oh, Ron is good for that because he's going to talk about what happens when all your planning goes to shit and how you make it happen.” It's just a joke. She was always like, “Right, could you talk about what happens when your thesis falls apart?” I was like, “I can Donna. This is what you do, you freak out and then you figure it out afterwards.”

**Speaker 1** [00:49:27] That is about where I am at right now, actually. So it's very, very relatable.

**Speaker 2** [00:49:33] You need to just realize-

**Speaker 1** [00:49:35] I have to rewrite my whole lit review and completely rework my thesis. So, I am kind of at that mental breakdown point.

**Speaker 2** [00:49:46] Yeah, the key is to try to gauge how cool your advisor is. Luckily, my advisor was chill as hell.

**Speaker 1** [00:49:53] Who were they?

**Speaker 2** [00:49:55] His name is Scott Meder. He actually was an Honors grad.

**Speaker 1** [00:49:58] He is still here! He's a teacher.



**Speaker 2** [00:50:00] Yes, Scott Meder is cool. He is in the film department. He is really nice. He still does-He was like the chilliest dude ever. He was just like, "Yeah, we will figure it out. That is cool." And I was like, "I don't know this is good." He goes, "It does not have to be good. It has to be done." I was like, "That's the attitude I need bro. Let's do it."

**Speaker 1** [00:50:24] I think he's in the art department. Correct?

**Speaker 2** [00:50:30] He does production design. So he goes between the art department and the film department, at least he used to. He works with the production-the art side of production design and the film department production design. So he kind of dabbles in both.

**Speaker 1** [00:50:43] That's funny because I spoke to him. He was on my-when I was trying to find a new adviser, I spoke to him first. He's not my adviser, but he did help me find my advisor now, which is great.

**Speaker 2** Small world.

**Speaker 1** I know. I think he's also having an interview for this oral history project, so you'll be able to watch his interview, probably.

**Speaker 2** [00:51:11] Oh, that's funny. Yeah, that's a good dude. Well, good for you. Anyway, I literally know people that didn't turn in their honors thesis and turn them in after they technically graduated, and they still graduated. Don't do that, but like-

**Speaker 1** [00:51:27] Do not let Whit hear that. She is going to be like, Noor, don't do that. Do not do that."

**Speaker 2** [00:51:31] I am telling you not to do that because it was not good, but I am just saying. If you guys can get through, you will be fine. It's going to be okay.

**Speaker 1** [00:51:42] Yes!

So after the Honors College, what was your plan once you graduated? You said you were a film major, but you didn't-

**Speaker 2** [00:51:52] It was the recession. I don't know how old you were in 2013, but the economy was not yet good. The economy got better, but in 2013 we were still in a post recession. My friends and I joke that people a little bit older than me and my cohort-I say this with a grain of salt, because you are the COVID graduates, so I do not draw prospects, don't worry. But one of my old bosses was 38. I think she's 40 now, but she was like, "Oh yeah, when I graduate college, anyone could just get a job and get paid well." We were all like, "what?" She was like, "Yeah, you all just got it bad." Pre-recession, you could actually go to college and you would just get a good job. That was not me. I just palled around for a bit. I did some projects. I eventually moved to Los Angeles. I was there for about a year where I worked an internship and worked on film sets. I kind of realized film is not great and has a lot of problems. Actual production, it's kind of like working on a construction zone. It's very-

**Speaker 1** [00:53:11] I have an intro to film class this semester, actually. So I see.

**Speaker 2** [00:53:16] That is the best version of film, where you just talk about movies. Actually working in movies. It is like doing a 12 hour day with a bunch of people who are

super sweaty and overworked and being like, “All right, we got to put these cameras together and we had to shoot the thing in three hours.” Also, “All this crap going wrong. Hope everyone is cool working until midnight.” That was the vibe. It was not-the romanticized version of film, working in film, that everyone is just talking about and thinking about movies and the actual reality of working. Quickly after getting into it, I was like, “Man, this is not the vibe I want to have.” And I had just gotten-I was 25. I moved back from L.A. I hated L.A. Actually I slept on this one guy’s couch. He was from UCA, Corey Womack, who is actually in the interview process. I don’t think with you, but he’s doing it too, a friend of mine. We both moved back to Arkansas because we hated L.A. because. I liked to have another Honors guy out there because we could talk about postgraduate dysphoria, how it sucks being poor. I just realized I didn’t want to do that. I moved back to Arkansas and met my girlfriend, now my wife, now the mother of my child. I didn’t want to be away and have a job that didn’t allow me to have a normal traditional nine to five. Film was not going to cut it. We hated film and decided to get out, and I did not exactly know what I wanted to do. I got very lucky that we moved to New Orleans because my wife has family in New Orleans. I had never been there, but. Fucking awesome. I love New Orleans. I am going to say, dude, it’s so fun.

**Speaker 1** [00:55:09] I’ve been there, but it was when I was 16, and now I am going there for my 21st birthday. So it’s going to be a very different experience.

**Speaker 2** [00:55:21] You will get lit. I love that city. I lived there for six years, but we lived there. I got very lucky. I got a job at Tulane University, doing film stuff. While I was there, I was very fortunate that I got free tuition, and I got a masters degree for free, my MBA.

**Speaker 1** [00:55:42] You got a masters in film as well.

**Speaker 2** [00:55:47] Fuck no. I have an undergrad in film and then a master’s in business administration, which allowed me to transition into marketing and marketing technology. So now I do marketing. I do marketing technology. Now I am the manager of marketing technology for a brink of Iraq. So I handle that aspect of marketing, which is a weird journey, but it allows me to have a nine to five, stable career that is boring as hell, but is good and I like it and allows me to have a family, so.

**Speaker 1** [00:56:28] That’s interesting. So the Honors College didn’t have any effect on that part of it?

**Speaker 2** [00:56:35] I would not say so. I wouldn’t say in that sense. I mean, one thing that honors it have a lasting effect it had on me was to always know how to approach a problem from multiple angles and to understand that there were other people with different life experiences and different aspects and different sets of knowledge that inform how to approach the situation or how to think about a problem. As I learned that, not everybody in the world gets that, and so everyone’s like, “there is one way to do it.” That is not true. I know it’s not true. There’s not one way to think about something. I think one thing Honors instilled in me is, there’s always-everything is interconnected and there is always a way to bring your own experiences and other people’s experience to learn how to understand the problem, which has made me a better person in general, but also just a better citizen, a better problem solver, better at my job. Just in general, just give me a better understanding of life. So it’s kind of a soft thing, but yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:57:37] For sure. Has it changed your worldly perspective, being in the honors college?

**Speaker 2** [00:57:47] I think to a certain extent, I think that it asks you to question things. I think, unlike a lot of other- Well, it's not simply the college experience just to sit down and be like, "I am going to think about things and talk about things." It is very discussion based, which is not the typical college experience, which I think people in Honors perhaps take for granted that. So much of their class is about reading and thinking, when in fact, a lot of college courses are not geared towards that. It's about learning and absorbing, regurgitating, project based, which is fine. That's all fine. It's a different way to learn a different way to excel. Being like, yeah, "you're going to spend four years thinking about stuff and talking about it, so that when you know, when you graduate, you know how to think about and talk about stuff." I think that is intrinsically valuable, whether or not we can qualify it.

**Speaker 1** [00:58:44] That's very true. All right, so I am just going to ask you one last question, because we have gone past an hour, which is wonderful. We had a lot where you had lots to say which is great. So last question if you could give some advice to a new applicant coming into the honors college? What would you give them, or what would you say to them?

**Speaker 2** [00:59:08] If I was going to give any advice to future Honor students, the people that are interested in honors, I would say if you want to leave an impression, or if you want to be a certain version of yourself that you think of as successful, in whatever regard that might be, you have to-Actually, you want to live your life as if nobody could confuse you for someone else. I know everyone would say, "be yourself, be authentic", that's been co-opted, and it's something that we hear so much that it almost feels overplayed, but the truth is just that the actual work of understanding who you are and what you value is a very hard and lifelong process, and I think that that really starts in college. I think if you are going to apply to honors and start thinking about what the world means and how everything connects to each other, a big part of that is understanding how you fit and all of it and understanding what's really important to you, and also understanding that's going to change. I think that there are kids that enter college and you don't know who you are, and that's a big part of college is whether or not we really talk about it is understanding that it's this weird time in your life when things change super quick. Then you are thrown into a world being like, "all right, here you go. There's no playbook. Hope you don't die." I think that something, in my experience, that helped-to accept this. Yeah. And I think something that, at least in my experience, helped-when my life started getting easier and I felt I was living the life I wanted. A large part of it was understanding what was important to me. And I think being open to understanding that and being open to the fact that's going to change is really important. It affects not just your education, but it impacts the way you make friends, the way you engage with people, the way you respect yourself, and set boundaries, the way that you actually look at what's important and what success can look like. It's a really big thing. Really understanding who you are is not just important to your education, it's really important to your future. It sounds so hallmark, but the truth.

**Speaker 1** [01:02:11] It's true. Well, this has been a great interview. Thank you so much for.

**Speaker 2** [01:02:20] You feel less nervous? You feel like you can continue on?

**Speaker 1** [01:02:22] I feel very-high five. I feel great. It was a great interview. After that first 10 minutes, I was like, "okay, I got this."

It was so wonderful interviewing you today. We will keep you updated with the process. That's all for today.

**Speaker 2** [01:02:46] Yeah. Well, good. It was lovely speaking to you Noor. Thank you so much for going through this and organizing all this. I know it's a lot of work. Just know that I appreciate it and I wish you the best of luck with everything else.

**Speaker 1** [01:02:55] Thank you so much, Ron. You have a wonderful rest of the day.