

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Leah Horton Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Horton, Leah

Interviewer Name: Galloway, Mary

Date of Interview: 03/21/2022

Location of Interview: Conway, AR (Remote Interview- Zoom Recording)

Acronyms:

MG = Mary Galloway

LH = Leah Horton

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

I2 = Interview x2 (Application interviews for UCA's honors college)

CRISPR = Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (Genetic engineering technology).

Interview Summary:

The following oral history is a recorded interview with Leah Horton, conducted by Mary Galloway on March 3rd, 2022. This interview is a component of the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project where current students and alumni reflect on their experiences before, during, and after the UCA Honors College.

Readers should be mindful that the following transcript is of spoken word, not prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

MG [00:00:01] So if you don't mind, can you sign the Deed of Gift and then email it to me. So, before going into the interview, is there anything that you're wanting to take out of the final

transcript? Are there any redactions that you are planning on making or any limitations for the interview?

LH [00:00:28] I mean, I don't know that you can know redactions until after the interview, right?

MG [00:00:33] Yeah, I just wanted to make sure going into it that you didn't have anything that I was not aware of. At any time, if you change your mind and there's anything that you want me to redact, just let me know, and I can do that. I'm going to pull up some questions. With that being said, are you good to get started?

LH [00:00:40] Yeah, I'm good.

MG [00:00:45] OK, perfect. So what are your pronouns?

LH [00:00:50] Just she/her?

MG [00:01:00] I am going to start off with a little speech that everyone's going to say, and it's going to ask for you to say your name for the purposes of the recording. This is Mary Galloway with the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Today is March the 7th and I am interviewing Leah Horton, who is in her office at UCA in Conway, Arkansas, and we will be talking about Leah Horton's experience leading up to, during, and after their time in the Schedler Honors College. Please state your name and age for purposes of the recording.

LH [00:01:51] I'm Leah Horton. When I was in honors, I was Leah Tilley and I'm 47.

MG [00:01:57] Where are you from?

LH [00:02:01] I graduated from high school in Mountain Home, Arkansas, and I spent eighth grade through senior year there.

MG [00:02:09] Was Mountain Home, Arkansas, a very big town or is it small?

LH [00:02:15] It's in North Arkansas, about 15 miles from the Missouri state line. It's the biggest school district in the area. When I was in school, I think the athletic conferences went out to 5A. We were a 5A school, and most of our conference members were three hours away. Comparatively [to larger schools], it's not that large, and I think I graduated with 260 people.

MG [00:02:46] Did you enjoy growing up there, or were you ready to leave and go to college?

LH [00:02:53] I enjoyed high school a lot. I was really involved in student council and all kinds of student organizations, so I had a really good time in high school. I remember one time in my AP English class, our teacher asked how many people were ready to go to college just to get away from home, and I was the only one who didn't raise my hand. I had a good relationship with my parents, so I wasn't necessarily just dying to get out of the house.

MG [00:03:29] Do you have any siblings?

LH [00:03:32] I have an older brother. He is three years older than me.

MG [00:03:37] Did he go to UCA for college as well?

LH [00:03:40] He started at UCA, though he did not finish college there.

MG [00:03:43] What led you to choose UCA?

LH [00:03:48] That's a good question. Part of it was because Alex, my older brother, was here. At that time in my life, being in a church youth group and being involved in a church organization was really important to me, and he was really active in a campus ministry. I knew that there would be a group for me on campus. My parents had both gone to Harding University and I had a Fulbright scholarship to Harding. But, I didn't want to go to a place where I was going to have more rules there than I had at home. So, that's why I wound up deciding to come to UCA.

MG [00:04:36] What campus ministry were you involved in, the religious one?

LH [00:04:41] The Robinson Center Church of Christ. I think they're called Bears Christ and are affiliated with that church.

MG [00:04:53] What made you decide to join the Honors College?

LH [00:04:56] I didn't know anything about the Honors College and I can't remember the exact context, but there was some sort of event, whether it was an awards ceremony or a band concert or something, I don't know. But, my best friend's grandfather was a really well known attorney in Mountain Home, and he had a lot of connections around the state, and he heard that I was going to UCA and he was friends with John Smith, one of the associate Vice Presidents for student affairs or something like that at the time. And he told me about the Honors College and that I should look into it. And that's why I did. I mean, that's why I looked into it at all.

MG [00:05:49] OK. That's really interesting. Were you really homesick when you first got to the Honors College?

LH [00:05:58] I really wasn't. One of my best friends from high school and I were roommates in Carmichael Hall. And that was only the second or third year, maybe only the first year, that they had honors housing in Wingo Hall. But, it was not required that honor students live in honors housing. And in fact, I don't think there were enough rooms for everybody anyway. I didn't live in Wingo because I had already made a commitment to live with Marian. I knew a lot of people here: I knew Marion, I knew my brother, and then of course, I got to know folks pretty quickly through that campus ministry.

MG [00:06:49] Carmichael Hall, was that an all girls dorm at the time?

LH [00:06:50] Yeah.

MG [00:06:55] How was your "I-squared" experience?

LH [00:07:00] Didn't have one! I squared doesn't date back to 1993, Mary [*laughing*]. I had an interview process, when I reached out to Norb and I reached out to honors and applied. I also think I had to send in a sample of my writing. So I sent in an essay that I had written for my AP English class. And in fact, I got a little curious. And so I looked into this, and looked in my student cabinet. And that essay is still there, which is kind of funny. [For the interview] I met with Norb in his office, which is now Tricia's office, and it was me and two other prospective students. And we just had a conversation with Norb. He asked us questions and tried to rattle us and talk to us about what we wanted to do and what we believed in. It was a neat experience.

MG [00:08:07] Looking back on your essay that you can still see. What are your thoughts reading it? Are you like, “That was a good essay,” or not?

LH [00:08:17] When I looked back at it, I was like, “That's not bad for a high school kid.” I think it was on some of Emily Dickinson's poems. If you've read any of her work, she doesn't adhere to any sort of standard English grammar and punctuation, so I was analyzing that [in my application essay].

MG [00:08:38] I like Emily Dickinson. I read her in high school as well. Do you remember what your conversation with Norb was about during your interview process?

LH [00:08:51] The only question that I remember specifically was he asked - I guess because all three of us in the interview were Christians and were involved in our churches - “If we thought God was changing or unchanging.” I think all of us said “unchanging.” And of course, he went into Biblical examples of where God was changing, trying to convince us to change his mind. The only other thing I remember is, Norb basically trying to rattle us. I can't remember the exact context, but it was something about making us uncomfortable and getting in personal space. So, he would raise his voice and he would get really close to you like this far away from you [*motions a foot with hands*]? I just remember sitting there looking at him and not backing away. But some of the other students, when he came in close to them, were like, “Oh” [*panicing immitation*]. That's about all I can remember.

MG [00:10:11] I know you said you stayed in Carmichael your first year. Did you stay there the remainder of your four years?

LH [00:10:18] After my freshman year, my roommate became an R.A. and she moved into Bernard Hall. So, I moved into Short-Deni, which Deni was the girl side at the time, and Short was the boys side at the time. I had a private room, and stayed there for a semester, and then I was invited to apply to be an R.A. So I moved into Karmichael Hall, the spring semester of my sophomore year as an R.A. I was an R.A. my sophomore and junior year. Then, the summer between my junior and senior year, I got married and was living off campus in an apartment with my then husband, my senior year.

MG [00:11:03] Okay. Did your husband go to UCA?

LH [00:11:06] Yeah, he was a nursing major.

MG [00:11:08] Was he in the Honors College as well?

LH [00:11:10] He was not, he was an R.A. And that's how we met.

MG [00:11:13] That's a cute story. Who was your Core I professor?

LH [00:11:21] I'm honestly, I'm not sure. I remember the large group lectures and I remember all of the faculty being there, but as far as the small group, I'm really not sure. I want to say it was Norb, because I think I was in at least two classes specifically with Norb.

MG [00:11:47] What was Norb like as a teacher?.

LH [00:11:50] He was really dynamic, and you never really knew what to expect - what? Now that I say that, I know he was my small group instructor because as I'm talking about this, some of the

memories are coming back - He was a really good listener. He was a really good question-asker, and he would ask really insightful questions and get folks to talk and think. He wasn't afraid to push back. He wasn't afraid to play devil's advocate, and we never really knew what he thought about issues. Our core one was very different from your core one; it was more focused on current contemporary issues. We still read some philosophers and different things, but we talked about that more in the context of contemporary issues. I remember us having conversations about abortion and euthanasia, poverty, homelessness, and those kinds of things.

MG [00:13:03] What was your Core II service project?

LH [00:13:05] We didn't do those.

MG [00:13:10] But you still had a freshman retreat, though, right?

LH [00:13:12] Yeah.

MG [00:13:16] Where did you go [for the freshman retreat]?

LH [00:13:40] We went to Meadow Creek, which is in Forks, Arkansas, and at the time, it was a retreat conference center. It was always sort of focused on sustainability. There was a girls dormitory and a boys dormitory, and they really encouraged us to be conscious of how much water and electricity we were using and those kinds of things. I don't remember much about the food, but I've read other comments about it from Facebook memories and stuff. I guess they grew a lot of their own food. I remember somebody talking about dandelions in the sandwich, but I don't remember. I don't remember specifically that.

MG [00:14:13] Did you make a lot of friends at your freshman retreat, or not really?

LH [00:14:19] Yeah, I would say I had a core group of honors folks that I was friends with. But since I wasn't living in Wingo, and most of the freshmen were, I was really heavily involved in that campus ministry organization. I didn't necessarily integrate fully into honors as retrospectively, I wish I had. I know a lot of the honors kids would spend lots of their time in the Wing Go lobby and in the Forum, and I just didn't really hang out with them outside of class, except at mealtime. In the cafeteria, we would almost always have a group of honors folks that would eat at a big round table in the pit, in the caf. So that was kind of fun. I remember a core group of people were there.

MG [00:15:29] Was it the Christian Cafeteria that you're referring to?

LH [00:15:30] *[nodding]*

MG [00:15:35] Did you enjoy the food there when you were in college?

LH [00:15:39] I mean, sometimes. There were still a few meal options in the student center. I want to say Pizza Hut was still there and there was another, some kind of a burger line or something. There were certainly different options except Pizza Hut there, there today.

MG [00:16:02] So growing up, what did you want to be when you grew up?

LH [00:16:08] Honestly, I kind of faced the issue that a lot of honor students face today, because in high school, I was pretty good at all of the classes. I was editor of our school newspaper and I really enjoyed math and science, but I also enjoyed reading and writing. It's what I see many honor

students struggle with today - it's that multi-potentiality - right? There's so many things I could do that I had a hard time figuring out what I wanted to do. My parents were both teachers and they encouraged me not to be a teacher. But I think teaching had always sort of been what I was good at. When I was little in elementary school, we lived in a really little town called Devalls Bluff, Arkansas, which is about an hour east of Little Rock on I-40 between Little Rock and Memphis. It was a little bitty town and that's where my mom was from, and she's one of seven kids. A lot of my cousins still live there and I had a younger cousin, Stephanie, who was just a year younger than me, that lived right down our dirt road. She and I were always together. When I started kindergarten, I would come home and we would play school, and I would teach Stephanie what I had learned. So she was reading before she went to kindergarten, which at that time was not normal. Kindergartners today are expected to know so much more going into kindergarten than we were in 1980. So, I feel like I've always kind of been a teacher. But when I started school, I was a chemistry major intending to go to pharmacy school. I had an uncle in Harrison who owned a pharmacy, and I worked in his pharmacy the summer after my freshman year. That's pretty much what I thought I was going to do until about my junior year, and I realized I didn't want to go to pharmacy school. I had started doing undergraduate research with the biochemist in the chemistry department, and I really enjoyed biochemistry. I hated biology until I took biochemistry, because most of my biology classes had been focused on the organismal level, what I call the creepy-crawlies, and that's just not what I was interested in. I really liked biochem, so I decided to go to graduate school and get a Ph.D. in biochemistry. I applied to graduate schools and I got into all the schools that I applied to, and I wound up going to Emory, in Atlanta, into a Ph.D. program in Biochemistry, Cell and Developmental Biology. I realized partway through my second year there that doing basic science research was really not what I wanted to do. I just was not happy. I left Emory with my masters [degree], and my husband and I moved back to Arkansas, and I did the nontraditional certification process through the Arkansas Department of Education. I taught high school science for a couple of years, and then we moved back to Conway because he wanted to get his MBA, and he got a

graduate student position through the housing department. He was a residence coordinator in Arkansas Hall, so he lived in Arkansas Hall while he was in graduate school, and the biology department hired me to teach here. So, that's when I first started back at UCA as an instructor.

MG [00:20:16] What made you decide your junior year that you didn't want to go to pharmacy school anymore?

LH [00:20:25] I worked at my uncle's pharmacy. I had grown up with him not being able to come to family events because he always had to work. He always had to be at the pharmacy. That just wasn't the kind of life that I wanted, and I didn't really know anything but retail pharmacy. I didn't know about other options really in pharmacy [at the time], but I still think I made the right decision.

MG [00:20:56] What was your undergraduate biochemistry research about?

LH [00:21:03] My professor's name was Pat Drives, and she was investigating a cancer drug called Mitomycin C. We were investigating the mechanism of how the drug actually worked. We knew that the drug would get between the DNA bases and disrupt the structure of the DNA to prevent the cells from being able to replicate and divide, but there wasn't a lot known about the thermodynamics at the actual quantum level. Pat wanted to start a computer modeling program and add that to her lab, so I was trying to learn the software, called Amber, and it was using a Unix computer in a Unix platform. I was having to learn a little bit of the Unix language and figure out how to, from scratch, basically build this molecule and do a bunch of computer stuff. And honestly, I didn't really feel like I got very far. I did a lot of work, but most of it was just figuring out the software in the program, and I made a manual basically with everything that I had learned in all of the steps for the student who took on the project after me.

MG [00:22:37] Do you think being in the Honors College helped you get into graduate schools?

LH [00:22:44] Oh, absolutely.

MG [00:22:50] How come?

LH [00:23:00] Well, I think the way that you think in honors: thinking in an interdisciplinary way, being able to think about problems from multiple perspectives, and also just having the practice of speaking and talking about what you think and talking through your ideas - and the grad school interviews were tough - but I definitely think honors helped prepare me for being able to, hold my own and stay calm and talk about, work through the answers to their questions.

MG [00:23:30] What was your graduate school experience like doing research? Can you kind of walk me through what it was like?

LH [00:23:38] The way it worked at Emory is in your first year, you did rotations. What that means is, you looked at all of the faculty in the division and you talked to them to try and figure out who you wanted to spend some time with. So, you spent six or eight weeks in three different labs kind of learning their techniques, learning their projects, kind of getting your feet wet with the lab work. And then at the end of your first year, you were supposed to pick a lab that you were going to join.

MG [00:24:14] Which lab did you end up picking, and why did you choose it?

LH [00:24:17] So I picked a lab that was working, again, on cancer research. A sort of formative event in my undergraduate career was my mom's mom. My grandmother got ovarian cancer when I was, I guess, probably a freshman, and it was a pretty long, drawn out, difficult process. And she

died the Thanksgiving of my sophomore year, and so I was really determined to do cancer research. That's what I wanted to do.

MG [00:24:51] I'm so sorry about that, by the way.

LH [00:24:53] Oh, thank you. It's the college kid age where that happens, you know? And so as a professor, I've always tried to be really sensitive to that because I know how hard that can be on folks. And I really get irritated when some professors are like, "Oh, the third grandmother died this year," some professors are just kind of asses about it. I joined the lab that was doing cancer research, but they were trying to activate the body's immune system to attack the cancer cells and so it was a therapeutic vaccine lab. And I worked using a breast cancer model. I grew breast cancer cells in culture and we were trying to basically take the breast cancer cells and add a molecule back on the surface of the cells that the T cells in the immune system would recognize, and it would activate the T cells to then mount an immune response to the cancer. And so, I was growing human cells. I was also growing mouse cells. And, as part of my project, I did have to give little white mice cancer. And then, we basically we gave them, the normal a shot of the normal cancer cells, and then they would start developing tumors and then we would give them the injection that had the immune response thing added to it and try to see if that made any difference in their tumor development. Because I left at the end of my second year, I didn't really get really far into my research, but I, of course, did write a master's thesis about that process.

MG [00:26:53] So where did you go to get your doctorate? Was it at UCA?

LH [00:27:00] I did, I did the interdisciplinary interdisciplinary program and leadership [at UCA].

MG [00:27:06] So just out of curiosity, I'm a biology major, and I get asked this question all the time. So I'm sure since you were doing biochemistry research, how often were you asked if you were going to be a doctor?

LH [00:27:22] That question is not as common in the chemistry department. As a chem undergrad major, I really wasn't asked that a whole lot. But, in the biology department? Absolutely. Yeah, yeah [nods]

MG [00:27:40] What made you decide to focus more on the research side initially?

LH [00:27:46] Well, I really didn't have any interest in going to medical school. I had decided I didn't want to go to pharmacy school, so it just sort of seemed like a natural fit. I enjoyed the undergraduate research that I did, though I wasn't really in a wet lab because I was doing modeling. So, I spent most of my undergraduate research in front of a computer. It just kind of seemed like the next step - I thought going to graduate school and getting that Ph.D. - would allow me to basically come back and teach at a university like UCA. I pretty much decided at that point that teaching on the university level was really what I wanted to do, it would allow me to be active in the sciences, but also kind of play to my strengths, which by that point I had really figured out was teaching.

MG [00:28:56] Were your parents supportive of your decision to teach after you got to UCA? Because I remember you mentioned that you said they were hoping you would not become a teacher.

LH [00:29:10] They were always supportive. When I decided to leave Emory, I remember we had to take what are called written exams, competency exams. I think we did that and, either in

December or January of our second year, it was these two full days of questions, and you would have to write out your answers and you had to pass the exam to be able to move forward in the program. And I remember when I finished my exam, I called my mom and I was just a basket case because I just realized that I just really couldn't see myself doing this for the next three or four years and to finish the Ph.D. I passed my written exams, that was not an issue. I just wasn't happy and I was ready to quit. Then, my mom kind of taught me off the ledge and was like: "You've been there for a year and a half. You need to at least finish your masters. You don't want to leave with nothing." And I called back and talked to my undergraduate research advisor, and she was saying the same thing. And so I talked to folks at Emory and ultimately worked it out where I could finish my masters that last semester, get enough of my research in and get my thesis done.

MG [00:30:52] So when you got your doctorate, did you do interdisciplinary research or can you explain to me that process?

LH [00:30:59] Yeah. So in my Ph.D. program, at the time I had been, I was the first resident master. They call them academic directors now in the STEM residential college. So that opened in 2010 and I had already been teaching biology. My family and I decided to apply for that job and I got it. So, my family and I lived in Arkansas Hall for the second time as a resident master. It was me, my husband, and our kids, and our basset hound. And during that time, UCA was taking Rwandan presidential scholars into this stem residential college, and I got to know those first three students really well, and we were doing all kinds of science education outreach as part of the STEM program. And one of the students came to me and asked me if I could help them plan some activities that they could do this summer after their sophomore year when they had to go back to Rwanda for their summer internship. And I was like, "Well, yeah, I could do that. Or maybe we could just study abroad and we could all go together." And so that's where the study abroad idea came from. And out of that study abroad experience group, my research interest that I ultimately

turned into my dissertation in the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program. So we were introduced to a village in Rwanda that was really impoverished. They just didn't have access to basically anything. And we had started some service projects with the village, but I wanted to extend that. And so I did an environmental leadership, environmental justice kind of project where we were building a cleaner, more fuel efficient, more wood burning, efficient stoves in the village. And so I tested those out with my dissertation, comparing them to their traditional cooking methods and then tied all that into Martha Nussbaum's "Capabilities Approach," and then related that all back to environmental leadership. It was really kind of multifaceted, but it turned out really well.

MG [00:33:25] Was that your first experience seeing poverty on that kind of scale?

LH [00:33:34] For sure. Growing up in Devalls Bluff was a little bitty town. There were lots of folks that I would say were living in poverty, you know? In Duval, I guess in the school district, it was probably 60 or 70 percent African-American, and my dad was a bus driver. And so I remember when I was little, I would often ride the bus with him, and of course, there were sort of black parts of town and white parts of town. And there is poverty in both, of course. But the more extreme poverty that I remember seeing tended to be in the black parts of town, kind of out in the out in the "boonies," as we would say.

MG [00:34:31] What was the most challenging part of your research in Rwanda?

LH [00:34:36] The most challenging part was the funding and getting there because, it's not like I could just, every month, pop over and do interviews or whatever, you know. I mean, it's a major undertaking just to get there. And it's, at least twenty five hundred dollars for a round trip plane ticket. And then you've got, saying and traveling and all the expenses associated with it. And so, I was really only able to go during the summer and spend two or three weeks there. So I did a pilot

study in 2015. We had been planning to do the study abroad again in 2015, but that was the year there was the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which is about 3000 miles away from Rwanda. But the UK decided we couldn't go so we can study abroad. So I went on my own and did a pilot study that summer, and I guess I was there for about two weeks. And then the next year, in 2016, I went back to expand the study and gather all the rest of my data and do interviews and things.

MG [00:35:48] So I looked up what your capstone project was, and saw that it was on genetic engineering, which is pretty cool because I am wanting to do genetic research. Can you tell me about your capstone project?

LH [00:36:01] Yeah, basically it was more of an extended literature review. I did a lot of reading. I did a lot of research that way and then sort of developed my own argument and personal stance toward genetic engineering. And of course, at the time, it was pretty new. there wasn't there wasn't a lot known. There wasn't a lot that had been done. Much of it was theoretical at that point. So it was really more of a theoretical project. What do I think would be OK to do? What did I think would not be OK to do from a genetic engineering perspective?

MG [00:36:51] I know Jennifer Doudna, the professor that created CRISPR, got the Nobel Prize for it last year, but was it developed by the time you were writing your thesis. *[LH shook head]* Were you for it or against it?

LH [00:37:12] I was for genetic engineering to a certain extent. So, I was not in favor of altering the germline. I was fine with genetic engineering for things like disease treatment, cancer treatment, curing cystic fibrosis, those kinds of things. But I was certainly not OK with thinking about altering the germline because I just felt like that got into all kinds of a slippery slope, ethical issues that

honestly people still talk about, right, like designer babies. And, those are all questions that people still ask today.

MG [00:38:09] Were you really stressed about your capstone project?

LH [00:38:13] I was because that was the last semester of my senior year. I was also doing grad school interviews, and for Ph.D. programs, you had to travel to all those schools and participate in their interview days and all of that. I was trying to do that and finish. I was taking physical chemistry that semester. And physical chemistry is a nightmare. And so, there was a lot going on and laptops weren't all that common. So I remember over spring break my parents and I - because my husband was a year ahead of me in school, during my senior year of college, he was working as a critical care nurse at the VA - So over spring break, I needed to go visit Purdue and Ohio State. And so my parents and I were planning a road trip to go do that. But I still had to write my thesis and I was like, "How am I going to do this? There's just too much going on." And we had some friends who had a computer store and they let us borrow a laptop so I could take it with me and work on writing my thesis on the trip.

MG [00:39:40] That's really nice.

LH [00:39:41] There was a lot of stress.

MG [00:39:42] I bet. Throughout your four years, describe what kind of student you were like.

Were you really stressed, or not really?

LH [00:39:53] Not really. I mean, school always came pretty naturally to me. And, I was always a pretty good student. I will say I didn't like organic chemistry and organic. Those were the first B's I

made because I just didn't care enough to work hard enough in it to make an A. But overall, I was a good student and I wasn't overly stressed most of the time.

MG [00:40:29] Once you returned to UCA as a biologist in the biology department, can you describe how the process happened, where you became when you came back into the Honors College?

LH [00:40:43] Yeah, yeah. So I taught in the biology department from 2001 to 2003 while my husband was getting his MBA, and then he got his best job offer back in Mountain Home at the hospital there. So we moved back to Mountain Home. I had had my oldest son at that point, so I was basically a stay at home mom for three years. But I realized I was a much better mother when I had a job, and he was tired of small town hospitals. So he got a job at Ames, so we were moving back to Conway. And so in 2006, the biology department rehired me, so I was really fortunate that they were willing to take me back. And I guess maybe it was in 2012 or 2013. Trisha had reached out to me about teaching an honors class once a year, so this was about the time they hired Ellen. And because of the current tenure guidelines, when Ellen was hired, she had to get tenure through the geography department. And the only way to do that was for her to teach geography classes and be active in the department, which meant she couldn't teach a full load of honors classes so they were kind of borrowing faculty. And so Tricia and the Dean of Natural Sciences came to an agreement that he would loan honors a faculty member every year in exchange for the course that Ellen was teaching in geography. So, that's how I started getting back involved in honors, and I taught Senior Seminar two or three times, and then I taught Core III, two or three times. And then in 2017 is when Tricia was writing the proposal for the University Scholars program and I was on the University Honors Council, and Tricia basically asked me if the program was approved, if I would want to be the director of that program, and I said "Yeah." So for the first two years, I was split 50-50 between biology and honors. And then the third year I was interim associate dean, so I was

full time in honors and then we did the search. And so now I'm full time or the department is achieving.

MG [00:43:18] Did you enjoy teaching biology or honors classes more?

LH [00:43:25] Oh, they're both different. So I really enjoy teaching cell biology, but I had done it for 15 years or whatever. It was just getting a little boring, honestly, and I was really excited about the idea to teach something different and kind of use different parts in my brain, especially since I was doing the interdisciplinary leadership. Ph.D. I was really excited about sort of engaging back in more interdisciplinary courses. And, some of those bigger questions that we talk about in honors. And so, the education and trajectory was just sort of making it a perfect fit for me to come back in.

MG [00:44:14] You mentioned something that I thought was really interesting. I wrote it down. You said that, "You thought that you were a better, better mother when you had a job." And for me personally, I've been told "You can't be a mom and be a professor." Can you relay how you've been able to manage a successful career and be a mother?

LH [00:44:39] I was never one of the mothers that would say my kids are my whole world. I personally don't think that's a healthy attitude because I don't want my children to feel like I am living through them. I want them to know that I love them and support them. But they have to live their own life. They have to fight their own battles. They have to learn their own lessons. And when I was home all the time, I missed, I missed adult conversation. I've missed engaging with the more intellectual part of my brain, and even those three years that I was a stay at home mom, I really wasn't even a full time stay at home mom. So in those three years I taught adjunct classes at a mountain home in chemistry. I did a long term maternity sub in math at the Mountain Home High

School. I started selling Mary Kay and was, like doing Mary Kay parties and those kinds of things like, I just needed something else to do besides, just play with toddlers.

MG [00:46:12] I understand.

LH [00:46:13] Yeah. It can be a challenge. I think the most important thing when you're trying to say, "OK, I'm going to be a working mother," is you really have to recognize what that means and that having it all doesn't mean that everything is going to happen all at the same time. So you may have a job and you may have children. And yes, some days the kitchen may be clean and some days it might not. And some days the laundry might be done, and some days it might not. like, you don't have to do everything every day. And then I also think it's really important to have a supportive partner. Ed and I have been divorced now for almost 10 years, and he was a supportive partner in a lot of ways. But we were living in Conway and he was working in Little Rock. And, he would basically get up in the mornings, put his scrubs on and go to work. And so, I was the one who was getting the kids up and feeding them and getting them ready and taking them to school and doing all of the school day things, and would take them to doctor's visits and they got sick and whatever. That can be exhausting. So, those are just the kinds of things that you need to think about. And also recognize that it's OK to ask for help. And if you can afford it, have someone come in and help clean the house? And, it's OK to drive through McDonald's for the third time that week.

MG [00:48:01] Thank you for sharing that with me. That was very interesting to hear. So as a current faculty member who also has the experience of being like I was a student at a time, what are some things that, looking back, you wish you did differently.

LH [00:48:20] Yeah. Well, I mean, I think the biggest thing for me is I wish I had been more engaged with the honors community outside of class when I was a student. I just really did it like I

said other than, lunch and dinner in the cafeteria or whatever. And so, I listen to Cindy talk about all of the really close friends that she has and all the memories that she has from hanging out in the forum and being an R.A. and Wingo and those kinds of things. And I do, I regret that I did not take full advantage of that.

MG [00:49:00] Did you have mentors or tough talks, opportunities like that that we have now?

LH [00:49:08] So the big little program was a thing. And so I remember the summer before my freshman year getting a letter from my honor's big and he and I are still friends. He and I are friends on Facebook. And when we had Norb's Memorial Service, he was here and we got to visit, then. And it's kind of funny. I remember who my big was, but I don't remember who my little was. So maybe I wasn't a very good big, or maybe they just weren't interested. I can't remember how all that worked out, but soapboxes were still a thing. And then there was also a program series called High Tables, and that was more where different professors from around campus or one of the honors professors would talk about something that was current or that they were working on or whatever?

MG [00:50:09] Did you attend Challenge Week all four years?

LH [00:50:16] I'm sure I did, though, I honestly can't remember what the themes were. I'm sure I did, I just don't remember much about that.

MG [00:50:33] So I'm looking at the form that everyone had to fill out, and you mentioned that Norb asked you to be one of the senior banquet speakers. Can you kind of tell me about that?

LH [00:50:44] Yeah. So I was really surprised when he asked me to do that because I wasn't sort of in the core honors community. There was a time when I almost dropped out of honors. I guess it

was after my sophomore year going into my junior year because I was a science major and a lot of the junior seminars and things that were offered just didn't appeal to me. And so I went and talked to Norm and he was like, "Well, there's a really easy solution to this, and we can just do an independent study for your junior seminar." And why I chose this topic, I have absolutely no idea. But I did a junior seminar on health care, and it was basically looking at the different kinds of health insurance options and their pros and cons. And there was a lot in the news about, what's the better option for how you want to do all of the health insurance? And health care's always been an issue in the US. So, I did this whole project with him, and he invited me to come speak and basically give a Core I guest lecture on what I had learned through that project. Then, I took his world religions class as a senior seminar. Norm and I always had a good relationship. And so when he asked me to be the speaker, I mean, I was surprised in a lot of ways. But then I guess it kind of made sense in some other ways. And I remember that sort of the opening line of my senior seminar address was something like, when people out there on campus outside of Honor's found out I was in honors, they would often say, "You're in honors? You're not weird enough to be in honors. " And my reaction to them was, "That's not what it's about." And then I went from there and I can't remember what else I said, but that was sort of how I opened it.

MG [00:53:10] Do you think being in honors changed your worldly perspective or perspective on education or both?

LH [00:53:20] It really did, especially from a religious perspective, I was raised in a really conservative religious organization. I mean, the Church of Christ is known for being really conservative and and I had gone on a medical mission trip this summer after my freshman year to Guyana. And it was a dental trip. But the way that the trip was structured is that the folks couldn't see the dentist until they did a Bible study. And yeah, and I remember being really uncomfortable about that. And there were folks on the trip who were yeah, because basically our goal as the ones

doing the Bible study was, to present the Church of Christ view of the five steps of salvation and try to encourage people to be baptized right then and there. And I remember folks sort of bragging about how many people they had gotten to be baptized, then I was like, This is just so uncomfortable. And what I remember visiting with an old woman and I think she was maybe Hindu. I can't remember exactly. And we were talking about her experiences. And what I was supposed to say is the Bible study leader, and I remember her saying that her son had passed away. And if she believed what I believed, then he would be in hell. And there is no way that I can look her in the eyes and say she was wrong. I mean, I was candid and I remember writing about that in one of my journals with Norb. And he basically praised me for saying, good job, on that empathy and really that internal struggle, because that's how we grow. And I tell him, I tell students all the time that for me, the lessons I learned in honors continued to sort of be revealed to me over time, years after I left. I honestly, I wish looking back as an undergrad that I had been more open to challenging ideas and reevaluating my worldview than I was, I had sort of taken baby steps toward that, I think. But it took a long time for me to kind of continue that journey.

MG [00:56:04] Gotcha. Was there any set of readings in particular that you still remember to this day resonating with you? Or was it just the overall experience you think?

LH [00:56:16] I remember really struggling. I think maybe it was in two or three I can't remember. We had to read *The Invisible Man* and not just an excerpt from it, but we were supposed to read the full book. And I remember really being troubled by that book and how the narrator was treated and that was it was just really, really hard for me to read. And I remember talking to my mom about it and and, she was basically like, "Well, if it's causing you to be that uncomfortable or whatever, I just don't think he should have to read it." And so I think back to that and just, how can I be empathetic to students when they're struggling with readings but also encouraging them? There's a

reason we chose this: can you trust the process and trust the messy middle that there's going to be a reason and you're going to see the reason on the other side?

MG [00:57:21] So I like to ask people this in memory of Core I. What's your definition of what the self is?

LH [00:57:31] Oh, that's a good question. And interestingly, I can't remember that being a huge topic or a huge focus of our core one. It may have been, but like I said, I remember it more being a class about contemporary issues. But the search for self may have been all wrapped up in that. But if it was, it didn't seem to be as centrally presented or else my memories are just bad. I think the self is something that we are constantly engaging with and that is that we're constantly developing ourselves through a combination of our experiences, our culture, our values, and that it's something that as long as we're alive and growing and engaging, that it's changing as we change.

MG [00:58:32] So can you kind of touch on how technology has changed the honors college since you can look back and see back when you were born and now?

LH [00:58:43] Well, for sure. I mean, the whole application process is entirely different with access. And all of that and I when I came into honors as a professor, I was overwhelmed with age, sex and everything that is built into that system and all that it can be. You and I still have a text ratio and like, how do I find this? And it's like, I know I can, but there's too many tabs and links and I get lost. So that's a huge thing. I think right now the ability to, do what we're doing and zoom in and, those options that we have are really helpful because I mean, we just, back in the day it was you were in class or you weren't and those are your only options, you know? I still remember getting my first email address, and that was not when I was a freshman. The internet really came to be a big thing during my lifetime. So, yeah, technology has changed a lot. And I do worry.

Sometimes I worry about the distraction that technology can have in class. I encourage my students to put their phones away and put them on do not disturb, so they can really engage in what we're doing in class because I mean, I'm just as connected to my cellphone as anybody else is. And it's a huge distraction. And so you, can you force yourself to either turn it over, say you can't see it every time it lights up or, you know? I think that's one of the biggest challenges for students these days, right?

MG [01:00:32] I agree. I watched a capstone project on a documentary, and it had us watch it just to kind of learn a little bit about the honors and the Honors College. And in here, including a scene of Parents Day where Norb was doing a skit. And I'm just curious, did your parents go to that or was that a tradition while you were in the honors college?

LH [01:00:59] It was. And I imagine I imagine they did. they would have had to have taken like personal days because they were both teachers over. And so I honestly don't remember. I remember going and I remember at least one year Norb been doing the Grecian Urn. I'm not 100 percent sure that my parents were there. I know they came to the senior banquet and they came to my thesis presentation.

MG [01:01:38] Do you have anything, any stories or anything that we didn't touch on that you'd like to tell me about?

LH [01:01:50] the only thing that comes to mind is, I guess it was after I was back at UCA, but before I was really teaching in honors, there was some kind of honors event in the McCaslin Ballroom and I went and I was standing in line in the lobby and I guess my my hair was in a ponytail or something and and Norb came out behind me and kind of pulled my hair and I turned

around and saw him and he said, "I knew it was you because of your ponytail or something like that." I just thought that was really sweet. That's about the only other thing that comes to mind.

MG [01:02:34] Thank you. OK, so I'm going to say something like a short clip to state that the interviews are ending. So thank you for your time, Leah Horton, this concludes our interview. If you don't mind, can you send me the Deed of Gift you signed and is there anything that you're wanting me to redact that we talked about? If I just end the meeting or the recording, just upload to my computer?

LH [01:03:04] Yes, when you start the recording? Did you say saved to the computer or say to the cloud? Do you remember?

MG [01:03:11] Not for sure.

LH [01:03:12] Well, if you saved it to the cloud, you'll get an email from Zoom saying your recording is ready. Otherwise, if you send it to your computer, you'll get a little bar pop out that day that says basically that it's saving in progress and that it'll tell you when it's complete.

MG [01:03:28] Perfect. Thank you so much. This was fun.

LH [01:03:33] Thanks, Mary. Bye bye, see you later.