
INTERVIEW WITH KRISTY DEWALL, CLASS OF 2001, 2003, AND 2007

Heather Paraday 00:01

This is Heather Paraday here with Kristy DeWall on Friday, July 8, 2022. We are going to discuss a bit about their time here at Illinois State University for the alumni oral history project so that all of those who listen can learn about the history of the campus and its students. So Kristy, before we begin, do you want to give a little background on, like, where you're from, that kind of stuff?

Kristy DeWall 00:24

Oh, sure, wow. Well, I'm from originally Springfield but I was raised in foster care all throughout the state of Illinois and then ended up at Illinois State for about - oh my gosh, what, in 1997? - so yeah, I lived here for 16 years following that, and then left and now I recently came back last year. So yeah.

Heather Paraday 00:50

So just kind of jumping right in, I know you said that you grew up in the foster care system. So, like, if you want to talk about that, like how that impacted you growing up and your journey?

Kristy DeWall 01:00

Sure, that would be a whole other interview and a whole other book that I'm actually writing, so I'm going to keep it brief, because it's so much information. I would say primarily, everything's relative. And so this is a question I would get a lot, like, what was it like growing up in foster care? And I asked, but what was it like having a parent or a biological parent or two parents or mom and dad or whatever you had, you know, it's all relative to your situation. So to me, it was normal and it really instilled a sense of resiliency in me and made me a stronger person, made me more determined. And, yeah, so, it was just my life. There was some major bumps and things in there, which I've written about and presented about, but it led me to ISU eventually. So that's not a bad thing.

Heather Paraday 01:57

All right. So then you attend the ISU. Why did you attend college?

Kristy DeWall 02:04

Sure. So, mainly because people said I couldn't. I was a really stubborn foster kid and kid growing up and I typically - you know, ideally, in a foster care setting and system, you have people that are mentors who are helping you, and I feel like, unfortunately, some of this is gonna sound depressing, but I had people that weren't as supportive and they were like, well, you can't do this. I wanted to go to Christian College, and I know we'll probably get to that, and they were like, you can't do that. That's not a thing - like, you can't, you have to go to a public school because you're a foster kid, and I was like, I'm gonna do what I want. So I mainly went to college because no one

else in my family had as well, not a single person, anyone I could think of, in terms of my biological family. And so I was always that kid that was like, well, whatever you tell me I can't do I'm gonna go do it. And so then that's really the main reason initially why I did also join the Air National Guard. So while at - my time at ISU as an undergrad did coincide with that six-year period that I was in the in the guard, but that's, you know, down the road.

Heather Paraday 03:16

Alrighty. And then what was your major that you picked when you first enrolled at college? And then, like, why?

Kristy DeWall 03:22

Sure, it was secondary English education. I had to really think back on that. I thought I changed my major a lot, like, this is a conversation we have in my current work about [how] your major doesn't determine your career. And yeah, definitely, I was never a secondary English education teacher. And I did change my major eventually, but it started as secondary English education because I loved writing and I loved English and literature and wanted to teach that. But that changed.

Heather Paraday 03:53

So did you - when did you change it and what did you change it to?

Kristy DeWall 03:56

Sure. So I had some classes, I changed it, I transferred to ISU is a sophomore, and I took a class about Shakespeare and I was like, oh, heck, no. I hated Shakespeare and it was horrible but I was like, there's no way I'm gonna teach this so I decided to go a different route and changed it to print journalism communication because I liked the writing portion more. So I dropped off the teaching and decided to just write.

Heather Paraday 04:32

And then you said that you attended Lincoln Christian College prior to transferring to Illinois State. So why did you transfer?

Kristy DeWall 04:40

Sure. Honestly, so I remember the exact moment. I wrote this down because I remember the exact moment that I decided to leave. It was I was filling out my financial aid application, my FAFSA for the next year, in my dorm room, and it was like, are you going to return to the same school? and I was like, no, I don't want to do that. I'm gonna go to ISU. So I knew that it was - you know, so I was living in Springfield, Lincoln is a little further away, and then another half hour north is ISU, why not? For no other reason, honestly, except that it was the next closest town, which is kind of crazy in retrospect. But I also - it just, I wasn't around the right type of people at LCC at the time. It was, you know, nearing the late 90s and I had a lot of great friends but they also were very much in that mentality of "love the sinner, hate the sin" and I was in the closet then and so it just wasn't a great environment for me and I was really at this crossroads in my life which carried with me to ISU. But yeah, I was just like, I'm gonna leave, I'm gonna go somewhere else, so.

Heather Paraday 05:56

And then, because you said that you transferred in and that you were still in the closet, so then how did that go into your experience at ISU, then?

Kristy DeWall 06:05

Yeah, it was a little rough at first. LCC - it was a really small private school and [ISU] was a shock, it was huge. I felt like a little fish in a big pond. I had - you know, it felt a little overwhelming at first, and I remember vividly the first time I went to a PRIDE meeting. I remember Barb Dallinger being there, and thank God because she was very happy and smiley and welcoming and everyone else I thought was scary. I just remember walking up to the Student Services Building, I think it was the third floor, and I walked up there and I walked past and I walked past - I probably walked past the room four, five times before I finally just went in because I was terrified. And it was a rough transition for me because I'd never been in an environment that was like, you can be a Christian and you can be gay. And I was like, wait what? Who are these people? What are they saying? And so that's what I found initially at ISU.

Heather Paraday 07:10

Yeah. Did you think that, like, atmosphere of - besides their group of PRIDE, did you find that the student body was more accepting of it? Or was it still very much closed off, or - ?

Kristy DeWall 07:22

I think it was a rough time. I think it was a big period of transition, because back in '97, it was the spring of '97, Ellen DeGeneres had a big coming out episode on TV, which I still have on VHS as it recorded, and that was a really huge moment for me. I watched it when I was at Lincoln Christian College in the lobby and recorded it on a VCR. I was like, I don't care who's here. I'm watching this, this is happening. And yeah, so going back to ISU, though, they were great supportive people. They were great supportive staff and faculty and then there were not so great and supportive people and faculty/staff and they were some really rough times. But I look at that period of time as really a time of transition, not just for ISU in the student body and awareness, but to kind of nationally, things were really moving in a better direction. It was just moving a little slowly maybe from my perspective.

Heather Paraday 08:27

Okay. Were there any, like, significant people that impacted you, like on campus here?

Kristy DeWall 08:36

Yes, I wrote down four people. I've always had my top five, and these are individuals that I came in contact with in the Division of Student Affairs. I have wonderful faculty that I also came in contact with, but my involvement as a student and a student leader really led to these involvements. And I already mentioned Barb Dallinger, who just recently retired. And it's funny because now I work in the Bone Student Center, but when I met her she was working in the Bone Student Center and I'm like, we just missed each other by a few months, like, it took me 19 years to finally get here as a staff. And so Barb, Barb was like ISU's mom, for everyone. It was not just about the LGBTQ students, it was really anyone and everyone that knew Barb. Danielle Miller-Schuster, who is still here and works in the President's Office. It's hard to believe she was only a few years older than me, but she was. Her passion and enthusiasm for students and for ISU in general was so contagious, so she was a big part of that. Jill Benson in the

Dean of Students. I was a student worker in Housing at one point, and my friend Robyn - she was my, well, she's my friend now - she's been retired from ISU for 20 years, but she started working at ISU 50 years ago this August, which is insane. She was also a pivotal person, mentor, all four of them [were] mentors for me. Those were really meaningful relationships that led me then later to work in Student Affairs.

Heather Paraday 10:19

What - were there any, like, historic events that took place while you were on campus?

Kristy DeWall 10:25

I was - I ended up being on campus for ten years, because I got my undergrad and then I immediately went to grad school and I took a year off and went to grad school again. But I'm trying to really focusing this information on my undergraduate and that's kind of how I framed looking at questions. Matthew Shepard was murdered, and he - that was in Wyoming, it was a very well-known hate crime that happened. He was a gay young man. And that was a big thing for us on campus. It was scary. And then a few years later, when I was PRIDE president, we had - it's not national, but it was a local issue where there was a straight theater student, he was also assaulted because of the shirt he was wearing and his assailants thought he was gay and so they attacked him. And we quickly organized a rally on the Quad, which at the time was like the largest rally that Quad ever had, and the community really came together. And that was 2000 and things were really moving, I think, in a better direction since then. But those are the two really huge things that stick out to me and they're, of course, both tragedies. But I think that they were important for our progress, honestly, from that point on as a campus and as a country.

Heather Paraday 11:55

Okay. And then I know you made mention that you were the president of PRIDE, how did you go from walking past the room so many times, you know, to being, like, probably the most heavily involved person in it?

Kristy DeWall 12:08

Sure. I, you know, I was very passionate about educating people and really putting a face to an issue. And whether that was as a Christian, as someone in the military, as someone that was LGBT, that's just, I felt very strongly about that. And what's interesting, and I hadn't thought about this in a hundred years, but when I was PRIDE president and speaking on campus, we used to go to classes. [It was] called the Speaker's Bureau, it would be like four or five of us from PRIDE and we'd go to classrooms and students would ask us questions. We would educate, we would do presentations, which kind of seems a little crazy now, and we were also on display. And at the same time I was in the Air National Guard and serving under Don't Ask, Don't Tell¹ and I remember being interviewed and I remember being on campus, being so out, but at the same time having that fear tucked away, like if anyone saw this from Springfield I could get kicked out of the military just like that, like without question. And so I think that was kind of what drove me though to doing it, because I just wanted people to know like, hey, you know, I'm not that different than you. But back then people - I mean, I got harassed, I got chased, I got called insults. We - I mean, we - horrible - I don't want this all to focus on obviously negative things that happened but there were some scary things

¹ "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was issued under Department of Defense Directive 1304.26 on December 21, 1993, and was in effect from February 28, 1994 until September 20, 2011. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted service members or applicants while also barring openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons from military service.

that went down in the community and on campus. And so for me it was just we kept fighting, and we kept, you know, trying to educate people so that those things wouldn't continue.

Heather Paraday 13:59

Do you have any stories of when you would go and educate people? And how, you know, you probably saw, like, many people that you're speaking to just be, like, a light bulb went off and they're like, oh! Anything like that?

Kristy DeWall 14:11

I mean, there's probably so many instances that I don't specifically remember, but, you know, students would thank us, they would contact us afterwards. They would, you know, commend us for being brave, and we're like, all we're doing is talking about our lives. But I think that that's what people needed to see. And the same thing happened in my dorm. And I look back on our time there, and it sounds really hokey, but I was probably the first gay person that a lot of the girls on my dorm floor came in contact with, and we were all so close that it was like maybe I had a hand in, you know, helping open their eyes to things and maybe because of that they became an ally. They became an advocate as well, just by [us] being who we are and educating people and not being scared, because it was scary at times.

Heather Paraday 15:12

So you said you live in the dorms? What dorm did you live in when you were on campus?

Kristy DeWall 15:15

Oh, man. Sure, I jumped around there for a while. I loved living on campus, I wanted that full experience. I started in Tri Towers and then I went away for military training, so I only spent a semester there. And when I came back, if I remember correctly, I lived - I wanted to have my own room because I had a situation where - when this happened, my second year at ISU - you know, well, back then what would happen is they would pair us with a roommate and then they would send you, like, a card, I think, like ISU Housing, and they'd give you your roommate's information, your future roommate's, like, name and address and phone number. And so that way you could write each other letters - I almost said something - I'm not kidding - and you can kind of get to know each other before you moved in. I swear that happened. And if it didn't, then I made it up. But I remember this one roommate I was supposed to have, you know, we're writing, like, pen pals back and forth - oh my gosh, I'm dating myself - and I felt comfortable letting this person know that I was gay because I'm like, well, you know, it was such a, like a [vocalization: uncertain noise] topic, because it's like, I felt uncomfortable disclosing but at the same time, it's like, well, you know, just whatever, you have a boyfriend, okay, well, then I should be able to talk about having a girlfriend. And I remember once she found out she went to Housing and immediately tried to change rooms. Well, at that point I already knew who she was, so it was just awkward because we ended up in Dunn but I, as a blessing in disguise, ended up with my own room. So we called it Fun Dunn One and I'm still friends with the girls that were on that floor. And so Fun Dunn One was our floor and I think I was in on that floor for like three years. So that's where I lived. And I love central campus, and now it's gone. But that's where my drag career started.

Heather Paraday 17:22

What?

Kristy DeWall 17:24

So - and I'm moving - that kind of could be one of the humorous things, but I don't know - they were such a great group of friends that one day they were like, you should do a show or you should - you know, I loved the theater, I loved, like, trying to make people laugh, basically, and that's where my drag persona was created. And we would do these shows, we'd make fliers and put them in the bathrooms so that people could come and the girls would, like, line up on the floor on both sides and sit and then I would just perform. Like, what is this! I remember one show, I think I just gotten dumped, and then my shoes broke the same day. I know, it's so weird, I can't even explain it, but we called the show "Broken Heart, Broken Shoes". And I've been doing drag now for 23 years as a result of my 1999 Fun Dunn One shows at ISU.

Heather Paraday 18:19

Oh my goodness, that's so exciting. I didn't know that about you.

Kristy DeWall 18:22

That's ridiculous.

Heather Paraday 18:24

So did you do a lot of drag shows in here on campus, or - ?

Kristy DeWall 18:27

Yeah, kind of. Yeah, I was in the first 14 ISU drag shows.² I think they're up to, like, 20-something now. Yeah. So that was up until when I moved away. I moved away in 2013, so yeah - ISU, the local community, I've done state and regional and national pageants, and I was, yeah, I won something one time.

Heather Paraday 18:54

That's so cool.

Kristy DeWall 18:55

In another life, but I still I still perform occasionally. Okay, I digress. Where were we?

Heather Paraday 19:04

You mentioned that you were the president of, like, PRIDE and like all that. Do you have any moments where, like, you realize, like, this something that you really enjoy doing or you wanted to continue to impact it?

² Annual PRIDE Charity Drag Shows

Kristy DeWall 19:21

Like in terms of PRIDE, or yeah, with, like - ?

Heather Paraday 19:28

Just in general.

Kristy DeWall 19:28

Sure. So one of the other - well, I kind of took that as, like, what else? What else did I do? But I did go on to talk a lot about the intersections of being a queer youth in foster care and so I did a lot of presentations and workshops about that throughout my graduate years and then I also, working with - I forget what they were called at the time but now they're the Dean of Students Office - I created Safe Zone for students. So they had just developed Safe Zone, I think it's called Safe-ish now, knowing that are we really safe from the trauma and other things that could happen? So I thought, you know what, we need - I don't - I knew a lot of peers and a lot of friends of mine that would go through this training and still want to display that Safe Zone sticker, so I did help create that. I think it was in an internship with the Dean of Students. And yeah -

Heather Paraday 20:28

So how did you get involved with the Dean of Students when you were here in undergrad?

Kristy DeWall 20:33

Well, mainly through my involvement with PRIDE. From there, you know, you're involved in SGA, the Student Government Association. From there, I got involved with Leadershape and some other leadership-type of things just as someone that was involved - and to me, that was, yeah, your education is very important. An academic side is obviously very important, but when I look back on my years at ISU, like, as a student, my involvement as a student leader made all the difference, and I think - well, so, once upon a time they also brought back Homecoming Court for students and I was on the ISU Homecoming Court 2001 with a bunch of my friends who were also student leaders and involved and it was just a hoot. I said it was a hoot. Yeah, I just - through those peers, through those relationships, and through the mentors, it was like, once one of them got a hold of you and they recruited you for all these different activities - it was the highlight definitely of my undergraduate time, for sure.

Heather Paraday 21:44

So what other RSOs [Registered Student Organizations] or student, like, anything else that you were involved in with your time?

Kristy DeWall 21:51

Yeah, so the majority of my time was PRIDE, but I was also - and it was a job, it also it felt like a full-time job - I worked for the *Vidette*, the *Daily Vidette*, back when it was - I think I skipped ahead, but back when it was a daily printed newspaper, that was an amazing experience for me and I did that for several years. But you know, my entire undergraduate, once I started working there - so really, SGA, PRIDE, and the *Vidette* are my main things because I was not an athlete and I wasn't a Greek student, so yeah.

Heather Paraday 22:36

Okay, so did they overlap a lot with, like, SGA and then PRIDE and then also, like, work with the *Vidette* and writing articles and everything like that?

Kristy DeWall 22:43

Yeah, it did. But, you know, I made it work. I was busy all the time, I do remember that much. I would run down - because I lived pretty close to the *Vidette*, and I would just remember running back and forth. That really - my involvement with PRIDE and the extracurriculars was my main focus. I was a good student, though. I did well, I just, I don't know, I think that I focused more on the other stuff so much [more] than the academics but, you know, eventually it led me to what I'm doing now.

Heather Paraday 23:26

So did you continue with the *Vidette* when you went on to grad school, or - ?

Kristy DeWall 23:31

No, I had an assistantship in Housing. I was assistant residence hall coordinator. I was also, I worked with the Alternative Spring Break program as a grad assistant. I also worked in Health Promotion. So some of these things I've kind of forgotten about, but since being back on campus and working here, I'm like, oh, yeah, I did that, or oh, yeah - you forget. But yeah, I really dabbled in a lot of different stuff in grad school for the two years. I was in the - it was the College Student Personnel Administration program, and so they kind of really encourage you to have assistantships and kind of dabble in different areas of Student Affairs to see really where you want to end up or what you want to do.

Heather Paraday 24:14

So when you were a resident hall coordinator, what dorm were you in?

Kristy DeWall 24:18

I was in Hewett. Yeah, I think it was just one semester, it might have been two. Honestly, I've blocked it out. But it's funny, because just last week I had to go there for a presentation and I was assistant residence hall coordinator there during 9/11 and so I had not been back in that dorm since, like, 2001, 2002. So that was like, whoa. It's like kind of a - I don't want to say 20 years ago, but that was 20 years ago.

Heather Paraday 24:53

Yeah, because you were here for 9/11. So how did that, like, happen and how did the campus take all that?

Kristy DeWall 25:01

I only have my opinions and my experiences from what I could see and they are a little different maybe than others. Well, they're very different. The one thing I noticed more than anything that disturbed me was the backlash toward our underrepresented students and our Middle Eastern students. It was bad. There were instances of hate crimes

<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/aoh/>

and issues and words and it was not great. And that's what I remember the most and which isn't, you know, maybe a lot of people's memories. I remember people having a lot of knee-jerk reactions, and I was in the military but I didn't really have that traditional mindset or belief system that comes with that service. Mine was more like, how can you protect people, all Americans? And yeah, I'd been working in Housing, people would, they put up their flags everywhere in the window and like, we had to be like, sorry, nothing - you know, fire hazards, we can't have anything hanging from the windows, and it got a little wild. But that's really what I remember the most about that situation being in the residence hall.

Heather Paraday 26:25

All right. So did you ever work on campus when you were in undergrad? I know you briefly mentioned about your grad, but is there anything else that, like, if you worked on campus, what you did?

Kristy DeWall 26:37

Yeah, I - the *Vidette*, but I mean, you know, I already mentioned that. When I first got to ISU - and, you know, everyone that first gets to ISU, you should have this experience - I worked in in the dining center. I worked in Linkins for probably a hot minute, I don't remember a lot about that. But I worked in the dining center and then I worked in the *Vidette*. So yeah, those are my main areas and that was an amazing experience because it really put you all over campus for various reasons and in the community, even if you're covering a - different events throughout the community. So it really helped me get to know the campus and the people and the community a lot faster, I think, than if I hadn't had that job, you know, riding my bike around campus trying to get the story.

Heather Paraday 27:34

Were there any stories that you did that you remember that were so, like, impactful? Or anything like that, or just fun to write about?

Kristy DeWall 27:43

I don't remember. Oh my gosh, I don't remember, however, because I have such a poor memory. I do have a portfolio of everything I ever wrote for the *Vidette*. I still actually - yeah, at home, so I should have looked that up. But no, there's - yeah, I don't remember anything specific. I would cover what was called Take Back the Night, and I don't know if they still have that here, it was a night where all, like, women would march all over campus and in the community for sexual assault awareness and we would do it late at night. And so that was an event I always loved covering.

(28:27) And then one of the more kind of humorous [stories] is one time I decided to do a column, and me and this coworker, he - it was about getting a job, and so his argument was your GPA has to be perfect to get the right job after college. And my opposing column, you know, the side-by-side, was you need to know how to network and you need to know people. And so I was very excited about our columns being featured and then I - oh my gosh, so for some reason, this Fun Dunn One crew were bad influences on each other. I had really, really short hair back then and I decided the night before, we were all just doing crazy stuff and hanging out, and they were like, oh, we should dye your hair blonde, and so I let them dye my hair, like, platinum blonde. And I'm like, oh my gosh, and I looked like Eminem. It was so bad, it was so bad. It was just like, oh my gosh, whatever, I'm just going to get to my classes today, or, get to the *Vidette*, and then get home as quickly as I can. I probably wore a hat, I was mortified, and when I showed up to the *Vidette* that day, they're like, this is the day we're taking your picture for your column. And I was like, no! But yep, I still have that picture too, of me and my ridiculous hair for the column, so.

Heather Paraday 29:53

Goodness. So with the, *Vidette* I know, it used to be printed out, like, in paper. Did you get it out, like, every single day? I mean, was it very consistent then and then how did that? Did you guys have to - like, how quickly was turnover for you guys writing?

Kristy DeWall 30:09

Well, it's because of the *Vidette* the I learned to be a procrastinator, because you're always on a deadline and so if I didn't have a deadline for a paper or something, or, oh, you have, you know, your paper's due in six weeks at the end [of the semester], no, I'm going to wait till the night before because of the *Vidette*. And so we had strict deadlines but we got paid by the inch, which is kind of funny, you know, the column inch, and how big the story is, or how long the story is. Again, it was a great group of people that I worked with and it was a huge student staff too, because you got editing, you got the circulation, you got all of it, you know, the writers and everyone has a different type of section or, you know, specialization and what they write about. But yeah -

Heather Paraday 31:02

So where was the building at for the *Vidette* when you were here?

Kristy DeWall 31:04

It's still here. Yeah, it is. It's near the Bone Student Center parking lot. Kind of kitty corner across from it, next to a gas station. It's a tiny little building, I think it still says *Vidette* and it may still be the *Vidette*. But that's where it was back in the 90s, in the early 2000s. It's still that building, but it's not used obviously for the same exact purposes since it's not a published - printed, sorry, [paper].

Heather Paraday 31:34

Okay, so did you - when you were here with, like, grad [school] then, did you have any other jobs that you mentioned, or is that [it]?

Kristy DeWall 31:41

Ah, yeah, so mainly graduate assistantships like I already mentioned, and then I did get a second master's degree. And at that point in my life I was working full-time off campus and then I would come back to classes, night classes, if you will, like four nights a week. And then I also worked with Coffee Hound in Normal and The Coffeehouse in Normal, which are kind of close to campus and they're staples now, I think, of the campus community. But yeah, I just, apparently I just like to stay busy. I was - one or two jobs and a full-time student? Sure, no problem. Let's do this.

Heather Paraday 32:20

Yeah. So then you said that you worked off campus? What did you work off campus doing?

Kristy DeWall 32:27

Sure. So after I saw - I graduated with my first master's in 2003 and I got a job as an academic advisor at Lincoln College in Normal. And so that was about a year, a year or two, and then when I came back to ISU for my graduate, my social work degree, my MSW, I was, oh my gosh, what was I? No, I don't know. I'm like, what was I doing in grad school as an MSW? Yeah, I'm gonna have to say I don't remember except that I was a full-time student and I was also working in social work, I think, at the time.

Heather Paraday 33:16

Okay. Sounds good. So were there any professors or classes that stick out when, like, remembering your time at ISU or any events that happened? Like in classes, anything?

Kristy DeWall 33:30

Yeah, well, there's good and bad - only one bad experience out of the whole time, which is great - but then, mainly good. I went back and looked and saw that my favorite professors have since retired. That's what happens when you, you know, get older. But Dr. Virginia Gill - she was in sociology, I was a sociology minor - and she made every class just the most fun and just the most informative, and, like, you would look forward to her classes. Whether that was sociology in general, or sociology of health care, all things. So I really enjoyed all my sociology professors, she really stands out. Susan Sprecher, who's still here, she did sociology of sex and gender. That was a huge, it was a huge class, but, like, I saw her, oh my gosh, I saw her last fall, we were both trying to take a flight at the airport and I saw her and I waved and she waved back like she knew me but I'm like, she doesn't remember me. But I went up to her and I was like, I you know, I had your sociology of sex and gender class like 20 years ago and it still sticks out in my mind as an important and pivotal class for me and I just loved the way she taught it. And she was just like, oh, thank you so much. And then of course after that we saw each other like four more times in the community. And so that also was important, yeah, and then of course grad school, I had some amazing, amazing people.

(35:06) But I only had one bad experience and I'm not gonna - it was in communication. It was the day that we were going to hold a rally on the Quad, the anti-gay hate rally, and I'm in class, it was like, literally the class right before I supposed to head out to talk and lead this rally. My professor used an anti-gay slur in class and I was just like, what? Like, I literally interrupted him and was like, what did you just say? And I said, oh, no. I was like, not today. And I got up and he's like, where are you going? I was like, I'm not - of all days not today, like, this is not happening. I mean, you know, this was 2000. And I just walked out of the class. And I don't know if anyone else did, but in my brain I think maybe a few people did, too. But I left and went ahead to the rally and then I got to talk about that experience at the rally, because it's like, you just don't realize how prevalent this was or how commonplace, like did he think it wouldn't be a big deal or the people wouldn't care? Things were a little different then, so.

Heather Paraday 36:20

So do you think that in, like, the environment of how the atmosphere of both faculty and students has shifted since your time here with, like, the LGBTQ+ community?

Kristy DeWall 36:31

I would say yes, I would say yes, a lot. Yeah, I mean, I wasn't here through all of it to see that through, but yeah, I mean, there's a drag queen bingo as a part of Preview Week coming up. I'm like, what? Like, we had to fight to get

these drag shows and to get people in the seats, you know. But now it's just commonplace, it seems. So, yeah, I think it's definitely changed for the good.

Heather Paraday 37:07

So you said that you were here for a while and you went away am I correct? And then you came back to now work here?

Heather Paraday 37:12

So when you - in that in-between time, when you were gone - so, like, what you knew versus now coming back into it, have you seen anything completely changed about campus or the environment of it?

Kristy DeWall 37:16

Yeah. Oh yeah, I mean, it - so one of the biggest things for me was I had not been on campus for a long time. I was in part of the community but I did move away in 2013 and then I came back last year and then this spring Barb was like, have you seen the Bone?, and I was like, what do you mean?, and she's like, just come, I'll give you a tour, and it was amazing. Like, to finally see a student center that's a student center was just - I mean, I got a little teary. And so, physical changes, obviously, there are amazing changes that have taken place, but there's also amazing things that have changed with technology and just how we set up spaces to make them more welcoming and to make them more inclusive and to make them just somewhere where students want to be. I think there's been a lot of progress with that and that's been pretty amazing to see. And obviously, people have changed, I think mindsets have changed, and it's been really great to see those changes in a lot of ways.

Heather Paraday 38:36

So while you were here - I know I kind of, like, asked this a little bit, were there any, like huge events that were so impactful for you, like, whether it be with PRIDE or in your academics or anything like that?

Kristy DeWall 38:48

I think out of the negative things that happened, you know, came positive things like that rally that we had. Just seeing the campus come together was really rewarding and it was I think it was a turning point for us and for people supporting us. And I feel like it happens sometimes [that] out of tragedy, people, like - they have, their awareness is - how do you say it - it's just increased. I mean, that happened - yeah, I don't need to talk about that, that's not ISU-related, a personal story about what happened after Orlando³ and - but... I think I've forgotten the question. Or maybe I answered it.

Heather Paraday 39:42

I mean, it was just, what impact, like, what big event helped you, whether it be like academic or like, growth for your character.

³ The mass shooting of 49 people at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016.

Kristy DeWall 39:52

Yeah, and I think another thing - and I think Barb has talked about this one time - and I bring up Barb a lot because she's very important to, I think, the LGBT history at Illinois State University, and not just that, but for me personally, helping me to reconcile, maybe, religion with sexuality and just that first person to say it's okay, you're okay. And I had - when I went to Leadershape, I got this idea - Leadershape is a leadership conference for students, you kind of come up with this big idea and you're like, how do I make this big idea a reality on campus? And it could be with anything. My big idea was I wanted to bring Kate Bornstein to campus, and Kate Bornstein is known as kind of this gender outlaw, she was talking about sex and gender and gender roles and trans issues and nonbinary stuff back in the 90s, before it was something that the rest of us maybe knew about. And I wanted her to, I wanted to bring her to campus. And she's also a big theater person and so it was just like a dream for me.

(41:03) And I did, I brought her to campus, and it was a turning point for me personally because I was kind of - since coming out I was like, well, this is how you have to look and this is how you have to be. And, you know, I really kind of gave into these stereotypes of what I thought it meant to be gay. And Kate was like, forget that, like, you just be yourself. Just be - you want to grow your hair out, grow your hair, or you want to wear this, wear that, you just do whatever you want to do and just be whoever you are and don't listen to anything else or anyone else. And I was like, oh, okay. It's like, did I really need this person to come along and tell me this? Because a lot of what she talks about and educates is the opposite - or, what you think, people are more free - I'm not, I'm not really making any sense. But the point of the story is, for me, it was a pivotal turning point where I didn't have to fit anyone's mold anymore and I could just be myself, because a lot of times - and even back then, late 90s, early 2000s, we'd go to these classrooms and we talked to people and some of them would say, well, you don't look gay, or you don't sound - you know, all of these things, these stereotypes, and so it was an important turning point for me with my own personal journey.

Heather Paraday 42:24

Okay. While you were here on campus did like you have any, like, humorous events happen or humorous moments or anything that like, you know, [that] you like to look back at and think about?

Kristy DeWall 42:37

Yeah, I - there's too many. I mean, I don't - I thought of one thing in particular, and I don't know how anyone else would maybe think it's funny, especially since we were being kind of unsafe and silly in the dorms, but I remember one time when we were the Fun Dunn One crew we decided to have a water fight. And I hope Housing isn't listening, but we decided to have a water fight in the dorm, and the floors are, you know, they're not carpeted, it was dangerous. And so we're, like, chasing each other around doing this and someone gets me, like, from the back. They're, like, squirting that - splashing this water on me, and I ended up slipping, falling. And it's not funny, right? But I ended up basically opening my knee up on the doorframe, blood everywhere. It was awful. It was horrible. And I was in a lot of pain and but we were scheduled to go to a movie that night, to the Normal Theater, like, me and all my crew, right? And I was like, you guys, you have to go, like, we have to go, and so I really - like, it was a movie called *Boys Don't Cry* and I thought it was a really important movie and a meaning and a message for them to learn about, so I said, I'm fine. My knee is - you know. So we just decided to kind of wrap it up a little bit, go to the movie, you know? Okay, cool. And then ended up going to ER after the two-hour movie and I had to get stitches and I still have that scar, but - I don't know how funny, necessarily, that story is, but you know, just people, ridiculous students doing ridiculous things that we should shouldn't have been doing and then making poor choices to on top of it. That was my friend group in Dunn, for sure.

Heather Paraday 44:27

Did you guys have an RA when everything thing happened or did you just have to, like, clean everything up really quickly, be like, yeah, it's fine!

Kristy DeWall 44:32

Oh yeah, we made sure she didn't know about it. Or she maybe went to the movie with us, I'm not real sure. Actually, when I think back on - we used to pull pranks on her all the time. Like putting stuff all over her door and, you know, nothing - and it was all harmless but it was still pretty obnoxious and ridiculous. And make flyers and put them up in the in the bathrooms and stuff, like - I actually came across, like - I'm way too sentimental and I kept some stuff throughout my undergraduate years and stuff and came across some of the flyers that we'd made that we put up in the bathrooms, like just being funny and just being stupid but it was still a good time.

Heather Paraday 45:12

That sounds like a wild time. So then, like, you graduated and everything and then how did you stay involved with campus, like, after graduating? I know, like, you said you did your undergrad here, but -

Kristy DeWall 45:26

Yeah, so obviously I kept coming back. My foster parents always joked that I was a professional student, which was [laughs insincerely], but I graduated last time in 2007 with my MSW and then was a social worker in the community for several years, well, a few years until I moved away. And honestly, like, I can't - like, I get emotional when I think about my time at ISU because all I wanted when I graduated with my master's degree - the first one in higher education, student affairs, that was 19 years ago - and all I ever wanted from that point was to get a job ISU and just work at ISU, like, ISU is home, Bloomington-Normal is home. I have lived - and I wrote this somewhere - like, I have lived in Massachusetts, Alaska, D.C., California. However, nothing has come close to the community and how I feel about ISU and Bloomington-Normal and so it's always been my goal to get back home. And while I didn't maybe stay in touch over a few years, it was always home base.

(46:34) And so it's funny because I was actually - I kind of digress, but it's all related - I met up with Danielle a few months ago, Danielle Miller, she was there, one of my mentors from, you know, 20 years ago, and we met up and I was about to leave the next week to move back to Massachusetts. I got a job and I still have military service there so I go back once a month to that. So I was like, you know, this isn't financially responsible. I just need to go back there to live. And so she's like, is that really what you want to do? And I was like, well, no. She's like, well, you got a new job there and you got an apartment there, like, you're going back? Is that what you want? And I was like, no. So she's like, well, what do you want? And I was like, I want to work at ISU. And she's like, then work in ISU, like, figure out your life. And wouldn't you know, that - like, I don't know, like, less than a month later a job came open, I applied, I interviewed, and I interviewed, interviewed, interviewed, you know, 17 different levels of interviews. And here I am, I got the job. And so it's all come full circle for me. I want to be that kind of student mentor that I had, you know, and I'm excited. But yeah.

Heather Paraday 47:59

So what are you currently doing then, working with ISU?

Kristy DeWall 48:03

Sure. I'm a new career advisor in Career Services, which is in the Division of Student Affairs, yeah.

Heather Paraday 48:13

Since you still work on campus - I already asked that - what do you find the most valuable about your time here at ISU, and then, like, you know, got [you that] huge drive of saying, like, this is home?

Kristy DeWall 48:24

Well, it's those experiences. And so it was really the out-of-class experiences for me that were the most impactful. It was the relationships that I made over 20 years ago that I still have those people in my life, those mentors that I never had in foster care, I never had in high school, I never had at LCC, but at ISU I found my people, my tribe, and -

Heather Paraday 48:48

Your Fun Dunn One.

Kristy DeWall 48:49

Yes. And I still - like I said, I still am in contact with a couple of them. It's the kind of people that, like, that I hadn't seen for 20 years, but I could see and then it's like no time has passed. And so it's that sense of community. And if I could, if there was one thing about, like, if it was one word, like you could only choose one word to describe ISU, it would be community. And I've been a lot of different places, I've been a part of, you know, military community, I've been a part of the drag community, I've been a part of different types of communities, but nothing quite like being a Redbird. And I know that sounds maybe a little cheesy, but it's totally true and I mean it. So, yeah.

Heather Paraday 49:34

I mean, that's really all that I had. Did you want to cover and talk about anything that I missed or have anything else to say?

Kristy DeWall 49:41

I don't think so. I think I feel I have I have said my piece about ISU and I'm very happy to be back home.

Heather Paraday 49:53

Alrighty, well, thank you so much again, I'm gonna stop this.