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Kelly Petrowski and Anyssa Balcazar

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**Oral History/Women's Summit: Alum Kelly Petrowski and IWU Senior Anyssa Balcazar,
'16**

Kelly Petrowski: Cool.

Anyssa Balcazar: Alrighty. Shall we introduce ourselves?

Petrowski: Yeah. Go ahead.

Balcazar: Okay. My name is Anyssa. I'm a senior...a psychology major, pre-occupational therapy.

Petrowski: And my name is Kelly Petrowski and I graduated from Illinois Wesleyan in 2008. I was a Biology major. Right now I am working at the Core Center... a clinic in Chicago...and I am working on my Ph.D. at Rush University.

Balcazar: Okay. So...describe one of your favorite things about the town where you grew up.

Petrowski: So I grew up in Tinley Park. A southwest suburb...I think one of the...these questions are hard, let me think...one of my favorite things... I think that I had so many friends...that were...that lived so close to me...and so growing up it was really easy to ride my bike to so-and-so's house, to walk over to so-and-so's house and just hang out and be outside and have fun with each other. And it didn't seem as like planned out, it was kind of like...the normal routine.

Balcazar: Yeah.

Petrowski: I think that is one of the fun things about growing up in the suburbs, especially in a neighborhood with a tons of kids your age...

Balcazar: Oh yeah...for sure.

Petrowski: Mhmm...

Balcazar: I grew up in... the south side of Chicago in the city. And my...I think everywhere that I lived, I lived in apartments but it was always by family. So I grew up very family oriented which I think a lot of people do. And so, every day was me over at a cousin's house. I surrounded myself with a lot of male cousins. We played a lot of t-ball and weekends where going to their baseball games. Going to my softball games and...

Petrowski: Cool.

Balcazar: It was definitely like a very fun childhood experience that I miss it a lot.

Petrowski: Yeah, that's awesome. I grew up playing with boys too because like my brother and I are thirteen months apart...

Balcazar: (gasps) That's awesome...

Petrowski: ...and I feel like...yeah...we were always doing like...playing hockey or basketball...or baseball or whatever...it's fun.

Balcazar: My brother is like, "Oh, I've always wished I had like an older brother, and then I think of you!" And I'm like, "you're twice the guy I have ever wanted so I think we're good!"

Petrowski: (laughter) That's funny. So, tell me something about where you are in the sibling order in your family.

Balcazar: I am... so there's two. There is the obvious one and then how I personally feel. I am the oldest of four. So there's my parents. My mom had me when she was eighteen...and my father was 21. And and then I have my...and then...so they are kind of my role models because of course I was kind of the, "Hello! Welcome to the world!" so- child and my mom was a full time mom and she worked part time and then she also went to school in the evening and she...she graduated from college so she always continued to go to school...school was always the number one thing for her... and she's now a teacher. She's getting her masters...and the same with my dad-

Petrowski: Awesome.

Balcazar: -So we are very academically oriented. And then there's my brother who is seventeen who's about to get ready for college and then my eight year old sister who is a very lively and very much like the life of the party. And then my six-year-old little sister. Who... I love her spirit. She's kind of like...she's...everything that she does... she does for her. Like she loves to dance and when the music turns on she just like feels the music you see her hand on her chest and just like closing her eyes and like just taking it all in and I love that.

Petrowski: Yeah...

Balcazar: So yeah...that's the order of my family. But I definitely feel like at times I'm the kind of like in the middle because like I learn from my siblings a lot. Like I know that I am supposed to be the oldest, but at times I find myself like more childish than the six year old. I'm like, "Lexi, let's do this!" And she's like, "What are you doing...no let's not do that." So- and then there's of course moments where I feel like I'm like the parent...so it's like different. There's a lot of different scopes and I love like how in my family we are very open and we're very...very close. And I appreciate it a lot. How about you?

Petrowski: I am the oldest of three. My brother is like I said one year younger than me. He works at the University of Chicago, and my sister is four years younger than me and she...right now she is working in some kind of like billing department. Not her like dream job. She's trying to figure out her life and so yeah. It's kind of fun to...It's fun now that we are older to be...I feel like we were always friends growing up and we were always close but now I feel

like...especially my sister and I like we're-- are like peers. We are very close...we hang out with the same group of friends like... you know it's like. You know, it's like pretty cool.

Balcazar: Great. Let's see. What is one of the most important life lessons you have learned in your life...so far?

Petrowski: Let me think about this...I would say one of the most important lessons that I've learned is that it's okay...it's okay to forgive yourself and to let things go and just to realize that there are some things that are totally out of your control and that's okay. And...I think it is important to definitely deal with things and to process them. But, at the end of the day...just to like accept things too...you know what I mean?

Balcazar: Yeah.

Petrowski: There are some...Obviously you need to work through things, but I think sometimes we are too hard on ourselves, you know? Or we expect too much from ourselves or from other people. And I think something that I have learned like working with a lot of different communities and different people is—is just sometimes we just have to forgive each other and help each other...as best we can. What about you? What's an important lesson that you have learned in life?

Balcazar: Senior year has definitely... and college entirely has been a 360 for me. I mean I came in thinking I knew exactly what I wanted to be. I am going to be a pediatrician and that's how it's going to go...I am a senior Psychology major pre-OT so I am not going to be a doctor. But like you said ...just being... living life according to yourself and no one else. I've like struggled with that and I feel like I still do. Where you of course...you...coming from a very education based family...and being the eldest...I definitely want to set an example for my younger siblings.

Petrowski: Yeah.

Balcazar: But I've learned that as long as I am doing something that I am passionate about and it's purposeful for me...and it's something that means a lot...that is way more effective in being a role model...than just being something that is stereotypically what my mom and dad want me to be or some "a" and "b" want me to do. So it's definitely just living life according to yourself because at the end of the day...you're the one that has to live with that person...like the one you are looking at in the mirror at the end of the day.

Petrowski: No you're right. Just being authentic.

Balcazar: Yeah!

Petrowski: And just being present.

Balcazar: Oh yeah.

Petrowski: And being you. And not apologizing for it.

Balcazar: That's like 100 percent yeah. --You have-- You are living with yourself every day so like c'mon...

Petrowski: Exactly. Yeah. I'd say another lesson that I have learned, especially thinking about my college experience, is that you don't always have to know what's is coming next.

Balcazar: Oh my god, yeah.

Petrowski: You don't have to...

Balcazar: I 100 percent...like...agree with that. Wholeheartedly... because you just have to go...and appreciate the small things too. Like I have learned that...I am taking up meditation and yoga. And all these weird things...knitting. Which I don't know how to do yet. But I am just appreciating the smallest things and like...the small joys in life. And like when the going gets tough remembering [inaudible] small moments...to get me through...so yeah.

Petrowski: That's awesome. Who has been the most important woman in your life? Tell me about her.

Balcazar: Oh that's really hard. Wow. It would have to be a tie between my aunt who is two years older than I am. Growing up...I never...she was kind of my big sister. And that is something that I have always wanted. Because my mom comes from a family of six and this is her youngest...one of her younger sisters. And she was always the one where she...was herself...and never apologized for it. Like she would go through the tunnels of light...she was kind of like. She went through all these stages. She went through her ...her ...different-different styles. Like prep style...rocker...and all that stuff. She dabbled in so many things. And she was definitely the creative one. And got her into a lot of trouble. But she ...just matured into a very well-rounded individual. She saved up money...I think...at the age of eighteen. She was working three jobs while she was still finishing up high school. And ...was able to move to Los Angeles and pursue a career in acting and she's been there for about three years now. And still working on it...and is working like two jobs and even though it's hard for her... and all the struggles she has been through...she is still the biggest like inspiration to me. She's the one I go to when I have a problem and she's a great listener. She has the biggest heart out of anyone I know. And she just...I aspire to be half of the person she is because she is...

Petrowski: Yeah

Balcazar: Definitely one of those people. Where...when you meet her...she leaves you with like this impactful...like ...energy and she just has this light with her that goes wherever she goes and I love it. And the second one is my mom. She is definitely a hard-working woman. She has been through a lot as I'm sure every single person does. We all have our own story.

Petrowski: Yeah.

Balcazar: But ...she had a very rough start in the beginning of her life and she was able to fight through it and she's a constant reminder that nothing in your past defines you. You define yourself. Through hard work and dedication. Just the faith that you have with yourself with anything that you believe in so she is definitely...those two are definitely my role models.

Petrowski: That's awesome.

Balcazar: What about you?

Petrowski: I would say I mean I have a lot of good female...strong female influences in my life but I would say probably my grandma is the most influential. Because she's kind of...kind of the same thing right. She came from sort of a rocky past and a bad relationship with my dad's father and things like that. But, she is the strongest woman I know. And she is seventy-five years old and she's still working...

Balcazar: Yeah!

Petrowski: Full-time and like not even full time. She is working overtime...

Balcazar: Oh my gosh!

Petrowski: She loves her job and she doesn't tolerate any kind of bullshit.

Balcazar: Good!

Petrowski: She's just like...

Balcazar: She's hard-core.

Petrowski: She is a hard-core lady.

Balcazar: Awesome. What does she do?

Petrowski: She works at the post-office.

Balcazar: That's right. Got to be hard core for that! That's awesome.

Petrowski: Yeah, but she's like...like I said...she's like a powerful, strong lady and she is also really caring and really considerate. She is the woman who when something is wrong you can turn to her and she's got your back.

Balcazar: Good.

Petrowski: I think that she's that woman for so many people in my life. So many family members.

Balcazar: That's awesome.

Petrowski: So I hope that I can be like that too.

Balcazar: Yeah, I love that we have all these inspirational women in our lives.

Petrowski: Yeah! No that's amazing.

Balcazar: Yeah! ...What's...serious...oh... okay, we have five minutes. Awesome! Oh okay. How would you like to be remembered?

Petrowski: Hmm.

Balcazar: At the end of it all.

Petrowski: At the end of it all. I don't know. That's something that I have been thinking a lot lately. Like...especially...I have tried to take up journaling this year as like my new year's resolution...

Balcazar: Yeah.

Petrowski: So I started off by like thinking about like...who am I? I like tried to write this page thinking about how just so many different people. We're like...we're a different person right?

Balcazar: Heck yeah.

Petrowski: We wear different hats. When I was a Peace Corp volunteer in Malawi like I was a teacher and they will always remember me as a teacher and a community member. And like some people here will remember me as like a student and to my sister I am sister you know. A role model. And to my mom I will always be her like daughter. And I was just thinking about that the other day like how who we are is so fluid and it just changes based on our experiences. And who we're...and who we're thinking about I guess- who's thinking about us.

Balcazar: Oh yes.

Petrowski: So I don't know. I want to be remembered all those different ways. (laughter) Like why not have it all?

Balcazar: That's really good. I want to be remembered by this, this, this and this.

Petrowski: Yeah!

Balcazar: I just want to be remembered!

Petrowski: Yeah! I mean just that like...you know that I wasn't—that I had so many different experiences and so many important relationships with people.

Balcazar: Oh yeah.

Petrowski: And impacted them in a different way.

Balcazar: Yeah. That's awesome.

Petrowski: Definitely. What about you?

Balcazar: For me, I want to be remembered- I love... a big thing for me is service and just serving others the best way that I can...getting to know their story. I love sitting down with my grandparents and just learning about how life was when they were younger.

Petrowski: Yeah.

Balcazar: And just [inaudible] So, I want to be known as someone that was compassionate...that was caring...and is adventurous and took life by the balls.

Petrowski: Nice.

Balcazar: And just lived her life for no one else but herself.

Petrowski: That's awesome.

Balcazar: Should we do another one? Or should we go back?

Petrowski: I don't know! Ah, it's kind of fun, right?

Balcazar: Yeah, I know! We're are learning so much! I like it!

Petrowski: Is there any other questions that you like...that you like- are standing out to you?

Balcazar: (mumbling)

Petrowski: (mumbling) Does anything jump out at you?

Balcazar: I'm trying to read them. It's just like every... I don't know.

Petrowski: What do you hope your future holds?

Balcazar: Adventure and surprises and passion and love for new passions I've yet to discover. For new discoveries and growth.

Petrowski: Awesome.

Balcazar: And love for things.

Petrowski: Very cool.

Balcazar: Yeah. What about you?

Petrowski: I hope that it holds lots of laughter.

Balcazar: Yes! That too! (laughter) I'm glad that we recorded that too!

Petrowski: And lots of good times and even in not good times.

Balcazar: Yeah.

Petrowski: Lots of like support and strength.

Balcazar: Yeah.

Petrowski: And all that kind of good stuff. So, I hope that it holds all kinds of awesome things.

Balcazar: I'm excited. Like I- coming- senior year, I don't know if you felt like this, it's every new year, but being a senior I'm just scared of the unknown. Cause now I'm just like I've always been a student and now it's just like, "Okay, go out into the world...go do things." And I don't know what to do!

Petrowski: Yeah.

Balcazar: So, that is definitely scary. But, I am excited in the midst of it all.

Petrowski: You should be.

Balcazar: Yeah. So we were talking about the Peace Corp and I like really want to do that but I just- I don't know how to do it or when to do it. But I know I really want to do it.

Petrowski: Yeah. Well, well I mean you have your whole life to do whatever you want right? And like I feel like at different stages you...I mean you just take the next step and you don't necessarily need to know what comes next.

Balcazar: I know...

Petrowski: Like right now, like I said, I'm working on the Ph.D. but I can't tell you what do I want to do after I finish that. I don't know yet. You know, just like at the end of college I didn't know yet what I wanted to do. And at the end of Peace Corp...I didn't know yet. You just figure it out.

Balcazar: That's awesome. I love that we had this because I was definitely the type of person to be like, "Oh my god, there's so many people have their life together and I don't even know like what's going on and then talking to you guys it's like, " you don't have to know."

Petrowski: Yeah.

Balcazar: It's still early and I'm like, "Okay! I feel a little better!"

Petrowski: You just have to be yourself and live your life.

Balcazar: Yeah.

Petrowski: For sure.

Balcazar: Awesome!

Petrowski: That was fun!

Balcazar: That was so much fun!