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Liz Norell - You are listening to Tiger stories, a podcast from Chattanooga State Community College. This is the place to share the stories from our community with our broader community. A Chat state, we believe every member of our campus, students, faculty and staff belongs here and because we know that belonging matters, we are excited to share the stories of those, who make up the unique, diverse, and supportive community on our campus. You will often hear people on this podcast, talk about chat state as having the feel of a family. We are so proud to be part of an institution that welcomes people from across the community to come here and pursue their dreams. We hope you will enjoy hearing our stories and maybe even someday, you will want to share yours with us too. I am Liz Norell, and I teach political science on the main campus of Chattanooga State. I feel so lucky that I get to be on this campus, working with our students and my colleagues on the faculty and staff. We get to witness powerful transformations happening on our campus all the time and so I am excited to get to share this conversation with you without further ado, let us get started with today's conversation. So tell me your name again?

Lauren Pearce - I am Lauren Pearce.

Liz Norell - Okay. And you, you are in the?

Lauren Pearce - The computer support technician program.

Liz Norell - Cool. So how did you decide to do that?

Lauren Pearce - Honestly, I was just trying to find something I am interested to go to school for and video games are my passions.

Liz Norell - Awesome!

Lauren Pearce - And it was a year long program that I found and I was actually looking at a whole different option and I walked in and somebody was like, well look at come look at this program and I talked to the instructors and I fell in love and I was like, I am taking this class.

Liz Norell - So how long have you been doing that?

Lauren Pearce - This is my first semester.

Liz Norell - Okay.

Lauren Pearce - So Just since September.

Liz Norell - How do you like it so far?

Lauren Pearce - I love it.

Liz Norell - Yeah!

Lauren Pearce - My instructors are awesome in the classes, I get a lot of knowledge out of it. I have learned a lot.

Liz Norell - What do you hope to do with that?

Lauren Pearce - Well, honestly, I have not decided. So I am here on the GI Bill.

Liz Norell - Okay.

Lauren Pearce - And I have got more school that is paid for after this. So, I actually thought about taking another class, but I have not quite decided because I really love this field. So I have got about another couple semesters to decide exactly what I want to do with it, but if I decide to continue with this, I will just stay in the computer support area and work my way up, get more certifications.

Liz Norell - Yeah. So that means you are a veteran.

Lauren Pearce - I am.

Liz Norell - Tell me about that.

Lauren Pearce - I was in the Marine Corps and I had joined in 2012 and I got to spend two years in Okinawa, Japan, which was really cool. It is like a tropical island, and never drops below like 60 degrees. So we were actually in the ocean on Christmas Day at one point.

Liz Norell - Wow.

Lauren Pearce - Yeah, It was crazy. So that was a lot of fun and then I came back and I was on an air wing in North Carolina and then I got out and came home to be with my family

Liz Norell - Joining in 2012, did you have to do any tours in the Middle East?

Lauren Pearce - I did not. Now, we did do some field ops in like the Philippines and we actually did do some in Korea actually did not get to go to that one, but no, I did not personally have to go see anything like that. So I got lucky.

Liz Norell - Yeah. What led you to join the Marine Corps?

Lauren Pearce - I had a friend that was in the Marine Corps and I got out of high school thinking that college was going to be just as easy and it was not quite what I thought it was and I had a friend that like I said, had joined the Marine Corps and I got out he came from boot camp, and I talked to him and he loved it. I think I want to do that, so I dropped out and went to the Marine Corps. I did not even look at another branch. I just kind of went straight in there. So once I walked in there, they were ready to get me signed up to go. So it was kind of just crazy, super fast.

Liz Norell - Yeah. Where did you go to basic?

Lauren Pearce - I was on Parris Island.

Liz Norell - Did you like it? I mean basically.

Lauren Pearce - Well, but boot camp was not the greatest. It was. Honestly, it is more mentally challenging than physically challenging. You think it is going to get in there and it is physically challenging, but they really break you down and build you right back up. So that I think that was the hardest part is just having to rebuild yourself.

Liz Norell - So I am just curious about that.

Lauren Pearce - And that is okay.

Liz Norell - Tell me how you decided to come to ChattState.

Lauren Pearce - Okay, well, actually, when I got out of the Marine Corps, I did try to go back to school, and it did not go well. I went to the credit side and realized it was not for me, I failed out of some classes, at a different school and I almost was given up and somebody was like, go look at some of the TCAT programs at Chattanooga State like they are amazing. I think it is something that you would really like and it is I came over and I felt like I said, I talked to him, and I was like, this is what I want to do and it has been amazing. I got in there and I went from failing out of classes to have a 99 average right now. Like, it is crazy, so I really, that is something that for me, people do not push vocational schools and stuff like that towards people. They say, you know, you have to get a degree on the credit side and I am, so glad that I tried this before I gave up because it has been amazing for me.

Liz Norell - Talk a little bit for people who do not know, what is the biggest difference between a class on the credit side and a class at TCAT?

Lauren Pearce - So for me, it is a lot more structured. We come in Monday till Friday, I am here from 7:30 to 2:30 and you get your little bit for lunch and then you come back. So you have your, the only instructors you are going to have are the ones in your class. So you do not have to get moved from class to class. It is not assignment to assignment, you have got this much to do that day and it is all set in one area. So I am not all over the place trying to learn Math and English and Science and getting all these together. I am focusing on what it is that I am interested in and it is a lot of knowledge, and it is not easy. You still have to work, but it is all towards one goal and I feel like for me, it was hard to focus on so many different areas at once and when I started focusing on that one, and I found that one thing I liked, it is just been amazing. Honestly, I have been so happy with the way that this year has been going.

Liz Norell - That is awesome.

Lauren Pearce - Thank you.

Liz Norell - I mean, what I understand about the TCAT -- having not been on that side of the house here -- is that it is kind of like a job.

Lauren Pearce - It is.

Liz Norell - You come to school and that is your job.

Lauren Pearce - We have a dress code, which is, I have a collared shirt on right now and khakis. So we do you have a dress code you have to come in, in that dress code, its part of your grade as well as people come in. So for us, people can come in and bring their computers and we will fix them. If they are part of Chattanooga state, they can come bring their computers and we fixed them for free. So part of that is customer relations you have to learn how to interact with people coming in that do not know as much as you do and you have to learn how to show up on time because that is a part of your grade, how to participate. That is part of your grade teamwork. So it is all it is very job based.

Liz Norell - So you are telling me that people who are students, faculty and staff can bring their computer to you and you will fix it?

Lauren Pearce - Yes.

Liz Norell - So how do they do that? Tell me that.

Liz Norell - Okay. So we are TCAT, one building, and they come in and I mean, it is anything you bring in your computer now. We will not buy parts. So if you need a new part, you'll have to purchase that part, but you bring it in and we do all the labor for free and you just come like I said, as long as you are affiliated with the campus, you just bring it in. It is really that easy also. On Tuesdays, we do this thing called Tiger tech from 10 to 2, and it is in the library and you can bring your computer in and if it is something like, hey, my computer just kind of slow or I do not know how to navigate through the tiger net, or I do not know how to get Microsoft Office on my computer, we can do little things like that they are so you do not have to walk all the way across campus. It is right there in the library.

Liz Norell - Have you enjoyed doing that?

Lauren Pearce - I have. I was really nervous at first.

Liz Norell - Yeah!

Lauren Pearce - Because even though I love video games, and that is my thing. I was not super knowledgeable about computers going into it. So I came in and there were people that knew all this stuff already and I felt kind of behind, but I got in there and I learned quickly you get in and they, they really do. They throw a lot of knowledge at you, but as long as you're willing to absorb it. It is amazing what you learn and so going in there and helping people. It is awesome when, you know, even one simple thing like, Hey, I cannot get onto my email and so we show them, hey, this is how you do it and they are so grateful and it is amazing to be able to do that for people and they act like you are just like, oh, my gosh, you are so smart. I am like, I am so glad that you said that because I was feeling like behind. So yeah, it has been crazy.

Liz Norell - What all kinds of things you learned in this program?

Lauren Pearce - Well for mine, the computer support. First we did all of the Microsoft Office. So you learn, If you think you know everything about Word and Excel and PowerPoint, you do not there is so crazy the amount that goes into it. So you spend some time on that and you get certifications through that and now we are doing our A plus. So we are learning about all the computer parts, what if they are broken, what to do, how to tell if that is the issue, and all the error codes on the computers you are learning. The networking is something that we are going into now. So it has been, it's a lot like I said, it goes into detail with a lot of stuff and it this is just the first semester. So I am excited to see what we go into next semester time.

Liz Norell - Great times.

Lauren Pearce - Yeah.

Liz Norell - Can you talk a little bit about the community that you have found over in the TCAT and in your program?

Lauren Pearce - Absolutely. So I am also in Skills USA, which is a big part over in the TCAT. So everybody in TCAT is a part of Skills USA, and we do these competitions. So just with that, it has been amazing. I have met a great team. Our officers are some we have worked together on community service projects, little things as far as trying to get the students around campus involved. So that has been awesome, but just even in my class, so I have had a group of, it is a little group of like five people, and that is me included, and now we hang out on the weekends we play video games together. We have actually started trying

to do podcasts of our own like, it has been really cool like, I never expected to do that I came in thinking I am just going keep my head down and get my work done and I met these people that I am pretty sure they will be my friends for the rest of my life.

Liz Norell - That's amazing.

Lauren Pearce - Yeah.

Liz Norell - What besides that group of friends? Are there other relationships that you found on campus that have felt really meaningful to you?

Lauren Pearce - My instructors, honestly, they are knowledgeable within our program, but they are also they help us get jobs afterwards.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Lauren Pearce - So that relationship with them knowing that they are going to vouch for me when I get out, they are going to be like, hey, this girl knows her stuff. She is going to work hard and she is respectful knowing that they are going to do that, for me, has been amazing. Honestly, I am so confident and I am only in my first semester, but I am super confident that when I get out, I will have a job. I will have somewhere to go where that is going to be good for me. So and I trust them to get me there.

Liz Norell - That is awesome.

Lauren Pearce - Thank you.

Liz Norell - What do you feel like? Is the most important thing you have learned here so far.

Lauren Pearce - Honestly, I have gained self confidence back. I came in thinking, I am a failure, I failed at school and, you know, I am just not good at this. I am just going to have to get a job and work that and that has been awesome for me to realize. I am because I walked in and they were like, Hey, you should do this like, and I was like, why would you want me to go? Why would you want me to run for an officer? So now not only have they pushed me for that, but they pushed me to be, now I am a state officer and Skills USA and it has been I mean officer in our tech club, and that is voted in by our students and I that has just been for me. It has been amazing learning that okay, I am intelligent. I am, I can do this. If I just focus and put my mind to it, like I can do pretty much anything I want to do.

Liz Norell - That's good.

Lauren Pearce - It really is and I have I just cannot imagine being anywhere else at this point.

Liz Norell - That is really awesome. What advice would you give people who are thinking about coming to chat state or maybe who are already here?

Lauren Pearce - I would say kind of step out of your comfort zone because for me, like I said, I got in, and it was, I was afraid and I thought, I am just going to keep my head down and do my stuff, but then when I started, inch by inch moving out of my comfort zone, things have blossomed for me. So I would say, do that if you want to run for office, so if something happens, what is the worst she can do is like fail at see you get back up and you try again. It has been that would be my advice is just to go for it. If you are even thinking about it, do it. Yeah.

Liz Norell - Has there been a time over on the TCAT side where you have tried something and you failed, and you got up and tried it again?

Lauren Pearce - Yes.

Liz Norell - How many about one of those?

Lauren Pearce - So our stars that we would get our certificates for, for excel. I have actually went in and I failed, which was I actually came back to class. I was crying, people were like, are you okay I was like do not touch me, just leave me alone I will be fine. So, and I was, I will fail this again and I went home and I studied and I went back and made a better grade than I have made on any certificate test. So, yeah, that was a time for me that I honestly and I felt I started feeling bad about myself and because I had, I was making great grades, I was confident I went in there thinking I am going to pass this no problem and I think I was a little overconfident and so that taught me okay, you know what, you do have to sit back and it does not matter if you think you know it, study for it. So, yeah, there was a time that.

Liz Norell - I have to say like, I am sure that that was a really hard thing, but what you learned in the process and the way you talk about it, like you are super duper proud of that?

Lauren Pearce - I am honestly because like I said, I came back I failed and the guys in my class were like, I am not even going show you my grade because some of them made like 90 something's I came back and made like a 97 on it. Well, it is out of 1000. So it is like 900 yeah, but it was crazy like I felt great afterwards so, yeah, just been able to pick myself back up because that is something a lot of times back in the day, I would have been like no, I am not doing that again. I will just skip that one. So going back and doing it and getting it again. It does, it makes me feel a lot better.

Liz Norell - Like extra proud.

Lauren Pearce - Yes, I am very proud of myself for where I am at right now.

Liz Norell - Yeah. That is awesome. I want to ask you one more question and this is a question that I have decided I want to ask everybody on the podcast. So you are the first one. I decided last night. What really matters to you?

Lauren Pearce - Family and friends. I actually got engaged back on Halloween.

Liz Norell - Congratulations.

Lauren Pearce - Thank you. So that has been a big deal, but honestly, I think my family and that includes my friends because my friends that are actually close to me, I consider family anyways, so and that was something in the Marine Corps that was hard for me being away from my family because we are very close knit. I guess that would be my answer.

Liz Norell - Awesome. Is there anything else you want to share with us? Before we wrap up?

Lauren Pearce - I would say the only thing is, do not count TCAT, it is a viable option, and it is a great option.

Liz Norell - Thank you so much, Lauren.

Lauren Pearce - Thank you very much.

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Liz Norell - Those of us, who have the honor and privilege to work on Chattanooga state's campuses, know that something really special happens here and it is humbling to get to share a few of those special things with you, our listeners. So thanks to you for joining us here today and a special thank you to the students, faculty and staff to make this podcast possible. If you are a student at Chattanooga State and you want to be on Tiger stories, let us know you can get in touch at the email address in the show notes. We will be back soon with another instalment of Tiger stories until then, make it a great one.