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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. At Chatt 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 Chatt State as having a 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 some day, 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's get started with today's conversation. Why don't you start just by introducing yourself?

David Pitchford - Okay. My name is David Pitchford. I'm a Chatt State alumnus. I graduated here in 2016 and now I'm working on my Master's in Primate Behavior and Ecology at Central Washington University.

Liz Norell - Where did you go after you left Chatt State.

David Pitchford - Middle Tennessee State University. While I was there, I majored in psychology with a triple minor in biology, neuroscience and linguistics.

Liz Norell - Wow, triple major, triple minor I mean.

David Pitchford - Yeah, the MTSU's psych program is actually pretty flexible which is one of the reasons I chose it. They require people to have depending on whether you're just doing a general psych degree versus like graduate studies concentration. They require you to have at least one to two minors.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm. Cool. So why don't you start David just by telling us a little bit about why Chatt State was the right choice for you to start?

David Pitchford - So it's really kind of odd because I don't even know if Chatt State was kind of a choice for me. I think it was more or less the only option available at that time. Admittedly, I wasn't a great high school student and the way the high school that I went to worked, they kind of tracked people onto a, you're going directly to a four-year university or we don't care about you, just leave us alone and I honestly didn't really know what was going to come next, so I just started looking at things here particularly at the technical college and that's kind of how I ended up here.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm. Did you start in a TCAT program?

David Pitchford - I did a couple of weeks and one before going, I hate this. I feel like I was forced into it, someone made my choice for me and I'm one of those people, I am a little free-

spirited, I don't like being told what to do. So like I switched into regular classes the first moment I got.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm. Not to knock the TCAT.

David Pitchford - Yeah, no they're fantastic. They're absolutely fantastic.

Liz Norell - Not for you.

David Pitchford - It just wasn't what I wanted to do.

Liz Norell - Yeah, so where did you land when you switched over here to the credit side?

David Pitchford - I actually landed in this building right here because I want to do journalism.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

David Pitchford - I found that I really enjoyed writing and I took a lot of classes like in creative writing, a few humanities, a lot of stuff over here, shout-out to Chris Willis, so yeah that was kind of it and I kind of wanted to do science journalism which is what eventually led to my transition into the sciences as a field.

Liz Norell - So what did you think of Chatt State when you first got here?

David Pitchford - Honestly, I can't remember because, but I remember growing to love it. I think it takes a while to adjust to any kind of environment you go to but I think I remember by the end of my first semester that I felt very comfortable and very at home.

Liz Norell - Can you describe a time maybe from early in your time here where you felt like you really belonged at Chatt State?

David Pitchford - There's so many times. There really are just so many times.

Liz Norell - That's great.

David Pitchford - I don't know if I could narrow it down to a single memory but I remember one thing in particular that just like it made me super grateful to have to be here. I actually missed one of my final exams because I got the times mixed up and everything and I got a message from a girl in one of my classes afterwards and she was like where are you and I was like what do you mean like, I thought it was the next day and she's like, no that was today. So I sped over here in my pajamas and in a bathrobe and like ran to the professor's classroom, it was Bill Stifler's mythology class and I was like, please let me like take this, I totally have no clue what I'm doing, my life is a wreck, take pity on me and he did and that was pretty awesome because I think that's when I knew that the Chatt State professors really kind of cared about their students.

Liz Norell - Yeah, I love that. What kinds of relationships did you form with people on campus either students or faculty or staff?

David Pitchford - Oh, gosh! So many good relationships. I think that's one of the best things about Chatt State is because it's a community college, you get better like teacher to student ratios. So it really does feel like there's just kind of more room to get to know your professors and when I was here, I was involved with SGA, so I was able to connect with all kinds of people on campus both students and faculty I mean and some of these people are still people, I keep in contact with Emily Dunlap is absolutely great. She's basically my fairy godmother for a better term.

Liz Norell - I love that.

David Pitchford - And I mean I've visited a couple of times since leaving just and dropped into different professors offices every now and then and they're always happy to talk or just catch up about anything.

Liz Norell - Are there other people from your time here as a student besides Emily Dunlap that you've kept in touch with since you left?

David Pitchford - Bill Stifler, Mary Knaff and Sandy Rutter.

Liz Norell - That's lovely.

David Pitchford - And admittedly I don't reach out as much as I should and I feel guilty because I've been back in Chattanooga for about a month now and I go back to Washington tomorrow and I haven't dropped by their office but I've just been so busy trying to cram in everything in this short little time span, so I might do that after this interview. If I don't and you hear this Mary and Sandy, I'm so sorry.

Liz Norell - Good. What did those relationships mean to you at the time you were a student here?

David Pitchford - I think the relationships, they did a lot like just for my personal growth, I spent three and a half years here at Chatt State, so that I don't even know where to start with that. There's so much I could just talk about here and I'm trying not to give a TED talk but.

Liz Norell - You can give a TED talk, it's okay.

David Pitchford - Okay.

Liz Norell - You won't be the first one.

David Pitchford - Oh, well I think one of the biggest things was coming to terms with identity, just Chatt State has a very diverse kind of campus and from what I've read that's community colleges in general because they're more accessible to people in terms of price and I came from an affluent upper middle-class white suburb, so it was good to kind of break out of that bubble and it also like I took a couple of sociology classes, race relations, gender studies all of that and I think it like really kind of helped me understand the nature of privilege and like it also helped me come to terms with like my sexuality as a queer male, so that was a positive because it's just that weird like transition time in your life and I don't know that I would have gotten that as easy as I did, I'd say a four-year university or just entering the workforce directly after high school.

Liz Norell - I'm so glad you found that here.

David Pitchford - Yeah.

Liz Norell - What do you feel like your time here taught you?

David Pitchford - There's honestly so much. I think one thing that Chatt State taught me is that like I very much I've noticed that a lot of people view community college as a transition phase from like high school to a four-year degree but I think Chatt State taught me that like you're always in a transition phase of some kind.

Liz Norell - Oh, I love that.

David Pitchford - And so it's just a very kind of go at your own pace, don't compare yourself to other people and I I've noticed that there are a lot of other people here that I know that have had similar experiences. I have two friends that were bakers and then they that kind of fell apart for them and they decided to come back here, now they're both in their mid-30s. They're a couple of the wife, she is in pharmacy school and her husband just finished his master's in education. So it really is a never too late to learn. You're always kind of going to be figuring stuff out and in a sense that brings me a peace of mind and like my otherwise like just see of existential anxiety, so like but that is your mid-20s, so yeah.

Liz Norell - Yeah, it's not just this moment in my life where things feel like they're in transition.

David Pitchford - Yes.

Liz Norell - Kind of the way life goes.

David Pitchford - Yeah, yeah and I think that is probably the biggest lesson I've taken from Chatt State and it's also taught me to kind of like savor every moment of that like transition phase because there I cannot tell you what I would give to just like redo a few moments here because it just, it wasn't always easy but I always had fun doing it.

Liz Norell - What might be one of those moments that you'd want to relive and savor even more.

David Pitchford - Every Thursday night for a couple of semesters, I took a creative writing class with a professor that's no longer here and I think that was like super formative to some of the relationships I have now and I'm still best friends with many of the people in from that core group, I mean we like the guy that just got his master's in education, he was one of them, so and we do our annual Christmas New Year party but just every Thursday night, just coffee, snacks and reading each other's like personal works, I mean it was really good and Chatt State I think is good about being not just a college but a community. So I think that's really a plus.

Liz Norell - Have you found anything like that in the programs at MTSU or Central Washington?

David Pitchford - It's interesting that you ask that because MTSU, I felt like I didn't get that but MTSU was also the largest public undergrad university in the state, so I mean there's definitely a size difference and a difference in the way the bureaucracy is kind of structured. So I mean I still made some good relationships there but it was no Chatt State. Ironically, the school I'm at now Central Washington, it's a lot like Chatt State and I absolutely love it. I actually think Chatt State has more students now, I think last count I saw, the estimates was the Chatt State at about 12,000 students and I believe Central Washington has about 5500, so I'm back to that small like faculty to student ratio, the layout of campus is actually similar to Chatt State like the architectural style which it feels homey in that regards. So it's definitely a plus. It's definitely a plus.

Liz Norell - Okay. What advice would you give other students who are here now or who might come here in the future?

David Pitchford - My biggest piece of advice would probably be to enjoy yourself. I think one of the biggest failings that I've experienced with the university system is that coming out of high school like there's so much emphasis on pick your career, know what you want to do and everything else like that and I think an advantage that community colleges have over four-year universities are the community colleges just because they are less expensive. You're given more space to kind of like figure out what you want to do, not everything is as fast-paced either, so it really does give you time to kind of like figure stuff out and explore things for yourself.

Liz Norell - So what comes next for you?

David Pitchford - I honestly don't know. The past year that I've been at the school and now I've been in just kind of crisis mode. I do animal research. I absolutely which I'm going to thank Chattanooga State for that because that's a whole other story of how I got into it but where I'm at now, I'm requesting a lot of like moral and ethical values of what is considered good research and how can I justify this to my conscience. The school I'm at now is completely non-invasive with the research they do but I have friends at other schools and I'm starting to like kind of hear horror stories of the stuff they're doing and how it weighs on them plus there's a bit of a cutthroatiness to academia which doesn't exist at my school fortunately and I'm questioning, do I want to put myself in that environment? So I'm also kind of looking at that school but even though I initially wanted to go and get a PhD, everything's just kind of up at the air at the moment but I definitely think that I'm going to pursue something beyond this. I love a school setting. I know it's not for everyone but I mean I think that also just relates back to what a good time I had here is I feel most comfortable on a campus in an academic environment somehow.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

David Pitchford - So and I think this school really kind of pushed that for me.

Liz Norell - Awesome. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

David Pitchford - Get involved. Chatt State has plenty of clubs, extracurriculars, I mean it's not just limited to people on the community college side. TCAT people are totally welcome to join and hang out and do whatever they want to do like in the main part of campus and I think people on the credit side should really go visit TCAP more also because I know back

when I was here the cosmetology program would do haircuts and they would like the massage therapy program. I think that's what it was, they would offer their services like on certain days of the week and I think it would be nice to see like kind of a better integration of the two but I mean Chatt State really is a Community College. I think it's a good that we have that kind of connection between everything.

Liz Norell - Okay. We wish you the best of luck and figuring out what comes next after your program.

David Pitchford - All right.

Liz Norell - And thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us David.

David Pitchford - Not a problem. Thank you.

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's 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, the faculty and staff who make this podcast possible. If you're 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'll be back soon with another instalment of Tiger Stories. Until then, make it a great one.

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