

[00:00:02.250] - Delana

All right, so we can get started. My name is Delana Turner. The date is February 25, and I'm here with Sewanee alumni LaRaun Cole. So I see on your form that you're from Virginia. What brought you here?

[00:00:22.150] - LaRaun

I'm actually from originally Memphis, Tennessee.

[00:00:24.940] - Delana

Oh ok

[00:00:24.940] - Delana

I prefer to be from Virginia.

[00:00:26.450] - Delana

Okay.

[00:00:28.490] - LaRaun

What brought me to Sewanee is that I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee and had the opportunity to apply to twelve different universities, that I had work with my father in order to do yard work and all this kind of stuff to make money to apply and SAT/ACT to take those exams. And what came up was at the end of the day, it was between Sewanee and University of Chicago that admitted me and they basically the admissions officers fault or were persistent with my mother in order for me to sign up on the financial aid papers to have funding for Sewanee and the University of Chicago. I appreciated that a lot because Sewanee gave a little bit more and they offered for me to be able to take summer classes. It was an easy transition to come here.

[00:01:28.190] - Delana

Okay.

[00:01:28.660] - LaRaun

And it was a place of peace.

[00:01:34.910] - Delana

So with that said, what were some of your first impressions of Sewanee like after coming here? Because I think it's interesting that you find this as a place of peace because not everybody has that experience. So can you tell me a little bit more about your first impressions and how that impression may have shifted over time?

[00:01:52.770] - LaRaun

Definitely, I would say that the first impression was peace for me because I grew up in a little bit more of a chaotic environment in Memphis that didn't have a lot of support from family to go to school. And so when it came down to it, even though I grew up with the majority of African Americans in Memphis, coming to Sewanee was there, there wasn't like clashes or chaos. It was just the focus was and the value was placed on everyone getting an education and that it would be rigorous and that you can go and become any place going be anything you want. So some of the things that were the first impressions were people were friendly, but they kind of kept to themselves. They weren't picking on each other or anything like that. We had a great cafeteria where you could get food anytime, so you can eat healthy food regularly three as many times as you want in a day. You had these small classes where you can talk with the professors and get their perspectives and learn from them in a close environment and sometimes even in their homes. You had friends who were, whether they were African American or Hispanic or even white, where you're the same cut in a sense that you're learning, you're ambitious, you can go almost anywhere.

[00:03:15.990] - LaRaun

And then at the time, Sewanee was ranked in the top 25 in US. News World and Report, which had a standard and still does have a standard of academic excellence when it comes to in comparison to other universities within this peer group. And you had great professors at that time. Nearly 100% of

them had PhDs. Those were my first impressions. And the mountains was always beautiful. So even if things were chaotic and stressful, you can always walk out in nature. And the way I take it is you can easily be stressed indoors, but if you go outside in nature, it's serene and peaceful.

[00:03:53.870] - Delana

Right. Can you talk a bit more about professors that may have shaped your time here? Because I noticed that you kind of talked about that a little bit in your previous answer. But who were some of the people that shaped or that helped shape your time here?

[00:04:08.880] - LaRaun

Yeah, off top of my head, I would say there's probably the four to five that come to mind. Dr. Bruce Goldberg, Dr. Mohitan, Professor Sam Williamson, Professor Robeson. And I'll say there's one other professor that's lingering off the top of my head that I can talk about, the ones that, if I haven't said, I probably have already said Dr. Bruce Goldberg. But I'll talk about some of them in a little bit in detail. So with Dr. Bruce Goldberg and the last one was a dean. So Dr. Bruce Goldberg and Dr. Mohitian, what they did was I had a passion to I hadn't been abroad, but I had a passion to go abroad because I was learning history of China. I was an Asian, Latin American, African history major. And so as I was learning about China, someone was encouraging me to go to China as well. And I couldn't afford to go. But at one point, I was encouraging other people to go so much that when I was in a locker room, when it was me and another guy who I thought should have gone because he had a passion as well, I told him to take that opportunity.

[00:05:23.370] - LaRaun

And he asked me if I could go, why wasn't I going? And I said I couldn't afford to. And around the corner was actually Dr. Bruce Goldberg. And he's like, Lauren, I heard what you said. Let me take 1000 off of what I would make as well as what Dr. Mohitan would make, as well as help you get a scholarship in order to be able to cover it. Can you cover about \$1,000? And honestly, at the time, I didn't know if I could. But somehow, whether it's working, work, study and stuff like that, I was able to do it. And I had about \$100 when I went to China, which was equivalent of \$800. And the things that we did over there, whether it was talking to people within the state-owned enterprises and translation, I think that was probably the catalyst for a global experience that I ended up having, not only working and studying in China later on, but also in other global regions. So Dr. Mohitan, both of them were on the trip and they were just very encouraging and very informative and tremendously helpful. So when I look at Dr. Samuel Williamson, or professor he was also a vice chair, vice chancellor.

[00:06:39.630] - LaRaun

At one point, I took a class from him as well which basically was about international espionage and government influence abroad. And he used to work for the CIA, went to Harvard. Very brilliant guy. And as a vice chancellor, he set that standard high in order for academic excellence of the university. And I really appreciated him setting a high standard and being personable and being kind of, like, well rounded. The third person was Dr. Roberson. Dr. Roberson. And I'll even say between Dr. Roberson, Dr. Bruce Goldberg and that last dean, they were tremendously helpful for me because at a time where I struggled academically, like, my fraternity used to call me the hardest working C student because they would see me in the library, in some instances, reading passed out. I didn't know how to learn. And so I took the dean. At one point, I forgot his name when he and I were talking. He ended up saying I ended up saying I hate struggling or not performing on this school. He's like, have you ever took an assessment for maybe learning challenges? And I was like, no. We spent half a day, all day taking this learning assessment.

[00:07:57.910] - LaRaun

And at the end of it, he ended up saying, Lauren, I have good news and bad news. I was like, oh, boy. He's like, what's the bad news? He's like, LaRaun, you have dyslexia. And at that point, I was like. Oh how do I live with this? He's like, It's not that dramatic, LaRaun. He's like, oh, it's not I'm not done. He's like, no, not at all. He's like, you just process information differently. The good news is your memory is in the 99 percentile. And he's like, So what do you do with Aslam? So, what do you do? What do I do with that? Because I'm making C's. I came here to learn how to make better grades. And he said, if you learn how to organize things, you will. The sky's the limit. And so from that particular point, the

sky was the limit. I found out what was different from papers of people who got A's versus who didn't. And it was just organization. One of the people who some of the people who helped me was like Robin, who was a Rhode scholar, Amy Meyer. She ended up going on to be going on to University of Michigan Law. And then in Amy's instance, we had polar opposite of views. But she helped me understand what it took to make an A paper. And it was just simply organization. And once I learned that in Dr. Roberson's class he was one who saw the difference in me going from C's to a's solid A's. And so much. So he was like, LaRaun. He even told me a few years back you're one of the best students. And not the best student I had because you'd go to the library and get the book, all the books in the syllabus and start reading. And start drafting papers and stuff early on for me to get feedback to the point where I was facilitating a lot of his classes. But then he saw the change from the papers going to see the A's because of the organization. So there was instant feedback to the point where in my senior year, I started making A's. And I credit to Dr. Bruce Goldberg because in his class, he was focused on memorizing things the right way and understanding things throughout the US. Vietnam history. And so I know this is a long answer, but I think those were some of the professors that were impactful throughout my experience that was also transformative. Just to let you know, the impact of those is of my career, whether it was at Citigroup or whether it was at Price, Waterhouse, Cooper's, whether it was at Capital One or whether it was at Meadow or Facebook and we'll see soon to come, maybe even McKinsey. There was, and even in business school abroad, the understanding how first principles, understanding how to learn and to thrive and to organize. I tend to be one who organize groups of people today. That's it.

[00:10:50.620] - Delana

Okay. Thank you for that. I appreciate it. Thank you for that. I am going to get to what life has been like after Sewanee but I definitely want to touch on your university activities. So, like Gamma, cross country, the purple cow.

[00:11:10.010] - LaRaun

Yeah.

[00:11:12.550] - Delana

Tell me a little bit about everything, please.

[00:11:14.810] - LaRaun

So I think one of the things before Sewanee, that was my hallmark. If I didn't have great grades, I need to be in activities. And so when I came to Sewanee, I thought that was the way to still excel, to be in a lot of activities while you're studying. Even if your grades weren't that great, you can end up in a lot of activities. So I end up being in a lot of different clubs, and a lot of those clubs stretch me. Some of the clubs were like, I start off in cross country, in part because it was more my dad thought that there was a way to get a scholarship or something. And after running up and down the mountains, I'm like, I ain't doing this. I'm the last one in this thing, and this is not fun. And my leg started to hurt, and the college wear down. And I was in martial arts and I was in EMT Basic. I was selected, like four out of 50 or four out of eight or something to be EMT Basic. And then the Firefighter training, and I end up starting The Purple Cow, which was the first satirical newspaper in Sewanee, and it survived three years afterwards.

[00:12:18.800] - LaRaun

So there was a lot of lump fun and jokes with creating things with other people. I was a part of the director of short courses with Eric Hartman where it's like, we had students have these short courses that they in turn would create and teach to other students. And it was very interesting because what I thought would be popular was not. And what was popular was like, really, it would be like fly fishing was probably the most popular course and I did not understand that. And Terra Carter reading became a popular thing. I was like, okay, so it was pretty fun. And I had friends who were in like, Be Glad and stuff like that. But I think probably one of the things that is Be Glad was like LGBTQI because at least the way I grew up, a conservative Christian, there was a clash with the beliefs that I grew up with and who, homosexual, career lesbians, all that were. So for me, it's like to demystify that I have no interest in participating in any different sexual orientation, but at the same time, it's like there are people at the core just like me.

[00:13:36.310] - LaRaun

What is their perspective? What is it that they kind of want or expect out of life at a time and at a place where they weren't accepted? And so for me, I spent quite a few bit time with them and I told them my view and we clash and argue and all this kind of stuff, but it expanded my own view. Like, I ended up going to New York on an outreach trip to the AIDS clinic. And it was eye opening. There didn't have to be unwarranted hate in my heart towards somebody that I don't know anything about. And then I was also heavily involved with the international students because they felt more close at home to me than almost anyone on the campus because they came all the way over here focused on education. They are isolated. And even with a lot of the African American students, I didn't get to know them as immediately. I was probably the only one in my class that didn't play football. And so I was here a lot of times and yeah, it felt a little bit isolated, so the international students were welcoming as well. And then lastly, I think probably what most people may know me more of is being a founding father, Gamma Sigma Phi.

[00:14:54.790] - LaRaun

And so I was one of ten. And Esau McCauley, Devin Dalar, they were more the catalyst for the fraternity being created. But even as I gather inputs from all of them in preparation for a panel today, the vast majority, at least seven out of ten brothers I was able to get in touch with, they end up joining similar reasons why I did for Fellowship, for friendship, for Brotherhood, so that they don't feel isolated here. So those were a few of the activities that I participated. All of that on your internships? Love them and all that.

[00:15:36.860] - Delana

Yeah. Can you talk a little bit more about what the process of founding Gamma was on this campus? What the climate was like, how easy was it?

[00:15:51.170] - LaRaun

I'll start backwards.

[00:15:52.490] - Delana

Okay.

[00:15:53.350] - LaRaun

Very easy. From what I saw, the university was, to the second point, very supportive. The last one was what the experience was, like the process going backwards. So what the process was esau was probably at McCurg or someplace where Devon had the idea of starting a fraternity. Many of those guys played football together, but we went to classes separately and we loosely hang out with each other. So the idea was to inquire about in the fall of 1999 to inquire about who would be willing to join the fraternity. To me, at that time, there weren't many of us on the campus. At best, I would say maybe 20 of us, 20 to 30 of us on the campus as far as blacks altogether. And so when I was approached, I believe by Devin, I said, yeah, a number of brothers were surprised that because I didn't necessarily sit there mo. But it was like, I want to know who they are. I want to know who they are and be friends with them, even if they're very different, very different personalities. So we started getting together. I think Esau made a case to someone like Eric Hartman, the dean of students, I believe at the time, or coordinator, and was like, hey, we want to start this fraternity.

[00:17:19.300] - LaRaun

And so the university was like, okay, they're familiar with fraternities, but I don't know if they were missing out on what minorities needed on this campus. From a connectivity view, we had the multicultural center. And that became initially that place where we could congregate and gather together the majority of African Americans to be able to just hang out, to feel safe. But at the same time, it was still open to anyone who wanted to come in from any kind of, like, minority group race, all this. But the house essentially became hours of use. And that's where we started to have meetings, started hanging out, joking a lot again. But then over time, what we also noticed is that not only did we enjoy hanging out with each other, but we want to do something with impact. We already had established ourselves as an inclusive organization, not only on the campus, but even internally,

because we had to vote on it, whether or not to be a black fraternity or not. Maybe eight out of two. No, we're going to be an inclusive organization. How do I remember? Because I was one of the ones who's like, we need to be a black fraternity.

[00:18:41.510] - LaRaun

And I remember the other guy's fraternity brother who was like that, and the both of us becoming more inclusive in that regards. But with the process, we started doing things that hadn't been done on the campus and doing things in different ways. Like, we put on the first one Women's day event, we started doing things like we did a car wash to raise funds for something to in order to support the community, the local community. We volunteered to help kids with whether it's school supplies and in some instances, like tutoring. And so we started doing a bit more outreach because we wanted to be known not as diverse in just the way we look, but diverse in how we contribute to the inclusivity on the campus. And so over time, we didn't think that it would kind of continue and last as long as it did. We didn't have that forethought, and we just kind of did things as it came along. Today, we're over 100 gammas strong, and we're working to kind of create that visibility of who we are to ourselves. First, making sure that we add value to each other in terms of, like, internship, job referrals, business opportunities, investment opportunities, but also making sure that regardless of what value that we help give to each other, that we build up on our own value independent of what we do.

[00:20:12.310] - LaRaun

So we're working on some things or principles of, like, advancement, community, and empowerment. But I would say the origin of that probably started with the fraternity, but it wasn't mainly the founders. It was the ones who came after the founders who built up on the fraternity for what we have today.

[00:20:32.570] - Delana

Thank you for that.

[00:20:33.660] - LaRaun

No problem.

[00:20:34.560] - Delana

Can you talk a little bit more about the needs of minority students or even including international students on the campus?

[00:20:42.910] - LaRaun

Yeah.

[00:20:43.950] - Delana

Not saying, like, I want to know the gossip, but kind of sort of like yeah.

[00:20:50.690] - LaRaun

The need for the minority students, the international students that I saw was that you're not alone. Back in the day, we had Mr. Benjamin to help us out. Now, you guys should have access to alumni who are black, who are international students, and who are as successful, if not more successful, than our white peers here on campus. You guys aren't alone. You're just a phone call away from being guided in a direction where you want to go, like whether you want a good relationship or whether you want millions of dollars or whether you want to move up the corporate ladder, or whether you just want to own your business. You got not that far away. So you guys are not alone. It's just a phone call away. When you have someone internship funding that will give you an internship to go anywhere in the world, and they pay you to do whatever you want to do, that's a golden Willy Wonka ticket. When you look at Sewanee unlike a lot of the Ivy League schools, they give you the opportunity to have access to the alumni network, where they will work, where they live, all this kind of stuff, so that you could connect with them.

[00:22:07.620] - LaRaun

The Ivy League schools don't do that. And Sewanee is so small that even if a person didn't like the way you look or who you are by the fact that you have in Sewanee experience, they will still help you in

many cases. I've had a friend who got a job who went to Harvard undergrad in Columbia Law solely primarily because he saw that the person that was a partner of the firm was from Sewanee, and a guy was happy that he knew about Sewanee and a visitor, and he ended up working at that firm. I've seen super conservative Republicans, conservative Republicans who not only help me get into their law firm, even as a messenger, but also help other Sewanee students who had completely opposite views from him to get at a top three corporate law firm in the United States shared someone experience. So when it comes to the original question of life, I think it was what I would want the international student, minority students to know, based upon the experience that I had here, is that you guys although it seems isolated. And you can be isolated here. And you can feel alone here. You're not as you think you are. If you're able to reach out.

[00:23:33.370] - Delana

Right, okay, thanks. And then, shifting gears a little bit, I noticed that you were a writer in The Purple. You established a purple cow.

[00:23:45.110] - LaRaun

Yeah, the purple cow.

[00:23:46.160] - Delana

The Purple Cow and was the director for short courses. So you have a little bit of a creative side. Can you talk about tell me about it and once again what that was like here. I know you said short courses, people, things you thought wouldn't weren't going to be popular, actually were popular. So just tell me a little bit more about that.

[00:24:07.500] - LaRaun

Yeah, I would say this sorry about that. I think that maybe it's in Aid and me, maybe it's in Aid. In all of us, there is a part that's logical, practical, let's get stuff done side. But there's also a creative side. And I think the creative side isn't nurtured as much. So when we go to a place like Sewanee, every organization that I've been in, I've either added value or perform extremely well in something. For example, in Sewanee yeah, creation of The Purple Cow was great. The director of Short courses, allowing people to have this platform to express themselves was great. Even when I mentioned like, be glad, international students, gamma sigma Phi it's all to be able to give people a voice or allow people to express themselves or to learn more about others as well as myself along the way. This shaped up when I was at International Law Institute in East Africa, I got to meet people from all over the continent, 54 different countries. I had a job where I was creating projects, and by the time I left, five people had to be hired to do what I was doing. And the revenue went from 400,000 to 1.5 million.

[00:25:18.070] - LaRaun

But it became okay. There were things that we were trying to accomplish that we measured our measured success by money. So it's like, how can I increase? How can I improve? How can I improve it? How can I make it easier for somebody to come along? And so that was a hallmark. But then in Citigroup, at one point, my office was number one out of 2300 offices in the country. And so again, it was looking at metrics. What was the measure of success? How to do we strengthen certain areas that everyone is overlooking in order to be in that top rank? Then it was like, in business school, I went to hold International Business School in Dubai and then Shanghai. And in there, it was more like, yeah, do well in class. But I didn't care about as much doing well in class as it was what was needed on the campus that wasn't there. Like, we need a vendor machine. We need a way to make this process easier for us to live in there. And it became, Why don't there was this competition where I was one team of, like, five out of 19 other teams that we competed against each other, not my team emerges number one.

[00:26:27.610] - LaRaun

And then we had to compete against business schools around the world in this competition to create a social enterprise that would be awarded a million dollars if we had won. But that was trying to figure out what the measure of success was there. And then I helped create what was Holt Talks, which was based upon it was like, whole talks was based off kind of like Ted talks, where you have public speaking for eight minutes, but on anything that you would like to talk about or express yourself that

you're passionate about. And then when you have those talks, it gave a voice to people on campus and want something they care about. But the participants would judge based upon their phone. They would use their phone to vote on who would win based upon four criteria. And that rolled out. I didn't do it in Dubai, but I did it in Shanghai. And it rode out to all of the three, basically in total, like, five campuses where they do it annually, this public speaking competition amongst those who study. And then when it came to Price Waterhouse Coopers, I competed. Those who were in my peer group, like, in eleven categories, I was number one out of 15.

[00:27:45.590] - LaRaun

And I didn't get promoted. Daniel yelled at the partner who made the decision. He's like he followed up on all of my results. And because I had a person coaching who was kind of, like, trying to make herself look good, which held me back a little bit, but I ended up getting promoted, then Capital One, in a similar sense, managing different projects. And that's when I got more into diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. And then I ended up going to Meta or Facebook, where I was managing ten departments in Accounting, Finance, and Risk, but I was also asked to be the head of Finance, Transformations, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. And that transformed programs from being trained about diversity, equity, inclusion from leaders from the past two years to programs that were actually implementable, like having a fantastic Friday, short courses where we have classes on yoga, meditation, how to invest in inevitable wealth, being black in Brazil, all of these different kind of creative things that the employees there had. But they didn't pull it out of each other because we only knew each other as coworkers. And so that's an idea that came from Sewanee being creative, being a manager, short course, it's like, how do you express yourself in this diverse environment?

[00:29:08.500] - LaRaun

And then we had, like, Trailblazer Tuesdays, which were posts that highlighted someone in history who was a minority during Heritage Months who created systemic impact on the world. Like, we had a write up that will be a post for everyone to see. And so would it be someone like Shirley Jackson, who was one of the people who gosh, I forgot exactly what she created? Like, I almost want to say it wasn't 3D imaging, but stuff that we use voice over IP and text messaging and stuff that most people wouldn't know about. Or Garrett Morgan, who created the gas mask, the street light that you see in Sewanee there were a number of people who are African American that weren't just known for creating peanut butter, that actually invented things that transformed the world and it's not just African Americans.

[00:29:57.560] - LaRaun

There's Hispanics, there's Asians, there's other minorities. But to your point, the creativity probably came before, Sewanee but Sewanee gave this platform to be able to express myself or help create something that wasn't on the campus. And it just was filling in and doing the work to do it. Like gammas, like the purple cow, like all these other activities mentioned.

[00:30:27.290] - Delana

Yeah. I'm very interested in your life after Sewanee.

[00:30:34.640] - LaRaun

Yeah.

[00:30:35.100] - Delana

Like, you talked a little bit about it when you were in East Africa and Meadow. How I don't I don't know exactly how I want to word this question. I want to say, like, okay, hold on. What I'm trying to ask is, like, how what did you pull from Sewanee that took you all around the world to 40 plus countries? Yeah. Okay. That can be as long winded as possible. I'm incredibly interested.

[00:31:03.690] - LaRaun

Okay, I'll lay it out. So I didn't know that I was interested in international travel until I came to Sewanee. There was an outreach trip that was in the Honduras.

[00:31:16.080] - Delana

Yeah.

[00:31:16.390] - LaRaun

I didn't even know how people went abroad. My first plane ride was to Sewanee at the age of, like, 17 or whatever it was for the weekend. But I knew that when I wasn't selected to go on. The Honduras trip and I rode up while want to go that I was actually hurt after that, but I knew that I was going to go abroad. And so when it rolled around the next year, I was pissed and I was like, I should be the one going it. And I did go, but it wasn't like I appreciated being abroad, but I didn't like I still got rejected that first year, even though I have some great friends that I met on that trip. So the thing is after where I knew I loved going abroad, even today. And so when it came to the Tanya internship, I was like, yeah, I had free money go anywhere. I was like in Maryland. One point I was at Vanderbilt Medical School. At another point I ended up doing Georgetown, but did a trip to China, which was another time. And then I ended up doing something like working at the Embassy at ethiopian in Washington DC.

[00:32:20.290] - LaRaun

And so Tanya internship afforded it because I was in Professor Dunn's class at one point, who is a professor out of God, I want to say like Coke, where he left the weekend of the week that his whole entire cabinet got slaughtered. And he was in France, but he ultimately ended up teaching at Sewanee and we had to go to DC to participate in a model organization of African unity. And I represented Somalia and I was like all these people from all these diverse cultures and stuff. I want to be a part of that because if I only have one life to live, why not expendit exploring what the world has to offer you learn more about yourself. So I asked because for the time internship after I graduated for like three months in order to work at the Embassy of Ethiopia in DC. It got me here there and I met diplomats and stuff like that. It was pretty cool. Ambassador and ultimately I was struggling to find a job right afterwards. And I applied to a bunch of places. I didn't get any of them, but at the last minute I enjoyed the mission statement of the International Law Institute, which was a sister institute of Georgetown law.

[00:33:34.340] - LaRaun

And so with HR said, hey, I love your organization's mission. I think it's cool that you are focused on capacity building, helping abroad and stuff like that. Even though I probably don't fit for any jobs that you guys have. I don't even see any openings. I just want you to know if any opportunity comes up, let me know. I sent that email off. The lady said I appreciated this stuff. At that time I was pre law. I was focused on going to law school, study LSAT trying to pass it and stuff like that or do well on it. I ended up HR lady got back to me and she basically said, hey, LaRaun, why don't you come into the office and you know. You know, just bring your resume. It's like okay, cool. And so I come into the office. I was like, wow, this is a nice little place. And then I have my resume and it's like, Cool. She's like, hey, we have someone here. You want to interview with him? I was like, sure. I was like interview. In my mind, I'm thinking I have to be a paralegal or something. I hadn't gotten into law school and I took pre-law classes at Georgetown Law and all this stuff.

[00:34:41.840] - LaRaun

But I was like, okay, I'll probably go up the traditional route. But I ended up talking to this guy who was a CEO of International Law Institute in East Africa or in Uganda. And we talked. And at first, before even that, she asked me did I speak French or Spanish because if I did, they may have an opportunity for me. I said, I don't. And then when I fast forward, he ended up speaking with that guy. His name is Sweden moon Twali. He basically was telling me about interviewing me, asking me all these questions about organizing and planning. And I gave him my responses. Then he left. And then the lady, the HR lady who I'd spoken with basically said so LaRaun, we have an opportunity if you want to go to Uganda and work there for a year who doesn't pay much but we have a funding for you to be able to do it. And I was like, great. She's like, well, congratulations. You have a job. So you have two weeks to get your life on order and then you have to go to Uganda. And I was like, but wait, I don't speak Spanish.

[00:35:45.540] - LaRaun

And she's like, Uganda is not Spanish. Because I was like, I know, I know. It's in Africa. She's like, Are you okay with it being in Uganda? I was like, yeah. She's like, okay, tell me why. I was like, Because the

only alternatives I have right now is either to go back to Memphis or to go to Uganda. I don't care if it's war ridden right now. I go to Uganda then before I go back home. And so that's how I got in Uganda. And some point while I was over there, I met a great friends and I started traveling throughout East Africa like Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and some place over time. I didn't travel a whole lot in between after I left the international lawsuit and when I worked in Citigroup because I just didn't have the money and didn't make the effort enough to do it. But I still had that burning and desire. And when it came down to business school, I studied seven months in Dubai and in Shanghai. And so I had a chance to still do country hopping. And along with the way I did central Euroroad trips in places like Slovakia and Hungary and Slovenia and Italy and Germany and stuff like that.

[00:36:58.920] - LaRaun

And I also in Asia had friends, and especially after business school, were friends scattered all over the globe. Did not like Iceland and Seoul or South Korea, the Philippines. And so, all of these different places where I end up going and still have much more to go, it tells more about who I am, in a sense, like, what is it that I want to know about myself, what places I like, what I don't like and why. And even so with my wife, she's Ethiopian and she's been in more than 75 countries. And so that's kind of a part of us that's instilled. But I think once a person goes abroad, especially if they're open, they are going to get that travel book. And especially when they're able to meet friends and learn new things about themselves and others. It's a never-ending journey of exploration and fun.

[00:37:51.900] - Delana

Yeah. The reason why I asked, and I was looking like a smiling fool as you were talking, was because I went abroad to Ghana last semester, and I stayed an additional month, so I left right before Christmas.

[00:38:04.130] - LaRaun

Yeah.

[00:38:05.000] - Delana

But I do have that travel book.

[00:38:08.030] - LaRaun

So you went to Ghana. Do you have any plans to go anytime soon?

[00:38:12.450] - Delana

I'm trying to go this summer.

[00:38:13.810] - LaRaun

If you do go this summer, I know John Edinburgh is one of my fraternity brothers. His wife and him are they're going to go this summer. And then in Ghana, there's a Sewanee grad named Nana Bimpong. Fantastic guy. Both of them are John Edenberg. His wife is Lashanda Cobbins. They're based out of Atlanta, but they're excited to go. Nana is the best friends of John Edenberg, and I would highly recommend get in touch with Nana. They would more love to have you there and show you around.

[00:38:48.970] - Delana

Yeah, I love it so much. And I do have that travel bug now.

[00:38:53.850] - LaRaun

It won't go away.

[00:38:55.470] - Delana

When you said you went to 40 plus countries I was like wow.

[00:38:59.610] - LaRaun

yeah. Even that's one of the best life experiences I've had.

[00:39:04.540] - Delana

Yeah. And that was my first time really going abroad. So it's just it's been it's amazing.

[00:39:08.860] - LaRaun

And I'll even go as far as saying this. I was talking to another young fraternity brother who was trying to find things on his career path, and I told him point blank, I was like he asked me, should I do this? Go in finance, should I go in project management? I tell him, look, man, you're a sophomore. Just go, have fun, get your tiny internship, go abroad. Some of the programs that Gamma have or internships we have available that alumni or friends of mine have, like, we will take an intern. They're in Iceland. They're in Dubai or UAE. They're in Bulgaria. And they said they're like, we will love to have an internship earned for this summer and welcome them. Or if they want to work remotely, do that. Yeah. Have fun.

[00:39:56.610] - Delana

I didn't realize how kind of connected the Gamma like alumni network is.

[00:40:02.690] - LaRaun

We weren't about a couple of months ago, okay, but when we got 100 strong, when we created a list of who's out there and where they're at, that's when we're like, okay, what do you guys need on campus? How can we help serve or support you? And that's when we start seeing some of the brothers alumnus start saying, look, we got you for an internship. All they need to do is just connect with us and then other people for non-gambling like, you want to do an internship? We got you. A friend from was looking for jobs on LinkedIn to hire people. She was the head of Russia for hewlett packer for marketing, and she's in Dubai now because of the conflict. But she's like, yeah, I would like to learn more about this internship opportunities that you guys have so that I may be able to have some internship interns. Gamma is one sect, but then PST, they're building their list too, and they are in just as influential and powerful places as Gammas are, as many other Sewanee who aren't a part of either of the fraternities. And sororities but it's like we have to know where they are, who they are and are they open, which they typically are.

[00:41:19.370] - Delana

Okay, and so I assume that process has been good for you and the other founding fathers getting reconnected or kind.

[00:41:27.730] - LaRaun

Of like it's been a pleasant surprise to reconnect with some of them. Some of them are very busy with life and that can include having multiple kids. Others can be like being professors or New York times writers and others are living abroad in Japan and Thailand. And you have some and some of us in the military, some of us are, like myself, unemployed at the moment, but then sorry, and some of us are missing that, especially the founding fathers. We've been wished well because all the fraternity brothers of the past 20 years know who we are and been wishing us well unknowingly and didn't even know that the fraternity was still here. And so there's a rekindling of a reconnection with current and gammas in between. Heck, even some of us are like georgia's lawyers, VP, CEOs, some of us are top educators, software engineers at Google and just all over the place. And the PSTs is equally great places like that as well as many of the other minorities who didn't pledge. They're doing phenomenal stuff. One guy was referring me to Apple and another person saw on the campus is a doctor. So yeah, we're doing things whether we know it or not.

[00:43:08.910] - Delana

So is your field and it's probably be one of the last questions because I don't want to take up all your time, but I got time. So is your field tech because I know your Sewanee education is Asian, african and Latin American history. Yeah, but then you said you're being referred to apple, you have background at Meadow, Facebook?

[00:43:33.930] - LaRaun

Yeah, I can answer that. The easiest way for me to answer I think this may be most liberating for a lot

of people is I don't know. And when I say I don't know, there's things that I'm very passionate I enjoy, like I enjoy project management, managing things, building things from beginning to end and letting it go. So I enjoy that. But the space that I've occupied for a few decades have been accounting, finance and risk, whether it's at prestigious place like big four consulting like price of waterhouse coopers, or big four banking like Citigroup, or big tech like Facebook. And I see even going through the interview path of Google or McKinsey and couponing out of South Korea as some type of accounting executive. And I guess when I look at it right now, it's mainly and even asked to be somewhat of an executive for the minority business development agency in the government. But the thing about it is, I would say right now is just exploring ways to have fun and make money and being able to help as many people get what they want out of life. And that probably is still probably the driving kind of like joy or whatnot for now.

[00:45:01.630] - Delana

Is there anything else about your Sewanee experience or even life after Sewanee that you'd like to share? Good question.

[00:45:09.010] - LaRaun

Yeah, I think there was a couple of things. Despite the fear and the reality of some of the harshness that the pandemic created, I thought that was a beautiful time for a lot of people to kind of if you're not able to travel abroad, that you're able to travel inward. So that was a time where with having a four to five year old, having a five year old daughter, that was a time where you could do those inner simple child things like I learned how to meditate, that was tremendously helpful. Doing transcendental meditation during that time I learned how to draw again with my daughter and we go gardening and we try to create a gardening around the house, a garden around the house, or hiking in a local trail just to breathe in fresh air and just know that everything would be okay. To learn how to cook together, which was helpful in learning how to measure and organize and to plan and do all these different things and try to grow things which didn't turn out too well, but at the same time it was the attempt. And so painting, drawing and even tried to created a children's book better Together how Black People Improve the World.

[00:46:27.400] - LaRaun

And it would have gone to have this big list of hispanics and Asians and Jews and Europeans and then whites and women and stuff like that and was going to have a book series on that. But all of that came from exploring self within. While it was during a time where many of us would have felt more isolated. Being able to do that with family and my wife and over time, learning things about what self worth means, independent of what you do. Learning how to apart from self worth, just how to have boundaries, even with other people, whether it's work or home or any place. Family, friends. I thought those were tremendously helpful along the way that I probably wish I would have learned earlier.

[00:47:22.990] - Delana

Yeah, I think a lot of people definitely touched into those things during the pandemic. I mean, didn't really have much of a choice.

[00:47:30.180] - LaRaun

Yeah. Is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't ask that you want to ask or anything that you want to share about yourself in the record?

[00:47:47.990] - Delana

Like I said, I'm definitely fascinated with your travel experience. That's, like, a big thing that's been on my mind lately. It's like, okay, I've been out of the country. How do I get back out ?

[00:48:00.540] - LaRaun

Right. I would say this there's a fraternity brother that's on the campus. His name is Thadaeus Johnson. If I see him out here, I'll show you who he is.

[00:48:12.500] - Delana

Okay.

[00:48:12.880] - LaRaun

I'll try to bring him in here and be like, hey, look, you should talk with Delana.

[00:48:20.670] - Delana

You got it.

[00:48:22.190] - LaRaun

About traveling, because I think he's traveled at least throughout Asia as much. And then if I know anybody else who's traveled a lot, like, I have a good friend in DC. He works for the World Bank. He travels all the time, and I don't know if he still is interested in traveling, but he's another good person to talk to. But his name is Peter Kusek K-u-s-e-k. And he works at the World Bank. And if you reach out to him, he'll tell you about his travelers experiences and stuff.

[00:48:49.770] - Delana

Okay. Did you say he was a brother or not a brother? He's not a brother.

[00:48:54.430] - LaRaun

He's an international brother. Not a brother.

[00:48:59.050] - Delana

Okay. And this Thadaeus. Johnson.

[00:49:01.790] - LaRaun

He's a brother.

[00:49:02.840] - Delana

Okay.

[00:49:03.150] - LaRaun

Yeah. He's a Gamma as well, and he's probably out here too.

[00:49:05.760] - Delana

Okay.

[00:49:06.750] - LaRaun

He's one of those guys who travel a lot, and I know there's some in between that's skipping my mind, but yeah, there's quite a few of us.

[00:49:15.480] - Delana

Yeah. Okay. And then what I do when I'm in the US. And on campus, I am a Bonner leader. So that's like, a four year service learning internship, and I work with the Roberson project as part of that service learning internship. So I actually did my freshman year online because of COVID and everything, and I live with my grandparents. She was like, oh, no, if you catch it, you're not coming back here.

[00:49:37.560] - LaRaun

Yeah. Trying to take us out.

[00:49:40.400] - Delana

Exactly. So I had to stay home out of respect to my grandparents, and I was trying to figure out more ways to be connected with the people on campus, because I didn't want to pledge anything because I'm like, I don't really know much about the organizations I'm posse, and I'm like, I don't know much about my posse. I don't know much about just the people here. Yeah. And it was right after and this was in the midst of, like, you heard about the lacrosse incident when okay, well, that was in I don't know. I don't remember exactly what year, but I think it was in the spring, and some white students were yelling the n word and other racial slurs out at a lacrosse game, I think, against Emmanuel

college, there have been, like, news articles written about it, and I was like, okay, I'm coming from PG county.

[00:50:22.870] - LaRaun

Yeah. I didn't have as much of an experience like that, especially anything directly, directly towards me. But still, if it's directed against one of us, it's kind of directed against the all of us. But the one thing I've been trying to talk to different folks in administration about is, like, although we have a theme of resistance, although we're kind of, like, empowering ourselves by having these sessions and stuff, here, there's a strong part of me when it comes to advancement. Not like development or anything like start displaying who some of the minority alumni is. To have a talk to the university about what we do. Like, hey, you're a doctor in public health. You could speak to us. And the people who are interested in public health, they'll come, they'll listen, and then that's an opportunity to talk about how race plays a factor in it, because that way they're not on guard or defensive, because we always have those allies who are white that will already be there. But when you have somebody who doesn't look like you, who's privileged, and they want what you have, you put them in a space where they have to learn from you.

[00:51:34.700] - LaRaun

And then that is a way to passively change the way they view and think and have an added perspective that they wouldn't consider, and they won't be calling us the n word or they hesitate when it comes to them getting to know us better as who we are. Just brilliant beings. And you won't have probably incidents. I remember some world cup game where I think there are times throwing bananas on the field of players and stuff. So it's kind of like you have fewer instances of that, and you have people that are put in check if they don't.

[00:52:08.050] - Delana

Right. Thank you for that. I was coming in, coming to Sewanee in the midst of all that, and I'm, like, transferred to UMD before I even step foot on the campus, just because I don't know if I could do it.

[00:52:21.390] - LaRaun

And a lot of students go through that, but there is a need, if there hasn't already been full community, whether you know what I like, because even with some of the fraternity bros, I didn't like them. We named their gun fights in certain instances. I didn't even know why I was getting the fights. And I tried to keep in mind at least two things. It's like, you may not like everyone, but at least I try to do my best to love everyone. Even if I don't like them, even if I don't have want them around me, still wish them well. And that could even include the white students. The white students, they're still someone getting so wanting education just like you. They may come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, but at the same time, we're all, whether it's one or whether it's earth, whether it's in this type of community, I'm not saying we all need each other, but I am saying that there's value that we have from understanding each other's perspectives. Because you never know when you have somebody that be a helping hand that doesn't look like you or the other way around.

[00:53:31.160] - LaRaun

You're the person that has to help them get out of their own way in some instances.

[00:53:37.910] - Delana

Thank you for that great insight. It really is.

[00:53:41.206] - LaRaun

good

[00:53:41.260] - Delana

Yeah. And working with the Robertson Project, especially with the St. Mark's community, kind of was a way for me when it was difficult to connect with the students here because everybody else was going through their own things during the pandemic. Whether they were here or online was a way to connect with other community stakeholders that weren't necessarily like student staff or faculty. So getting connected with the black community here has been one of the best things I would say I've

ever done in this short life that I've lived so far.

[00:54:12.370] - LaRaun

Well, I would encourage you one thing, delana one thing. If you see it missing, add it because you can and the university tends to support you on it.

[00:54:24.530] - Delana

Yeah. All right. Thank you so much, LaRaun.

[00:54:27.720] - LaRaun

Cool bean. If I hadn't coughed on my head, but it was a pleasure.