

John Boccacino:

Hello,

Yeah, yeah, no, actually I love the snow. That's why I came up here. I wanted to have a different experience than the one that I grew up with, but through middle school and through high school, I was always interested in working with disability populations. I worked with the special education classes in peer mentoring programs, both in middle school and high school. I was the ambassador of Circle of Friends in high school, which is a organization where they peer up general education students and special education students to guide each other around high school.

And so I was really interested in the work that our speech language pathologist at our high school, Ms. Dempsey, was doing with the CDE. I was a 19.511 0 Td(w)

A lot of it is that, if there is training for it, it's one little piece of a course and it comes through voice course because it has to do with modifying voice, which we usually look at in the context of populations that are in remediation, rather than voluntary services. So it is a voluntary service, but it's such a life saving voluntary service to be able to give someone the gender euphoria of having the voice that they feel represents them.

But also, there are language aspects to gender, or gendered language aspects that a lot of people don't look at in the field, or they're just not historically recognized. And so a lot of the earliest voice training was done on a transgender woman. And there's a lot more gender affirming voice and communication modification being done with transgender women than trans men, because HRT hormone replacement therapy for trans men naturally lowers the voice. But in women, it does not because it has to do with the mass of the vocal codes, and a couple of other features.

Yeah. There's not a lot out there as much for trans men as there is for trans women. And then also, looking further at there, et

So this is actually why I like speech language pathology, because I've always been able to use my voice to advocate for my needs. I had always been a 4.0 student, 4.0 plus, I graduated high school with a 4.3. And I always participated in class. Nobody was really worried so much about my academic pieces. I was also a tri-varsity athlete. I was incredibly involved in clubs and everything at school. And I always knew that I would be able to work my way through school and get a good scholarship and go to college. So I've been planning this since elementary school. It was not luck at all. It was very much planned from elementary school that I would work hard and get my way out.

And I am very lucky that there are people in my life that told me that I could do that, and believed in me. So I applied to Syracuse University, obviously, and I got in, and I started living at in Day Hall, go Day [inaudible 00:12:46], and I felt a sense of stability that I hadn't felt in a long time. And again, I reached out to my support services at the San Diego Syracuse meetup. I asked around, "Hey, I've been homeless for a few months. I don't know who to talk to get help when I get into Syracuse, because I don't even know what I'm doing. I'm applying alone. I'm doing all of this paperwork alone. Every year I have to call the financial aid office and be like, "Hey, I can't fill out the parent form of my FAFSA because I have been disowned."

And I was put in touch with Colleen Bench who at the time worked at the parents' office. So she really got me started on understanding Syracuse University or understanding university life in general, and how to navigate everything. And then from there, I had help through this Syracuse University LGBTQ resource center, because I very quickly started using that as a home. I spent a lot of time in the LGBTQ resource center to the point where, when I started complaining about having to use my student work program, they offered me a job there so I worked there for four years.

John Boccacino:

There's a lot to one pack, Alex, from that story. It's emotional from someone who's listening to you say it because you could have every right to be bitter to be angry, and I'm sure you had those moments. I'm sure you went through that, but the way that you are presenting, the way that you're talking about your story, it's inspiring because you didn't let this get you down. You found a way. You had a plan since you were in fourth grade, and that resiliency is just such an inspiration. And I wanted to ask you about how you develop that resiliency when you don't have the proper support system in place that people at your age should have?

Alex Middleton:

That's a great question. Partially, I think it's internal. A lot of people told me... My cousin who is in a very similar situation to me or my friends, they often tell me, "I have no idea how he did it," and I don't know either. Therapy, definitely therapy helps. I recommend it. But also there's always been something that I click onto. And I struggle with depression, anxiety, PTSD myself. And so I'm not saying this is a solid plan or even easy, but there's always been at least one aspect of life that I've been like, "Okay, I love this. Let me focus on staying alive and keeping going for this."

And for a lot of the time, that was my little brother who I felt like I raised a little bit growing up, but I held on for him. And actually, I wouldn't have gone to Syracuse University without his blessing. I was about to accept my offer of a full ride to San Diego State, but I really wanted to go to Syracuse because it was across the country from San Diego. And I was about to accept San Diego State because my brother was angry at me for leaving the home at 18, and he really needed me there to be able to support him and take care of

And I got a text during my third period class, "Alex, you have to come to my class right now." And I was like, "Okay, I hope he's okay." He gets these really bad migraines. So I always meet him in the nurse's office when he is having one so I can calm him down. And so I go to his classroom, I excuse myself for my own class to go to the bathroom. And I go to his class and he hands me a Syracuse University paperweight and says, "Alex, I won this during my last class, and it's the sign that you need to go to Syracuse University." Actually I have the paper weight right here. So this is the reason I went to Syracuse University.

John Boccacino:

And I get it. Your brother is one of your huge supports in life, and you need to make sure that everything was kosher with him to move all the way across the country. And we're so glad that you did come to Syracuse to earn your degree. And it seems like you, from the get go, were connected with the LGBTQ+ resource center. What did that mean to you, and how did they really help you support you becoming who you are today?

Alex Middleton:

That's a great question. The Syracuse University LGBTQ resource center again has been a home. I had a teacher in high school who was a gay man who told me about how he used his university's LGBTQ resource center when he was in college. And so I was anticipating it as a resource for myself. The way he described it



Alex Middleton:

Each time a small inconvenience happens this month, I'm saying, "During pride month?" Nobody can be mean to me, it's pride month, not allowed, but I have had

