

Episode No.

Banking in the Bay Area feat. Danielle Conkling ('09)

[00:00] **Intro:** Welcome to Owl Have You Know, a podcast from Rice Business. This episode is part of our Flight Path Series, where guests share their career journeys and stories of the Rice connections that got them where they are.

[00:14] **Danielle:** I realized that so much of the MBA program for me was, really, learning from my friends and my professors, and how do you make tough decisions.

[00:27] **Scott:** On today's episode of Owl Have You Know, I'm joined by Danielle Conkling, 2009 graduate of Rice's full-time program. Danielle is the Director of Corporate Social Responsibility and ESG at Silicon Valley Bank. Her unique role at SVB combines her passion for giving back to the community with her extensive experience in advising entrepreneurs and leaders in the innovation economy. Danielle, welcome to the show.

[00:54] **Danielle:** Scott, so great to be here. Thanks so much for having me. This is super exciting. It's my first podcast.

[00:59] **Scott:** That's fantastic.

[01:00] **Danielle:** So, hopefully, you don't judge me too harshly on my performance.

[01:04] **Scott:** No, not at all. Really looking forward to getting to know you more and sharing your story with the Rice community, at large. And so, I just really wanted to start, like, where did you grow up? And why did you get into banking, in the first place?

[01:21] **Danielle:** Oh, yeah, that's actually really interesting. So, I grew up in San Francisco in the Bay Area. And back then, the Bay Area is, you know, wasn't quite what it is today, Silicon Valley, with all the tech companies and venture firms. You know, even in the '80s and '90s, we had a few established tech companies, but it was, you know, a very diverse economy. So, a lot of folks around me were like doctors and lawyers and teachers, just like anywhere else. And

now, it's funny to think we have all these tech luminaries around us — and HP and Oracle. Some microsystems were certainly here, but they were kind of far and in between back then.

And to think that I was living amongst all of that and decided to get into banking is kind of funny. So, it happened, really, by accident. I went away to boarding school for high school in Connecticut. And I came back for the summer after I graduated from high school. And I knew I was going off to college in the fall, back again on the East Coast. I was going to go to Georgetown. And my parents asked me to figure out something for the summer, basically. And I think, at the time, they thought I would go to the mall and maybe get, like, a retail gig or go to the local water park or something. I really don't know what possessed me to do this, but I borrowed a couple of my mom's suits today, took the BART into San Francisco. I didn't even tell her, I don't think. I had like a half-page resume with some babysitting jobs and volunteer work from high school. And I went up and down the elevator at 555 California, also known as the chocolate towers back then. It was before 9/11. So, you could just do that. And I would drop off my resume with the front desk and ask them if they needed a temp or an intern for the summer.

And I got a couple of callbacks. But I have to be honest, I mean it could have been an architecture firm, a law firm. It could have been a lot of places, but it was Robertson Stephens, which back then was one of the premier technology investment banks. They called me for an interview and asked me if I'd be interested in working in their PR and events team for the summer. And that's how I got into banking.

So, that was an exciting summer. So, as part of that, we had a big equity research conference in San Francisco. And Sandy Robertson, CEO and founder of the firm, was hosting it. And Bill Clinton and a couple of other folks were attending. And I got to escort them from the office to the hotel on Nob Hill. And I got to learn a lot about equity. And so, that's what got me sold, was a summer at Robbie Stephens in San Francisco that I got by luck, elevator surfing.

[04:27] **Scott:** That's amazing. That's awesome. So, it didn't scare you off, because you... how does the story kind of continue? You went off to Georgetown. And did that sort of experience lead you into an undergraduate major in things?

[04:42] **Danielle:** Yeah, absolutely. Because when I applied, I was supposed to be a psychology major, which I guess was probably useful in financial markets because, you know, as we all know, there's, especially these days, a lot of psychology and mental strength to the economy

and the markets. And so, I switched over to the business school as a finance major and decided to study and focus, really, on finance and international business.

I spent my subsequent years... I went back for another summer to Robbie Stephens, and that year worked with a similar team, but was more focused with the equity research team, starting to learn some of their business. And then I think, the next summer, I did an internship, actually, at a investment firm. It was UBS-PaineWebber. And so, I was with their private banking arm. The summer after that was with Chase in their investment bank. And I got to spend a lot of time with the fixed income traders. And so, learned a lot about that business. And then, ultimately, yeah, I was really focused.

And I think it just kind of built on each other, in terms of I was learning so much, and the scope of banking and financial markets became more and more appealing to me because it was all very new. But also, it was really exciting, especially as a young woman. That summer, I spent a lot of time interviewing with various investment banks in New York City. And ultimately, that's another funny story. I ultimately turned down an offer with Chase and took a job with J.P. Morgan with a role in their equity group, only for a month later for them to announce that they were merging. Things happen. Okay. And I remember, when that happened, and I got... you know, there's like you get your sign-on bonus and you sign your contract. I remember the HR recruiter saying, "See, we wanted you so badly, you know. We paid how many billion dollars." I was like, "Right, uh-huh." I wonder if you're disappointed because I turned you down and now I'm back. But it all worked out.

[07:06] **Scott:** That's fantastic. So, I mean banking in... And so, you ended up in New York City early on in your career. How was that? I mean what was, kind of, the environment like? And what were some of the unique challenges of being a woman in New York City in banking? And what were some of the, kind of, the key takeaways from that time?

[07:22] **Danielle:** Yeah. I mean it was really exciting to be in New York City and having my first apartment, living on my own. You know, I was lucky enough because I was in banking, I could actually afford a studio. Although, truth be told, I was really nervous, you know, with all the taxes. And, you know, in New York City, you've got federal taxes, but you also have your state taxes, and you also have your local taxes, all the way down to your city taxes. And I really didn't know what I was going to end up with in the end. So, my first couple of weeks, I ate a lot of Chinese takeout and pizza and hotdogs off the street in New York because I really didn't know. But I was surprised that I had some leftover to actually have some decent meals and buy some groceries.

But I worked a lot back then, probably not too dissimilar from how it is for a lot of our investment bankers at Rice, those who decided to pursue that career path. It was a lot of fun. I learned a lot. I worked really, really hard. I didn't sleep a ton, but I also had a lot of fun. I got to meet a lot of interesting people at work. And I think it was the first time for me, like, where I felt like I had more in common with some of my 45, 55-year-old colleagues than I did with, you know, my recent graduate friends, unless they were also in banking. So, that was really interesting. I mean, I got to meet a lot of people through my young colleagues at work, and we'd meet folks at other banks. And we would have a really good time in New York. So, you know, the late night hours, sometimes we would go out afterward and, you know, have a great time together and try to celebrate the little time we could get off. But it was definitely a work-hard-play-hard kind of atmosphere back then. But I wouldn't trade it for the world.

[09:14] **Scott:** What were some of the things that drew you to finance? Or, what is it about the profession that really drew you in and kept you engaged?

[09:22] **Danielle:** So, I think a few things. In the very beginning, I think, when I was just getting into it, especially with all my internships, it was very fast-paced. I really enjoyed, to some degree, like, the betting and the decision-making you had to make on economic indicators. And I found that really interesting. I think as I learned the business more, it became more about the relationships and the relationships with clients and my ability to guide and advise them and, really, offer them solutions for, you know, some of their challenges. And I think I really enjoyed that.

And, you know, I was young. And, you know, to be 23 years old and traveling with a CFO and a CEO and going on the roadshow was a huge responsibility. But it grew up a lot from that, right? I think there's very few people who have that kind of opportunity. And I look back and I think, gosh, that's pretty crazy. But I think it also gave me the confidence that I could, really, form relationships with people that were seemingly way ahead of me in life, but that I could build those relationships and learn from them, and maybe provide even some value to them. And so, I think I really enjoyed that and, like, of course, it allowed me to kind of have a lifestyle and security that, you know, you might not have in other careers.

But I think it kind of really drove me and exposed me to a lot of things, including, like, the work that I ultimately ended up in my more recent career. It helped me find my passions outside of work. What I realized was that you can be really, really good at something and enjoy it. It doesn't have to be your life passion, right? But it enables you to be able to do the things you

really, really love. I think sometimes I'll say you become pretty good at something and it just becomes easy to stay with it. And like I said, it allows you to do other things on the side to kind of round things out.

[11:45] **Scott:** Yeah, I love that. So, you'd spent time, obviously, grew up on the West Coast, school on the East Coast. But then you decided to come do an MBA on, as I like to call us here, the third coast down here in Houston. And so, what ultimately got Rice on your radar? And what was some of the decision-making that led you to do a full-time MBA here?

[12:06] **Danielle:** So, to be honest, it kind of all happened very, very quickly. So, at the time, my husband was wrapping up graduate school in Boston and we were thinking about what our next steps might be. And I always had an MBA on my radar. And he had a few job offers. And one of them was with McKinsey in the Houston office, because he would be joining the energy practice. He was focused on renewable energy at the time, but the practice was really, at that time, based there. So, it wasn't really on our radar. But I knew he was really excited about the role. And I had a couple of cousins who actually lived in Houston. And so, that was kind of compelling. And so, I reached out to Rice about the MBA program.

I think I applied in the last round. So, luckily, they had enough space for me. But they were so gracious. I loved it because it was a small program. I've always been a fan of small schools and knew that the program had all the different elements of a graduate program that I was looking for in business. And it would allow me and my husband to be in the same area. There was a lot of couples who were splitting up for career reasons or for school, and I didn't really want that to happen. But when I visited, I really enjoyed the people and I had such a warm welcome. And I remember meeting another "McKinsey significant other" who was a year or two ahead of me, who had also gotten their MBA, and just spent a lot of time with her and convinced me that, you know, this would be a good path to pursue. And so, that's how I ended up becoming an Owl.

[13:59] **Scott:** Super cool. I mean, what were some of the experiences being in the full-time program that have stuck with you now over the decade now since you've graduated?

[14:08] **Danielle:** I really think it was the friendships and the relationships that I built over those two years. Moving to a city where, beyond two cousins, I didn't really know that many people. My husband was traveling four or five days a week. Getting to meet people from all over, it's funny now because it's been a while. It seems really crazy. It's been over 10 years. And I'm still in touch with classmates. I feel like wherever I go and I was just on WhatsApp with a couple of

my guy friends from the program. And they just had babies over the last couple of years. And we were just really excited to show those cute photos.

And I think about when we first started getting to know one another, we were all trying to figure out the program and how to tackle it all. And I'm sure that first semester was stressful at times and trying to figure out how to work together and how we built relationships and how we learned from one another, and then all of that. And then, when we graduated, having those relationships, where we all went off and reconnecting how many years later and still having that commonality and that relationship to one another and, really, those memories. Because I think it's really special. For me, that's really what I got out of it.

And I think, you know, I learned a lot about how to think and how to develop leadership skills and strategies in business beyond what's sort of the more tactical work that you do. I realized that so much of the MBA program for me was, really, learning from my friends and my professors, and how do you make tough decisions? And I still think I rely on some of, some of that, maybe, to become a little innate to how I go about things.

[16:09] **Scott:** Yeah, very cool. Was there anything that surprised you about the experience? Coming to Houston and starting school, were there... was there anything that you kind of expected? Like you said, you had some cousins here and things. Maybe, you had a few expectations.

[16:20] **Danielle:** Yeah.

[16:20] **Scott:** But anything that surprised you as you kind of settled in?

[16:24] **Danielle:** So, the first couple of days of orientation, we were starting to meet our professors. And there was one who, like, couldn't make it. And it turned out... So, it had been one of those like super hot humid weeks. Like, those of us not from the area were like, "Whoa, this is intense." And then it would like... it'd start, like, raining golf balls every morning at like 3:00 a.m. and, like, tropical, right? It was like flash floods. And I was not used to that. Like, I had lived on the West Coast, on the East Coast. And I had never seen anything like it. And, turned out that, that professor had to go rescue his wife because she was caught in one of those underpasses, and they had to have, like, the firefighters. And I was like, wow, that's a real thing. And I remember at the time being like, "Wait a second. But I parked my car in the garage underground," and being like, I really hope there's not going to be a problem.

But, you know, we went through a lot of that, I think, together. And I remember Hurricane Ike happened when I was there. And I remember I was out of town and calling a business school buddy who lived around the corner to check on my house. And he did that. I mean, that's why, like, those things are so memorable to me, because that whole experience of living in Texas was just so different from anything I had experienced. But again, it was really my Rice friends that made it so special and, really, just so easy to, like, acclimate, because, of course, like, the local Texans were like, "Don't worry. We're on it," like, you know, because all of us from outside of the area were just like, what is going on? And Hurricane Katrina, I mean all that happened right around then.

[18:11] **Scott:** Yeah, the weather is definitely something to get used to. I wanted to touch on something. You kind of mentioned that your early career enabled you to kind of pursue some passions. And so, I wanted to explore a little bit of the next phase of just, how did you end up post-graduation back on the West Coast and some of the passions that you're pursuing and how some of those came to be?

[18:34] **Danielle:** Yeah, absolutely. So, the Rice experience was very special for me for many reasons. I went to New York for my summer internship. I worked at American Express. And I was doing some of their corporate card partnerships work. And during that summer, my husband and I ended up getting pregnant. Totally unexpected. And I remember calling the dean at the time and being like, "Hey, uh, bad news. I'm wrapping up my internship, but I'm having a baby in nine months. And so, I don't know if that's going to be an issue for graduating." And he was like, "Well, first of all, this is good news." Like, "Congratulations. And by the way, I just want to let you know that worse things have happened. And this is a good thing that's happened. We will make it work, and you will graduate on time." And that was amazing. And I did.

And so, I went to some extra classes. I did some classes with the evening MBAs. I did a special, sort of, in my last semester, once the baby was born, some research projects with some professors. But I was able to graduate. And my son, who's now 13 and a half, was able to be there for my Rice graduation. So, I don't know if that makes him like an honorary Owl or something, but he was in my belly.

And my classmates and my professors were so amazing about the whole thing, because I do remember, like, literally pitching, like, some real venture capitalists, very, very pregnant. And I couldn't even get on, like, a real suit on because it just was that time and it wasn't going to work. And they were just so fabulous. And I would bring food. Like, I was always hungry. So, I

would, like, bring food to class. And people were like, "Oh, my God, there she is with her Whataburger and her burritos." And, like, the professors were just, like, amazed. They were like, "She is here. She is getting her work done. She brings, you know, her giant Freebirds burritos." But it's all good, so...

And I think what I realized with that and, really, like, the community and everything rallied around that, and just were so, so helpful is that I graduated in 2008, which was a challenging time and decided not to take my offer from American Express because I didn't want to move to New York City again with a baby. But I also... I don't know. I just wasn't in a place where interviewing made sense. And so, I decided to just not interview, and I would just revisit things when I was ready.

At that point, when I was graduating, I just started talking to, like, alumni. And actually, originally, I kind of shifted gears because I didn't know what I could do and where I wanted to end up. And I decided to just stay in Houston. So, my husband had this really great gig at McKinsey. And he was doing well with the Houston office. But I decided to go back into banking, which was not my plan because I was doing more like corporate development, partnerships, product development at American Express, which I was really excited about. But, you know, life's happened. And then, I was like, all right, how do I pivot my skills to something that's flexible in case like we need to move at some point and I'm not going to be in Houston? Like oil... you know, oil and gas is great, but the reality is that like it's more than likely I would move back to the West or East Coast.

And it was actually a Rice alum who graduated a year ahead of me. I had re-engaged with J.P. Morgan, who I'd started my career with right after college. And a colleague was like, "Hey, I don't know if you remember, there's another colleague that we worked with closely. He is now the head of the private bank for J.P. Morgan globally. You know, I'll put you back in touch." But then, also, I learned that there was a couple of Rice MBA graduates who were in the Houston office.

So, Charley Donaldson, if you're out there, as an alum, thank you. He got me introduced to the Houston office directly. And then it was great that friends of mine from my previous career kind of rounded out some of those introductions. And so, that's where I ended up. But pretty quickly into my career, I got an opportunity to move back to the Bay Area and help open the Silicon Valley office for J.P. Morgan's private bank. And that's what really brought me back.

But I'd say, throughout my entire career, particularly after my MBA program, I was doing a lot of nonprofit work on the side. So, even when I was, you know, a banker, a consultant early in my career, you know, I had limited time, but I was always like volunteering or mentoring or something. And that was a lot of what I had really enjoyed as well during my MBA program with those opportunities. So, when I got back to the Bay Area, I started looking for opportunities to like advise, join junior boards, and things like that. And that's what got me started.

And so, you know, I continued my career, went from J.P. Morgan's private bank to Citi's, stayed on with a number of nonprofits, working with them and advising them. And then when I joined SVB and took a leadership role, leading their strategy work for the private bank, I got to be really good friends with the head of corporate social responsibility at SVB. And that was exciting because, like I said, I was always doing this on the side because it was like my passion project. But then, one day it was like, well, what if this was your full-time role? And I was like, oh, and you would pay me for that? And he said, "Absolutely."

And it was kind of a leap of faith, but I also knew that, if I ever wanted to go back to banking, I probably could. And so, initially, you know, I was focused on sort of philanthropy and community and the strategy around that. And then, you know, it was also at a time that ESG and sustainability was on the rise and our board of directors and our legal and investor relations team were trying to figure out, sort of, how SVB would start to build, sort of, a strategy and program around it. And they were like, "You've done some of this work and you've built strategies before. Maybe not around ESG. You can figure this out." And so, complete departure from what I had started my career in, but not really, because for a long time, there was that lens of ESG investing. And so, it wasn't unfamiliar to me. It was just, you know, really, just different to do it from like an issuer perspective.

I never looked back. I took the opportunity and decided, yes, I'm going to try this. And I love it. And I don't think I would ever go back to banking. I mean, I miss the client work, but I've also figured out how to bring it together. So, a lot of the work I now do around ESG and sustainability is around, you know, how do we integrate this into how we do business, how we operate, and how we serve our client ecosystem?

[25:46] **Scott:** I think that's amazing. There's, like, two things there that I feel like I want to unpack. Let's stay on the Silicon Valley Bank thread for a minute, because like you're describing, ESG and corporate sustainability are all topics of interest and growing. And so, you are at an amazing organization, working on big important things. Like, how do you think about and describe the challenges around ESG and corporate sustainability for big organizations?

[26:16] **Danielle:** Yeah. I mean I would say that ESG is broad. Terminology is tricky, right? Everyone's like, "Well, what's the difference between ESG and sustainability and corporate responsibility?" So, that in itself is a challenge, and there's nuances to all of that. But it is broad. And depending on what stage your company is in or what type of industry or sub-sector, like, what's material to your organization, can be very, very different. So, it's not like this one-size-fits-all. And trying to wrap your heads around that and being able to prioritize, it is a learning experience, I think, for everybody. And sometimes, it's not even the obvious things.

So, I think that's one challenge. I do think another challenge right now, especially, in today's economic market environment, is where does this fit in and how is this prioritized, given that there's so much uncertainty for companies right now? How do they keep focused on this and see it as part of their long-term strategy and make those investments and see it as contributing ultimately to the bottom line when it sometimes feels like, because you're trying to stand it up, you know, they're simply expenses? So, I think that's another challenge right now.

And then I think the other challenge is, honestly, expertise. There's very few sustainability experts in the world, and certainly, those that have practical experience implementing this within a real operating organization. We've always had lots of academics and researchers and thought leaders. There's only so many consultants that can go around. And so, you'll see a lot of people like myself who came from within the industry and might be passionate about it but might be learning it as well for the first time.

[28:26] **Scott:** Fewer practitioners, and it's a, it's a practice that is evolving as we're experiencing it. It's an exciting space. You know, you see kind of in the news, like one article that I was just looking at recently was the Patagonia restructuring and assigning all the profits to address climate change and some of these big issues. How do you think about the spectrum of outcomes and the purpose of business... and I don't mean to put you on the spot with kind of a random example, but I'm just using that as an extreme example that's out there as organizations wrestle with their responsibility as an organization. Can you share just a couple of thoughts or things that, kind of, are guiding principles for you as you wrestle with those items?

[29:07] **Danielle:** Absolutely. I mean, Patagonia is so inspiring, but they are much more mature in their sustainability work. This is something that they were kind of founded on, that the principles they live by, and it's really integrated into how they operate as a company. I think most companies are much further behind in that they are so learning in trying to figure out how

to catch up and figure out... like, it wasn't part of their founding and their purpose as a company. And so, now, they're trying to figure out, well, okay, how do we make ourselves purposeful? What is our purpose?

And for some, it's a bigger pivot, right? Like, it really challenges what they do and how they think about the world and the everyday widgets or services that they put out there into the market. So, I think it can be challenging for certain companies, but I think that the good news is that there's a lot of stakeholders out there who believe in this and understand that ESG and sustainability do have an impact on long-term sustainability of the company, success, and ultimately, its profitability and returns to investors, right? And it takes time to realize that because you really have to embed it into how you do business, right?

So, it's also... you know, it's as simple as diversity, equity, and inclusion. You know, if you have diverse perspectives, you're probably able to tap into a broader client base and also able to appreciate, like, others' values and interests and needs. So, that should be a good thing. But to be able to demonstrate that takes time, of course.

So, that's just like an example. The other example, right, would be around climate. A lot of the work, if you think about it, the investments in ESG actually allow companies to also reduce costs and create efficiencies over time. But again, that takes time. And a lot of it's new. So, there's that time that you need to kind of build it and then roll out and implement a lot of this work. And then, to realize the benefits also takes time. You know, I think most companies are just beginning that work right now.

[31:56] **Scott:** That's really helpful. And I'm curious, I suspect that there are people that come to you for advice on, like, how did you get into sustainability and how do you kind of make that transition? And it sounds like a bit of you pursued kind of some passions in your own free time that built some of those muscles and that exposure. Is that, in your view, kind of one of the best ways to execute that pivot? Or, are there other resources that you've seen that are, that are starting to kind of surface that people who have that interest might be able to take that leap and start to add to the talent and capability that are solving these kinds of problems?

[32:35] **Danielle:** Absolutely. I mean I think I'm kind of part of the generation scramble where they need to get leaders in place and they had to pivot some of us. I don't know that that's sustainable, obviously. But I do think that there is a lot of interest at many levels of talent in organizations. So, I always say, just don't dismiss that, because sometimes I've focused a lot on kind of the broad corporate responsibility. But as I shifted more of my time to ESG and

sustainability and climate work, the philanthropy community work that I was doing... actually, a colleague took over who was passionate about that work. And she'd been a really, really senior leader, a managing director doing completely different things. But it was sort of her passion work that she would work closely with us.

And similar to me, a lot of people are looking for purpose in their careers. And I tell a lot of young people, I think there's more opportunities, because one, your universities and colleges now have sustainability-focused curriculum. So, you're going in with... you'll be going into interviews and opportunities with some kind of foundation versus I had to go, read about it, hire a bunch of consultants, and kind of learn on the job.

I think another opportunity is consulting firms, they are losing a lot of their top talent in-house, because every company that's now doing ESG has to be able to demonstrate that they have leadership focused on this work, which also includes talent with certain expertise. So, they're losing a lot. And then the big consulting firms who were not sustainability firms are also trying to hire those same consultants because they need to build sustainability practices. So, they need a bench. And so, I would say, you know, there are, like, the pure sustainability firms like ERM, BSR, and DSS, all of those firms. But then, the McKinseys, the BCGs, the EYs, the PW, all of them, the Deloitte, like, they're all also doing it. And what's nice is you have a lot of resources, and it's a good way to work on different types of consulting engagements and projects, you know. And then you can go on. Oftentimes, it's like their clients will hire them, which is why they're in this predicament that they don't have enough talent. So, I'd say there are different ways to go about it. But I mean, I really like the consulting approach, especially because ESG is still evolving. So, it's not a bad place to start.

[35:24] **Scott:** I would be remiss if we didn't get a chance to double-click and talk about some of the philanthropy work that you've done, an organization called Girls Leadership and another one called BUILD. And I'd love to just get a little bit of some of the learnings and experience and kind of how you got in and kind of sustained some of your work with these organizations.

[35:42] **Danielle:** Absolutely. So, I've known BUILD for a really long time. When I moved to the West Coast after my time in Houston, I was looking for something where I thought, you know, I could mentor but I could also be an advisor to the organization. And at the time, my company, J.P. Morgan, we had a corporate foundation. And there was a number of organizations that we've been supporting and doing work with, and, you know, out there in the community with our clients. And they were just on a list.

And I liked what BUILD stood for, which at the time was about helping kids who were struggling in high school in low moderate-income communities find purpose and academic re-engagement through entrepreneurship. And what I liked is because I think, a lot of schools, even challenged schools, have their really strong students. And this program actually targets those that are at risk of dropping out. And they use entrepreneurship and the idea of, like, get together with a group of your peers, learn how to start a business, learn how to put a business plan together. But they also learn things that we learned in our MBA program, like, how do you put a financial statement together. How do you put a marketing plan? Those are things I would never have done as a 14 or 15-year-old. And here they are, doing that, coming from some of the most challenging circumstances.

And they get these mentors from really cool companies like Google and Facebook and SVB and other companies. And they get the support of real Silicon Valley venture capitalists. And I loved it. I started out as a mentor, worked with them prepping for business plan competitions, became a business plan competition judge, joined their associate board, became a board member in Northern California. I'm now on the executive board of their California State Board. And I've just really grown with them.

And part of the reason why, like, I continue to be involved and support their work is because the outcomes and the fact that their programs really do change the trajectory of life for a lot of these kids and their families is just amazing. And, in fact, one of them who went through the program is now a fellow board member with me. Her story at one of the fundraisers is what really hooked me. And we're friends now. And it's people like her that really drive that. And then continue to be involved with Girls Leadership. Although, you know, there's a couple of others who have taken my board role recently at SVB. It was time to pass on the reins. But, you know, I really believe in that, as a woman, especially somebody who started her career in the investment bank in New York, being the only female on my first team, which was quite daunting, just helping girls really develop their voice and their confidence is really important. And so... and you really have to do that early, because they've seen a lot... There's a lot of research that sees two big drop-offs.

And a lot of them is actually, one, the age at which my daughter is in, that's a nine-year-old in fourth grade, is usually a big drop-off. That's also, like, the age where, like, girls and boys temporarily sort of split up. But sometimes, it's unintentional, but the grownups in their lives, whether they be teachers or educators or even parents, unintentionally, some of the messaging and signaling how they've treated signals that, you know, there are certain things that are meant for them versus others. And so, that's where you see a lot of that drop-offs.

There's another drop-off that tends to happen, actually, during the college years, where there's another drop-off in confidence amongst young women, whereas there's a rise in young men, oftentimes. And obviously, there's lots of factors to that. So, in today's age, you know, there's lots of things, you know, may not work exactly like that, but... So, that work is really important because it helps provide the programming to help support the girls in developing their voice very early, as early as, like, kindergarten, but really builds on that in an age-appropriate way as they get older all the way to university. It could be as simple as, like, book clubs and them being able to, like, voice their ideas around plot or a character to, like, improv.

And so, there's a lot of things that you can do. But a lot of it, too, is about educating the grownups in their lives along the way so that it's a consistent experience for those girls. And so, that's why I became involved because it's not always easy, especially if you are a young woman in a career that, you know, is maybe a little bit more male-dominated. That work is really important. It's been important to me, especially, because I have a young daughter, and a young daughter, I would say, that, you know, has kind of a very big, bold, independent dreams for herself.

[40:49] **Scott:** Really appreciate you sharing. I have three daughters myself that are in those age ranges. And just love hearing that perspective, and appreciate that. As we get close to the end here, Danielle, I wanted to ask, I understand that you like to travel to, kind of, some off-the-beaten-path places. And so, I want just to sharp-pivot in the discussion to get your top travel location recommendations, places you've been.

[41:18] **Danielle:** Oh, gosh, this is hard. So, my family loves to travel globally. And off-the-beaten-path is our preference. With COVID and everything, it's been a little bit of a challenge. But our family has been to Iceland, to Morocco, to some interesting places in Japan, Ireland. We are currently planning our trip to Europe next year and hoping to go to some sort of more remote islands in Greece. And I'd say, over the last couple of years, I've found some really cool gems in the U.S. as well. So, we discovered this amazing "dude ranch" experience in Wyoming. And now, it's become a little bit of a tradition. And my kids are kind of little cowboys and cowgirls. And it's been a really fun time and something we've done. And now, we've recruited a lot of friends to come do it with us. So, you know, cow sorting is our new thing. Take advantage and, you know, especially, while you're at Rice, there's always some really cool trips. I remember some classmates going to Africa and building incubators for communities out there. Take advantage because, as you know, you can't always take for granted, like, the time you have to do those adventures.

[42:39] **Scott:** No doubt. That's a great perspective. Danielle, really, it has been a privilege to have you on. This has been fantastic.

[42:44] **Danielle:** Thanks, Scott. It's been fun.

[42:47] **Scott:** Thanks for listening. This has been Owl Have You Know, a production of Rice Business. You can find more information about our guests, hosts, and announcements on our website, business.rice.edu. Please subscribe and leave a rating wherever you find your favorite podcasts. We'd love to hear what you think. The hosts of Owl Have You Know are myself, Scott Gale, and Maya Pomroy.