

Brittany Pendergraft - Classical Studies PhD Candidate - GRAD STUDENT

This transcript has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Before She Went Blue - An Appalachian Childhood

Cherish: So we're once again on the record[1]. Thank you again, so much for your patience and your time, especially talking with me again today. And so even though I'm very familiar with your name, just for the record, will you state your name? And just, yeah, position at the University?

Brittany: Yeah. So my name is Brittany and I'm a PhD candidate and GSI in the Department of Classical Studies.

Cherish: Fantastic. And so having shared that do you think you could tell me a little bit more about what brought you to the University?

Brittany: Yeah, so it was kind of a long road to get here. I was born and raised in rural Appalachia, like super rural, like, technically Virginia, but the intersection of Virginia, Kentucky

[1] There was a recording error the first time Brittany was interviewed, and she was gracious enough to sit down a second time.

and Tennessee. So like, a very poor area, like coal country, an area hit hardest by the opioid crisis. And when I was there, just seeing so many people who were suffering physically from ailments and not being able to afford health care, even if we had had good health care systems nearby, I just thought that was so sad, and so wrong. So I wanted to go to college to be a medical doctor, and I was pursuing that route. And I started taking classes on the ancient world, just for fun. Just as my, you know, my alternatives to Orgo and whatnot. And over time, I just kind of fell in love with the study of ancient Greece and, and I'd already done some languages like French and Spanish, I knew I liked languages, and just decided to jump into this field that I never studied. And it's primarily Greek and Latin language, and I had never done either. So I graduated with no background to like to get into grad school. So I took a corporate position with a local but International Coffee Company. And I did that for like two years saving up money. And then I started bartending like around the clock, so I could finance taking Greek and Latin courses, to get them on a transcript. So I could apply to grad school. And somehow I got in here, which was my dream school. And some days, I'm still like, did they really admit me like five years later? But they did. And-

Cherish: -hopefully they can't take it back?

Brittany: Yeah, [laughter] hopefully, fingers crossed. But yeah, so that's how I went from rural Appalachia pre-med to studying dead languages.

Cherish: Yeah. And thank you so much for sharing it with me. I honestly didn't think of this last time, but like, kind of wish I could read that personal statement, you know.

But, um, something I wanted to also like to pick out from there. I think last time, you had shared a little bit about your great grandparents and that experience in Appalachia, can you tell me a little more about that?

Brittany: Yeah, yeah. So when I was growing up, they're great grandparents and grandparents were very connected to the land, raise their own animals had massive gardens, tobacco farmers, like they also grew like hay for like, horses and cows, and they would sell that to other people to and there was just this very, like direct connection to your diet and to nature. And the older I got, the more there was kind of this like divorcing of like, my family and and nature. In large part because there were just so many of us, it wasn't practical to keep feeding everyone from the garden. I mean, my grandparents had like seven kids, like why'd you do that. Um, but then also just financially, it just it became so much cheaper and easier, and just like less of a gamble to just go to the store and buy like a can of green beans instead of growing them and I don't know if you've ever done it but you have to grow them you have to watch them you have to go pick them then you have to bring them home wash them like take the strings off and break them and then cook them and it's it's a process especially like as my family like transitioned forward in time like it's just like a farmer as a job wasn't really like a thing anymore. It was something that you had to do to supplement your income with farming but you had to have like a nine to five job and it's just not practical.

Cherish: When time is a commodity-

Brittany: Yeah, yeah. But like growing up with that I just thought it was so magical. Like I remember when my grandpa like he was like put this potato in the dirt and let's see what happens and like not long after there was another potato had grown I was like, this is like how did that happen? You know? Yeah. And even though I understand like, chemically and everything how that happened it still just it's so amazing. Yeah, and just there weren't you know, this was like pre internet and we didn't really have like a lot of books or like, like we had like an antenna for the TV that yeah, go out and jiggle to get it to work. So my entertainment as a kid and like the way I self soothe was just like going outside and watching the garden and seeing how big the watermelon was compared to yesterday. You know, like that sort of stuff and it's just, to use, perhaps not the best word– It's very grounding for me.

Cherish: No [laughter] I think it's the perfect word.

Brittany: But yeah, it was just amazing watching my grandpa like raising pigs and then, I didn't watch this part, but killing the pigs and then like making his own sausage and then like cooking it and it's just stuff that kind of blows my mind when I think about like, I could never do any of that stuff. And there's just all this knowledge that's kind of lost. But yeah, I just, I feel nature was kind of like part of my family like growing up, we were just very connected.

Cherish: Yeah, it sounds like [it], yeah. If you're like, if you're raising and growing your own food, you just have that more...you're more intertwined with it, cuz you're following along at every step of the process.

Brittany: Yeah, yeah. And it was, it was also a way of connecting like the green beans. Like, we would sit around, there would be four generations of my family at a table just talking and like, it's an arduous process.

Cherish: The green beans, sharing the load.

Brittany: Yeah! And I was like, I was never very good at getting like the strings off the beans. But--so my grandma would always have to go back and redo them for me. But, you know, my great grandma, grandma, my aunt, and I would just sit there. And like, it was at the time. I didn't appreciate it. But looking back, it's like, that's a really amazing thing. Like, we don't have that. Yeah. You know, like, we're all like on our phones.

Cherish: Or you just go to the store and buy a can.

Brittany: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Cherish: Well, thank you so much for sharing that I can just see the visual as it could have been. Assembly lined it maybe and passed along to your grandma.

Brittany: Yeah. And like. So I study ancient oral poetry. And there was a lot of like singing of traditional Appalachian folk songs in this context and which unwittingly I've like, come full

circle. And that's like, a big part of my research. This traditional music that essentially, I was growing up with. Yeah, it was just, it was really beautiful. And it kinda long for those like, yeah, I don't want to call them simpler times because I actually think they're more complicated, because you have to know how to grow your food and, and prepare it right. It's not just prepared. But yeah, I did..I do long for that sort of stuff.

Cherish: I wonder if maybe what comes to mind is not necessarily simpler. But it being a sort of, like, more embodied activity, I--

Brittany: yeah, totally--

Cherish: --think Yeah, absolutely. But thank you again, for yeah, sharing more about that. And then I want to kind of take a step back again, go over, you know why I first invited you for this interview, which is hearing about your work as a sustainability champion here at the university. Can you tell me a little bit about what it's like being in that position?

Championing Sustainability in the Classics Department

Brittany: Yeah. So it's new for me. And so we talked about it before, I didn't know it was a thing. But as we were talking about, it's a pretty new thing. But yeah, it's just, it's really, it's nice to feel like there is some sort of centralized endeavor of like, let's formally work on this, as opposed to independent actors just trying to do things at home and not really bringing it into the workspace and a lot of times. So that's what's been really cool about it so far, is just having this kind of centralized like little community. That is, you know, we're from all different departments and having, you know, the structure and LSA that where we have people who are tasked with doing they say yes, and I can just email them, like Jenna or someone and be like, Hey, can you like, help me with this? And they have all these ideas. And again, like, not having to, like reinvent the wheel every time like you want to do something sustainable, like we talked about before? Yeah. So yeah, it's just, it's been cool. And it facilitated, like me having a conversation with my department chair. And like one of our staff members about what can we do like on the departmental level that will be more like sustainability forward? So that's been really cool. And just kind of being in this conversation, even though I quietly participate, of, you know, how do we do this? And LSA, like, you know, how do we organize things? Like who's doing what? How can we put people into conversation with each other? So yeah, it's been really cool. And I'm really grateful that the LSA is offering this.

Cherish: Yeah, well, I'm glad that you're able to, like find the opportunity to be a part of it. And you said quietly participate, but the hardest part is just showing up. So that counts for something. And you mentioned talking with your chair, and I think before you said, Did you have any, like upcoming initiatives or thoughts in mind for your department?

Brittany: Yeah, yeah. So when I first signed up to be a sustainability champion, my first step was thinking like, what are we already doing? And I just, you know, want to give a shout out to our staff, because they are amazing. And they, when I started thinking about it, I was just thinking, how far ahead they already are, like, you know, no one's told them, like, you have to do X, Y, and Z. They're doing it of their own initiative, and it's not extra work that they're getting paid for. They're just doing it because they care. So I'm really grateful for those people. Our department cannot run without them. I mean, they've been like composting and before the pandemic, they were doing waste free meetings. And they're gonna pick that back up. Now unless one thing that we talked about, let's get back to them. Um, now that we can safely--

Cherish: yeah--

Brittany: –because of the pandemic. So we talked about that. And then I had a few things I wanted to do. I really want to have a little presentation, or just some sort of discussion about digital waste, because, you know, we don't talk about that no one ever talks about it. Yeah. I learned about it through a fictional piece of writing. And I was like, Is that real? Or is this like, you know, creative license? And then I looked into it, and I was like, Oh, my goodness, what are we doing? Every time I send a text, like, I'm hurting the environment. So I want to have an event where, you know, we just talked about it, and like, either I present or maybe I can get someone from university to come just tell us like, what, what goes on when you like, have a file hanging out in your cloud? You know, yeah, how is that maintained, because it does take energy coming from somewhere, and often not sustainable sources. So I want to do that and maybe have like waste free like snacks or something. And we can bring a device and just go through and maybe delete some, like, text messages or something. And like, while we're just like, collectively like talking about it, and like, just hanging out. So that's one big one that I wanted to (or) I would like to do. So I'm like, I know, merch clothing swaps, especially with grad students, which also helps with you know, finances like, I mean, it's all around like a good thing. And, you know, a space to also talk about the environmental impact of fast fashion, which we also don't talk about much. Our economy doesn't like when we talk about it.

Cherish: Of course not. Like I said last time: a purpose? a purchase?

Brittany: And let's see what else I would [do]...we talked about maybe next year, trying to do a river cleanup or something, we didn't get to it quite in time for this year. And if I can get them to buy reusable, hot, cold tumblers for grad students who buy coffee, often, I would love to do that. Because that would quickly, like, eliminate so many cups,

Cherish: Immediate impact as a department.

Brittany: But, ya know, those are some of the things but mostly I just when I talked to the chair and the staff about was like, think let's just, like openly talk about it more just like bringing sustainability into the discourse of the department. And so we talked about it, it's going to be part of things like orientations and trainings. I'm gonna go to like the first staff meeting of the year, and we're going to talk about, you know, put this into compost, put this into the landfill. And hopefully, you know, they'll just be like, kind of a starting point. And later on this year, I'd

like to do like, I don't know, if like a reading group or just like, kind of a discussion group or like, maybe a talk or something. Thinking about the ancient Greeks and Romans, whom we study, how did they interact with their environment? What was their relationship with nature? How did they talk about nature and texts that we have? Can we learn anything about them in terms of sustainability and the way that they approach their environment? So those are some things.

Cherish: Yeah, thank you so much for sharing all of that. Definitely, I gotta remember the coffee came up before, then the thrift swap, and the ancient natural world. I feel like that's going to be such an interesting topic and [with your] Classical Studies background, I'm excited to see what you guys are able to pull together with that intersection.

Brittany: Yeah, I mean, I think it would be great because as I, the past few days, I was thinking about it more and like, kind of at the heart of Western intellectualism with the birth of Western philosophy and ancient Ionia. The immediate reaction was not just like abstract philosophy, it was natural philosophy. And so with the birth of this kind of intellectual movement in the West, it was built on looking at nature and saying, nature is not divine nature is made up of elements and what are those elements and it was kind of this like demystification of nature that is at the heart of Western intellectual, like rationalism and philosophy and all these things. And the more I thought about it, it's like, wow, like that really impacts the way that we think because these early philosophers were responding to deification of rivers and whatnot. And for me, I see that it's just, like, reverence for these, like natural things, but these early scholars who influenced us to this day and the way that we think for them, that was their first step into being rational, was to say nature is not that great. It's something we can explain. And so I think, you know, if I could get a bunch of classes just in a room, and we could talk about that stuff, it could be really enlightening.

Cherish: Oh, yeah. No, it doesn't matter. We talked about that before the angle of like, getting away from man versus nature. Yeah,

Brittany: Right. Yeah, man. Yes. Like we weren't nature. We're animals too. You know, like, we're part of it. And I just think so much could be solved if we would just recognize that Don't just have, you know, like, a shared identity and compassion with the other organisms around us and thinking, you know, how does how does my behavior impact another person or another organism or, you know, a future person? Right, like, yeah, thinking that's one of the brilliant things about indigenous cultures is they think generations ahead a lot of times. Yeah. That's so amazing.

Cherish: I was thinking about that, too. I think it's seven generations.

Brittany: Yeah, uh huh.

Cherish: This is one of the terms I've seen.

Brittany: Yeah.

Defamiliarization, Digital Waste, and Anthony Doerr

Cherish: But once again, would love to be a fly on the wall. And thinking about something like the discussion here reminds me of a point earlier, when you mentioned digital waste. You talked about having learned about that from a book, I think it's one that came up before we're talking about this. Yeah. Anthony Doerr's book, *Cloud Cuckoo Land*. Do you think you could tell me a little bit more about--I think you mentioned before, like your involvement in that class and some connections of that to this work?

Brittany: Oh, yeah. Anthony Doerr and his wife, Shauna, are just two of the most amazing humans I've ever met. And they are such friends of the environment, and they are just so big on sustainability. And so--and if you read *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, you can see that I mean, it's just, it's throughout the whole thing, right? In a way that's just beautiful and heartbreaking. It really does impact you. And so he came here to teach a miniature course on defamiliarization and writing. My department and the honors program were able to like, put their funds together and get him here for half a semester. And I was fortunate enough to be his assistant for that class. And basically, the whole semester was just how can you get students to think outside of their thought habits. So you know, looking at, I don't know, your water bottle--

Cherish: --yeah--

Brittany: --as something different than just like the thing that you drink out of. And one student actually did their final project on that, they went around campus, interviewing people about their water bottles. And so we would do stuff, like, they brought a pebble to class. And he was like, okay, tell this pebble's story in a way that makes it seem like it's not a pebble, like, just if someone were reading it, they would have no idea it's a pebble until you tell them. And one of the things that they did, he brought doughnuts to class. And he put a list of animals on the screen and said, choose one of these animals and react to this donut in the way that you think that animal would react. And so it was just a way of like, getting outside of our human perceptual world and thinking about, Oh, what would a butterfly do with this donut? Like? Would it be sweet enough? Too sweet? Like, what would it think of sprinkles? And it's just, again, it gets back to this, like connecting us with nature. And like, yeah, getting outside of these great anthropocentric views that we have in the world, right? We are human beings, and we are at the center of every experience we've ever had, right?

Cherish: Yeah.

Brittany: So it makes sense.

Cherish: Maybe we should take a step back from that.

Brittany: Yeah, yeah. And so this is picking up on the semiotic concept I think I told you about last time called the umwelt. So every organism has its umwelt. So umwelt is German for environment, but it gets taken on to mean a perceptual environment. And basically, like, my

perceptual environment is limited by my sensory organs, right? So I can only see the colors that my cones in my eyes allow me to see, I can only hear the frequencies of my cochlea, and so forth. And then all of that is colored by my subjectivity, right? Like my past experiences, my attentional bias, and so forth. And my umwelt. It's just part of the whole world, right? Because I can't access everything. There are colors that I can't see that a mantis shrimp can see. Right? And like, plants make noises, but we can't hear them. Right. Like, my pothos plant is screaming at me right now, it's so upset and I don't know what to do for it. And I'm like, I wish I could hear you. But, you know, it doesn't mean that my umwelt is more accurate, or better than that of my dogs, right? Like, he can smell things that I can't smell right though, like ridiculous things that I can't smell. And like, so I can't access like, my olfactory system can't access the world in the way that his can so why is mine like, better or more accurate than his and you know, and so one analogy that gets used for the umwelt is like, we're all in a house. And we all have different windows that are different shapes and sizes, and we're looking out onto a garden. And we can see like I can see this part and like, I don't know this hummingbird can see another part and so forth. But nobody can see the whole thing, right because their walls like blocking off the rest of our view. And I just think that's so wonderful. And I noticed students were really into that concept. And that's something we all took with us was, you know, thinking about what's the umwelt of the person beside me, right? It's not just mine, like, what's this person going through? And like, what does my behavior do that might impact that person's umwelt? And, you know, just recognizing [that] there's this whole world out there that we can only access a little bit of, but we share it with other creatures and like, yeah, we're just part of like, we're part of it. Yeah, we're no better no worse. Like, we're just we're one with everyone else. Right?

Cherish: Yeah. It's like, just remember you don't exist in a vacuum.

Brittany: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And it's like, you know, if someone cuts you off on the highway, who knows what's going on in their umwelt, and maybe give them a little grace and be like, maybe they're on their way to the hospital? Maybe like, you know, someone's dying or something? And yeah, probably not.

Cherish: You know, just increase our patience.

Brittany: Yeah, yeah--

Cherish: --I get that--

Brittany: Yeah. And like, I don't know if you've seen those YouTube videos of like, there's this little groundhog, his name is Chunk. And he like--have you seen these..?

Cherish: I have not, but I would love to meet Chunk the groundhog.

Brittany: So basically, this guy was gardening and like, he couldn't understand what kept coming in and like taking one bite of each thing in his garden and just leaving it and so he got like a camera. Because he had tried putting up walls and walls and walls and like, whatever it was, kept getting it. Yeah. And then like, he gets a notification that there's movement on the

camera, and it's this groundhog, just like up in the camera, and just like chomping on like a carrot or tomato or something. And this guy, over the course of the initial like dealing with this little groundhog, like, it's his world to like, you know, like we can, we should just coexist. So now he makes a little garden just for the groundhog. And the groundhog brought his girlfriend together and had babies.

Cherish: Ahh, now Chunk has a family!

Brittany: It's like that sort of, you know, I know, like students and myself included, we're always looking at the squirrels around campus. Right. And that's yeah, it's a wonderful part of our day. But you know, the stuff we're doing to the environment, it's going to impact them in ways that are really harmful, and they're not asking for it. And, you know, just taking that time to think about how does my behavior impact their umwelt? Because they can't go into the AC like apartment that I have? Yeah, this summer's it's been ridiculously hot. Right?

They're stuck in the heat wave. Yeah. Right.

Cherish: No, I appreciate you showing that actually, I'm coming back to the squirrels' perspective, again, thinking about sharing the environment they may meet when you're sharing the idea with umwelt and the house and Windows analogy. Maybe thinking about how it works often today, we have the idea of human centered design. And it's like, I think that's important when it comes from the perspective of, you know, increasing accessibility inclusivity, but then it almost makes you think if it's just isn't turning into an extension of human centered, like, are we only thinking about humans and people when we're designing? We're in a wider environment? We exist totally.

Brittany: Yeah. Yeah. And it's great that we're being more accessible within our species, like, it's taken us a while. We're a little slow sometimes. Yeah, I think. And again, I really think it all just comes down to compassion, right? Like, and, you know, if you could just work on compassion, like facilitating compassion, I think that the umwelt concept is really good for that. Yeah, it's like, having compassion for a person [who] has a different, like, abled bodied-ness, the same way that you have compassion for like, I don't know, a raccoon who's like, you know, stuck outside and this like heat that we are creating for them. And, you know, just feeling that I really think if we could just cultivate that, you know, all these problems that we're up against as a species that are self inflicted global warming, you know, genocide, all of these things. If we just cared a little more about each other, and about the world in which we live, I really think that they would go away.

Cherish: Yeah, you could just step outside of your personal umwelt and consider the environment you're shaping. Yeah.

Brittany: And you know, I don't want to sound preachy, because I struggle with this too. And I have to actively do this. And, you know, when you're up in your feelings, like it's hard, right. But I do think it's a good exercise. So I'm very grateful for Tony Doeerr for that.

Cherish: Oh, I know. Again, an amazing class wish I could have taken it and glad I got to see him speak and that you had that experience working with him and his wife because it sounds like an awesome time.

Brittany: The best! I cried when they left. So sad.

Cherish: I can understand. Now, building on that and just wanting to get through some of these other specific questions, make sure I'm still addressing everything. I know we kind of talked through this before but still wanting to ask again if you recall a personal tipping point concerning climate change.

A Different Kind of Situational Awareness

Brittany: Yeah, yeah. So like I was saying before, you know, it's not I've never not cared about the environment, but kind of thinking about my umwelt right. My umwelt was so subjectively like, focused on just survival for so long before grad school that I couldn't even like step outside it. It was So, I was... at such a scarcity for all resources. And so basically like before grad school, I mean, I was working nonstop, like 70-80 hours a week and going to school. And, you know, when, like, when your focus is how do I keep my electricity on this month? You can't really stop and think about, like, what is the environmental impact of my electricity, right? Yeah. Or like, for me, there was also food scarcity. It was like, Where's my food going to come from, not like, is my food sustainably produced? Like, what? Yeah, what's the CO2 effect of my food? So yeah, I just always cared, always loved nature. But I was just I was, I was really in survival mode. And even like, growing up, I mean, we were always very poor. And so it wasn't until I got to grad school where it felt like everything was a little stable enough. I mean, grad school is hard. But it was like, one thing that I was working on. Whereas, like, I'd always had a job and extracurriculars and school and, you know, just always like, you know, touring in all these different places. But once I got to grad school, it was like, an a stipend, had health insurance, and hadn't had health insurance. And I was studying like, one field, as opposed to all these different fields, right. And so then, like, once I got settled, it was like, my umwelt, kind of like, the blinders are off. And I can be like, Okay, I can look beyond my immediate day to day survival. And I can think, think seven generations ahead. Yeah. Right. And the sad thing is, like people who are in that position are the people who are most hurt by the things that affect the environment, like all the downsides of climate change, they're the people who are going to suffer the most, right? But they're like, I can truly say, just from experience, like you're not in a position where you can even think about, like, yeah, how can I help the environment? Right? So for me, it was definitely like, once I got to grad school, and I was so grateful, just to have resources. And I was like, Okay, now I'm gonna, like really cut back on, you know, just like, I'm only going to use my car when I have to . I'll cut back on purchasing, which I mean, it wasn't doing my job. Because I didn't have money. But you know, when you do have to purchase, you're buying the cheap stuff, which is cheaply made, which has been for the environment and so forth. So yeah, once I got to grad school and was able to focus on one thing, with, with the cushion of

like, yeah, income that was reliable, and then I was able to just really like, work on like myself and gradually get more involved. Yeah, beyond myself.

Cherish: And I appreciate you mentioning that everything because it's just that stability. Like, here's, like you said, it's not that at any level that you didn't care, you just didn't even have the space to be able to think about what to do.

Brittany: Yeah.

Cherish: Well, I really appreciate you sharing that. And I think, building on that with one quick follow up. I know, before we talked about that aspect of life, less purchases and slowing down and more experiences, do you think you could share a little bit more?

Brittany: Yeah. And that's been a game changer for me, just in terms of happiness? Hands down. So Well, I mean, we know from psychological research that you get more and longer lasting happiness from purchasing experiences than you do from purchasing goods, right? It's just like, you buy something, it's new for a day. And then it's like, whatever, it goes into the closet, right? Whereas like experiences, you can keep revisiting those in your mind. Right? Yeah. And they're wonderful. So I guess like a year and a half or two ago, maybe I started just, instead of buying things I just started doing, like singing lessons, and guitar lessons and tennis lessons and dance classes. And I just, I loved it. And it's great in this life, I'm like, really excited about. I have my little things I do every week, and I'm just, I'm so eager to do them. And it's like little mini vacations, like every day from school, or whatever it is, right? Things are good for me, like mentally, physically, for the environment. And I don't feel the need to like, you know, fly to a tropical destination for vacation because like, I'm actually happy in my life. Yeah, because I have these little built in like mini vacations every day. I do something every day that is just for fun and just for me. And so it's just like a snowball effect in the best way. You know, cutting back and just really questioning like, anytime I'm about to purchase something like do I really need that? Like, is that marketing manipulating me? Or like, do I actually need this because if you actually need something I'm not saying like--yeah, like don't buy it. Yeah, right. Like, we don't have to suffer. But, you know, just like, really questioning like, Is this me wanting this? Or is this like the capitalist mindset of feeling like you need to need something because that's what our economy needs to like, survive. Yeah. And I found that pretty much every time it's just capitalism.

Cherish: Yeah. It's like I don't know, not today.

Brittany: Yeah, I think I told you last time like I started playing tennis. And when you start something new, there's all this gear that you're supposed to buy, right? And I was like, oh, gosh, I guess I gotta get this, this and this and like a new bag for my tennis racket. And like, all my friends were getting tennis bags. I was like, I went, I put one into an online cart. And I was like, Wait, am I really about to buy a bag? Just to put a racket in? Like, can I not just carry the racket? Yeah, like, it's just going from my car to the court and back. Like, that's, that's it? I was like, No, I don't need a new tennis bag. And like, no, no hate to my friends who have them. But like, I just

reused like another bag. And I like to put my shoes and my balls in there. And then like, I carry the rocket and like, it's all good.

Cherish: I appreciate you sharing that. And that, yeah, we can bring back that example. Now, actually, the next thing I wanted to ask, I think kind of ties in with that. But that was if you could get everyone on board upon specific belief or action around climate change, what would it be?

Brittany: Yeah. So I think it's always just like, I'm more about like–well, I mean, aside from like, sweeping policy changes that would really fix a lot of stuff, but that's beyond my control, unfortunately. I do think changing mindsets is better than just behavior, right? Because mindsets will facilitate more behaviors, as opposed to just like changing one specific behavior. And ultimately, I do think it comes down to the compassion aspect of just being like, more considerate of, you know, other creatures and other people and the environment. But I think I told you last time, I would, it would be like one of two, if I had to choose one would just be that reduced reduction of purchasing? Yeah. Because that will make a huge impact, even within my friend group. A huge impact. And just like, you know, questioning, I mean, I think it's a good exercise in mindfulness to to just be like, do I actually want this? You know, like, I feel like we do that with food, right? It's like, do I actually want that ice cream? Yeah, like, we do that with food? Like, we're encouraged to do that. And it's like, Well, why not? With like [other] purchases? Yeah, everything, right. And you get those Instagram ads coming out, too. And I got off social media highly recommended. So either like cutting down on the purchasing, just in a mindful way, just like, not just like the cut down, but just the self questioning, like, do I want this?

Or, you know, just like, having compassion for like other creatures? Yeah. You know, just, and that extends within the species to I think, just thinking about, you know, what about, even here in Ann Arbor, we have a pretty large unhoused population, like, what, what are these climate extremes, like for them? You know, like, I know, we walk past them, when we're going to and from the coffee shops to get our, you know, iced oat milk lattes, or whatever it is. But if you had to stay outside, like, all day this summer, like, what would that be like? Yeah. And in the winter, and it goes to the other extreme, what would that be like? And if you can mitigate that, like, why not? Like, if you could just walk somewhere instead of drive just like once a week? To help mitigate that? Yeah. Like, why wouldn't you? You know, so, again, not to sound preachy, these are like things. No, no worries, I struggled with it too. But yeah, just like, just really thinking about what's the experience like for, you know, a butterfly, a person, you know, someone in the future?

Cherish: No, I appreciate you sharing, I think it comes back to or so goes back to the idea of like, the mindset mindset shift, like you said, which when you compare that to just like, you know, taking any action, just thinking about the why not just the what, yeah?

Brittany: Yeah, I mean, you know, as you know, as a student, like, if you're excited about a class, you're gonna do your homework, right? Yeah. Because you want to, because it makes you feel good. And like, it feeds into this belief system that you have that you like, you want to learn, like, you want to learn this specific thing, maybe like your teacher, maybe you really like her

classmates. And that's much better than a teacher being like, you have to do this homework. If not, you're gonna get a zero, right? Like, getting that motivation and like that care. It's just like, you're just going to do it, instead of like, having like a policy that's like, you have to do this. Right. Yeah.

Cherish: It makes you think back to when you mentioned the staff earlier that they weren't being told to do that, they were taking it on their own initiative.

Brittany: Yes. Yeah. And they're amazing. I mean, one of the staff members was telling me like, yeah, I go through after events and like to dig stuff out of the compost bin because people put their own stuff in there. I'm like, first of all, you're amazing, but like, why, like why...?

Yeah,! And again, like if we talk about this in my department, maybe then like, the people who miss filing things will be like, Oh, I don't want Michelle To have to like dig this out of the trash can. She's a human being that I know and care about who does a lot for me. So I'm gonna motivate myself to do things differently. Right?

Cherish: Yeah, to learn more and to pick the right bin from this. Yes, exactly. Now, building on that, or one other thing that I want to specifically ask is, What is something that you're hopeful about?

Brittany: Yeah. So, like I said, before, you know, it's really hard to teach here and just not be excited about the future generation. Because this compassion stuff that I'm talking about, like, I see it so much in my students, and, you know, this generation, they really have, they've come so far, like, you know, working against, you know, not bullying and not, you know, misgendering people and just like being supportive and embracing each other. And I just, I truly believe that, they're gonna take this compassion stuff and run with it. And you know, that they're outspoken. And that's one of the good things about social media, I think it's like, it's given platforms to people and, you know, people really feel like, I want my voice to be heard, and my voice can be heard. And I see so many of my students just being amazing human beings. They're just, like, so kind. And I mean, even, like, if they sense I'm having a bad day, like, come and check on me. And it's like, aw, that is so sweet of you and like seeing them, like with each other. And it's just, that makes me really hopeful. Because again, I think all of this comes down to just caring a little more stepping outside of your stressed out world. And their stress. Like, they have so many reasons to be stressed, like, immediately. School is hard, and then everything that we're dealing with, like they've been dealing with their whole life, you know, like climate change, all these issues. Like it's been, they've been bombarded with it when you know, these 24 media 24 hour media cycles, yeah, social media, all these things, you know. And somehow, they're still just so sweet. Like, they're just good humans. So that makes me really excited. I really think that if we can keep things afloat for them to like, take over, that things could actually get better.

Cherish: Everyone's gonna work on it, and the kids will be alright. Yeah. All right. Well, again, thank you so much for answering that and sharing that with me, the last thing is just opening the floor. Just if there was anything else that came to mind that you'd like to share, or to add to the conversation?

Brittany: I don't think so. I mean, I think I told you this last time, I just, I love what you guys are doing with us, you know, like, especially you you've done this twice now with me. So thank you. But yeah, I mean, again, just like bringing it into the discourse showing like, in a centralized way, LSA cares about this and is prioritizing it. You know, we were talking about storytelling before putting a face to like stories and like, customizing it, that's effective storytelling, right? It's going to impact someone more than just like, you know, rattling off statistics about the climate. And also just like hearing someone else's perspective, or maybe someone else's things that they do for the environment, so that you don't have to, like come up with it on your own. Right. Yeah, like you said earlier, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Yeah, yeah. Don't have to reinvent the wheel and like, you know, just get the sustainability life hacks, right? And, you know, I think digital waste is a good example, like most of the people that I've talked to, because I'm trying to just bring this up with friends. Every single person I've talked to has been like, I didn't know that that's like yeah, I didn't know and so just like talking about that and being like yeah, maybe let's delete our like six year long texts thread as much as I hate to because like, yeah, there's--I don't know, there's something sentimental. But then you can connect and like, collectively, we're going [to help] the environment. Isn't that more meaningful than like some text I'm never going to go back and read?

Cherish: True enough and always ask myself, like yeah, how often am I going to actually go back and look?

Brittany: Yeah, but that's why I think this series is so cool. And I was so honored when you asked me.

Cherish: I'm so glad that we had this conversation again twice. And truly, I think you brought so many wonderful perspectives and I'm excited to share things. But then if that's that last point, I'm going to go ahead and say thank you again for your time today and close out the actual recording.

- This concludes the interview transcript. -

This interview was conducted in July 2024.

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