

TRANSCRIPT – BRANDON BREZEALE

Interviewee: BRANDON BREZEALE

Interviewer: Kieran W. Taylor

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KIERAN TAYLOR: I'm going to turn it on. I'm going to ask you just for the sake of the recording, if you could say your full name and when and where you were born?

BRANDON BREZEALE: Brandon Brezeale. I was born in Charleston, South Carolina, January 29, 1985.

KT: Is your family from Charleston? Do they go back a ways in Charleston?

BB: No, actually, I was born and raised in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, right outside of Charleston, and my mom and dad met in high school in North Charleston, but her family is from Florida, and his family is from upstate South Carolina.

KT: Okay. How did they get to North Charleston? Do you have any idea?

BB: No. I have no idea. I really don't.

KT: But that's where your parents –

BB: Yeah, that's where they met initially.

KT: So, they were in high school in the 60s, 70s?

BB: 70's. My mom was born in 58.

KT: Did you have any perception of the Citadel as you were coming up? I mean, did you ever go over to campus for parades or anything like that?

BB: No. No. I had heard -- I played baseball growing up, so, baseball is a pretty

**Brandon Brezeale**

big thing in my home town and some of the local kids, they would go to baseball camp there, so, I would see them with baseball hats or something, considering that was all I knew about it. A lot of kids really wanted to go there to play baseball. That was all I knew about it until I was in high school and my head baseball coach, my sophomore year, ended up leaving us to go get an assistant coach/recruiting job for the Citadel baseball team, and then he recruited me junior year.

KT: What position?

BB: I'm a pitcher.

KT: Oh, okay. So, how fast were the – your fast ball get up to?

BB: The fastest pitch I ever threw was ninety miles an hour, and I'm left-handed, so that was kind of a big deal at the time.

KT: Yeah, you had a decent breaking ball?

BB: It was okay. It was okay. My fast ball was better, but I had some control issues.

KT: (laughing)

BB: Somehow, once I perfected how to get my control down, then I lost the velocity and then I started throwing lower eighties, eighty-two, eighty-four kind of guy. Once I got to school, it just wasn't good enough (microphone interference), so I didn't play a whole lot.

KT: I'm going to see the Sox and the Nationals on Friday.

BB: Oh, are you?

KT: Strasburg's second game.

BB: Oh, nice. Yeah, I saw it on TV. I wanted to go. Our neighbor gets free tickets

**Brandon Brezeale**

all the time.

KT: So, you knew you wanted to play baseball in college, and you were being recruited as early as a sophomore or junior.

BB: Junior, yeah.

KT: When did you first make it over to the Citadel to see, you know, just to see campus, to meet people?

BB: I didn't get over there -- well, I guess it would be -- the summer after my junior year, I played summer baseball on a traveling baseball league. It was pretty competitive in the Southeast. And, they ended up winning national championships after me but -- we would have tournaments there. I would just play on their baseball field, but I did not step foot on the campus until senior year of high school, and it was because I had to do that pre-Knob visit, since I was up for that academic scholarship.

KT: Had anyone told you - had anyone said, hey, you know what you're in for here? I mean, it's not just baseball --

BB: Senior year I started figuring it out. Well, I guess it was the summer before senior year because they were recruiting me heavily; they can start calling you on August 1<sup>st</sup>, I believe it was -- or July 1<sup>st</sup>, one of those two days and they called me right on that day, and one of my buddies who played high school ball with me was a freshman there, and so he kind of filled me in on all that. And, then once I got there for that pre-knob visit, in early January, then I really got to see it in full force for the first time. I was kind of blown away.

KT: (laughing). What do you remember in the pre-knob visit?

BB: I remember these upper classmen busting into the room, because I roomed

**Brandon Brezeale**

with Knobs, just busting into their room and just trying to be macho in front of me, you know, just trying to show off kind of, and just thinking of how ridiculous it all looked and how they were, you know, standing at attention and “sir-yes-sir” and everything. It was just so ridiculous to me.

KT: What do you do -- as a pre-knob, do you just sort of watch this while -- bracing or whatever?

BB: You just watch. You just kind of hang out. You're a high schooler and they're older than you and they gotta do this.

KT: So, do the seniors make a point of showing the pre-knobs what it's all about during those visits?

BB: Well, it's more the juniors. Juniors are more the ones around campus who kind of give the structure. They are the sergeants who train the knobs, so it's mostly the juniors.

KT: Yeah, but they make a point, probably during the visits to --

BB: Yeah. And I remember once I ended up getting there and being an upperclassman and seeing the pre-knobs just thinking of being in their shoes, you know. It's interesting always to ask them why you're here. Do you really want to come here? After seeing this, do you really want to be here? 'Cuz I know me and my classmates every day who were over there, didn't want to be there, every day.

KT: Well, it's funny because sometimes there are those pre-knobs-- they'll sit in to my class, and they'll be more alert than their knob. Their knob has fallen asleep, and the -- pre-knobs. You know.

BB: A lot of them were like ROTC from high school, so they're really into that

**Brandon Brezeale**

kind of thing.

KT: But you hadn't done ROTC

BB: I had not.

KT: So, after the pre-knob visit, were you at least -- did the --

BB: Well, I had already committed to the baseball team before that, I knew I was going there.

KT: You basically did that site unseen.

BB: I knew before because--right-- the coaches do a good job of selling the school. And, they do it for all the programs. What they do is they tell you, "You put on the uniform and go to class. That's it." They're like "You don't have to do basically any - any -- you don't have to do any parades, you basically just put on the uniform, and that's the only military you have to do."

KT: And, to what degree is that true?

BB: Not very true at all (both laughing). I mean, you get out of some stuff but it's mostly just you get out of PT, which isn't a big deal because you do more physical stuff at practice, anyway, and in the weight room. I mean, you have to get up, you have to go to all the formations, you have to shine your shoes, you get inspected. In season, you get out of parades, but offseason you don't, and you still have to go to drill offseason. But, in season, you get out of the weekend inspections because of the games every weekend. So, we would get out of that.

KT: Well, that's pretty big.

BB: We get out of the parades and drill in-season, which was second semester for baseball, we were pretty much good to go for that. But, yeah. Up until parents' weekend,

**Brandon Brezeale**

I probably was the most soft-spoken guy ever--which is pretty outrageous for me because I'm pretty outgoing and like to talk.

KT: So, what was it like? What do you remember from hell week?

BB: I remember not being able to sleep a lot. I remember always being hungry, always being tired, always sweating, because you show up in August. The South is oppressive, especially Charleston in August, and they take you out to -- I don't know if you've seen WLI field? It's over there, beside the marsh. It's where the soccer team plays.

KT: Yeah. Yeah.

BB: Well, they would take us out there to do drill because I was in fourth battalion, so we would just march on there, in the middle of the heat, and learn how to do drill. You have mosquitoes swarming near you, you have sweat rolling down in your eyes and as a knob, you can't do anything about it. If you hit your face, or swat anything or wipe away the sweat, you just get reamed for it. So, that's what I remember a lot. And I remember we would also do drill, individually and squads in the battalion, lining up on the galleries on the first floor. So, we wouldn't be on the quad, but we would be up there against it. The quad, as you know is white and red checkered. That sun hitting off the white just reflects right in your eyes. So, it's -- yeah, it was pretty bad. So, that would blind you as well. So, that's what I remember a lot about it.

KT: Do you think you got through as good as most?

BB: Yes, I think I had it a little bit easier in the fact that, once, I think it was parents' weekend was over, there's a separate mess for athletes. We could eat upstairs. A lot of the harassment that you get is at mess, because you don't get to eat much and you're just, you know, belittled the whole time, you don't get condiments; you have to just spout

**Brandon Brezeale**

out knowledge all the time. Knob knowledge is what they call it. I got to sit upstairs with athletes. With the baseball team, it was a little tougher because we still had a class system. The freshmen still had to do stuff, like, God, they would embarrass us. They would make us get on our chairs whenever there was a Citadel football game, just like they do regular knobs downstairs, and chant The Citadel chant and wave our arms like idiots, and they would -- I don't know why but the mess ladies always put out these big bowls of Jell-O on each table upstairs in the athletics. They would make us, at the end of mess, they would get two freshmen on the baseball team, sit there, and each get a big bowl and try to race each other eating the stupid stuff. Which, I'm sure it goes on downstairs, too. But we'd still have to do stupid stuff like that, humiliating stuff.

KT: So, the baseball team just sort of informally kind of adopted that? Football, they don't do that?

BB: Yeah. None of the other sports I noticed did it.

KT: That's interesting.

BB: The other sports were very big on, you know -- which the baseball team, we still -- if we were around campus, our upper-classmen still kind of look out for us, you know, the best we could, and make sure we weren't getting too harassed kind of thing. Yeah, they were big on humiliating us still for being freshmen, and kind of, you know, know your place, yeah. It's very much you had to fight for what you got.

KT: It doesn't sound like there was anything -- I know it's traumatic, you know, but it sounds like -- you seemed to have weathered it pretty well.

BB: Yeah, I mean it's -- it's such a mental test. It just became a game and the coaches and the upperclassmen on the baseball team were good at instilling that in us, if

**Brandon Brezeale**

anything. They're like, don't even think about it, just laugh in your head while they're yelling at you or making you do stupid stuff because it doesn't matter.

KT: You almost just have to divorce yourself.

BB: Yeah, you really just have to shut out any party or personality and just -- it's weird, it's like you had to go somewhere else. Strange. But I'm fine, now.

KT: Just wait.

BB: Right, right. (laughing)

KT: You're a time bomb. (laughing)

BB: Exactly.

KT: So-- thinking. Do you have -- you had said earlier that all of your classmates or -- there wasn't a day that went by where you were saying -- where you didn't say, you know, get me out of this place or I hate this place.

BB: Right.

KT: I mean, is that knob year you're talking about?

BB: Every year. It got worse after knob year, actually.

KT: How so?

BB: Because you have more freedoms and you see all of your friends going out to bars on a Tuesday night. I'm a local boy, so I had friends at College of Charleston that were still around in the area and I had friends at USC and Clemson, and just to hear them like, going to frat parties, going out whenever they wanted to instead of studying, you know, we couldn't do that. We were stuck in there. We got out on Wednesdays if we were lucky. On the baseball team, we didn't get out on Wednesdays because we were practicing or had games. Yeah, we had games. In-season, we had games on Wednesdays

**Brandon Brezeale**

and then Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. So, that pretty much took away all the time that I was free from the barracks life. I was in baseball.

KT: You didn't give any thought to transferring?

BB: No, well, I mean I did, but I knew it wasn't a reality because they were giving me a full scholarship. And I knew that I would have to pay the money. I didn't come from a family with money, so I'd be the one paying that. Actually, I had an overage of scholarships. The school cut me a check every semester

KT: That's not bad.

BB: Yeah, and they paid for -- we have those QM cards, where we could charge anything from the gift shop or the -- our books and all that on -- all those paid for. I don't even think it had a limit on it. I would just go to the gift shop and just buy stuff --

KT: How can that be?

BB: I don't know (laughing), but I never paid a penny for it. I don't know if maybe my overage of scholarship ended up -- they ended up taking more than that? --

KT: (laughing) That's why we went on furlough last year.

BB: Right, so. That was the reason that I never, ever transferred but I had -- I mean --

KT: Your whole attitude from the beginning was, I've gotta get through?

BB: Yep. And, it went by quicker than I could have ever imagined. But, I mean, whenever I came in, there were probably fourteen freshmen on the baseball team. My senior year, I think there was about four or so. They would transfer to go play baseball somewhere else, or they would stop playing because Fred Jordan's a hardass.

KT: Is he pretty tough?

**Brandon Brezeale**

BB: Very, very difficult. Have you ever read, *My Losing Season* by Pat Conroy?

KT: No, no.

BB: I'm actually reading it now and it brings up so many memories of playing on the baseball team because Pat talks about how he's a mediocre basketball player, which I ended up being kind of mediocre at baseball and I was kind of young at pitching because I didn't get into it until freshman year of high school. So I still needed words of encouragement and I needed a little bit of guidance every now and then, got none of it with them. He was very much -- he would just hammer his players all of the time. He was just not very good at giving positive feedback. So, just kind of -- it broke me down, mentally, more so than the school did after a while. So, that also contributed to me, and ended up getting off the team after sophomore year, among other things. There was just a lot of factors. It wasn't fun anymore.

KT: Do you know these guys who just got drafted? I think three were picked this year.

BB: I know of one. I don't know who the other two are, no, I don't know them. They were before -- or, after me. So, no, I don't know those guys at all. A couple years afterwards, though, I did know the guys.

KT: But you think that's pretty typical of cadets? That -- I mean, it wasn't just you that was hating life?

BB: Yeah, all my classmates hated it. Nobody really enjoys being there.

KT: How does it keep going?

BB: I don't know. You know that you're getting one of the best degrees in the Southeast. You know that once you walk across the stage, and have your ticket punched,

**Brandon Brezeale**

you know that any job in the Southeast that you want, especially if a Citadel grad works there, the network is unbelievable. Like I told you, I got a job up here getting paid a lot more than I probably should. Probably end up -- I'm probably one of the top earning people from my graduating class right now, just because I have two Citadel guys, my boss and his boss, they're both Citadel grads and they saw that I was an engineer from The Citadel and they wanted me in there. Pull some strings to make it happen.

KT: Do you think it's different from the liberal arts? Or do you think it works for -  
- I mean, you know, an engineering degree is - you've got more power in the market.

BB: Right. And, we have our degrees pretty solid. I mean, I know whenever I was there, we were the number two civil engineering degree in the Southeast for public schools next to Georgia Tech. So, yeah, I probably do have a little more leverage that way but I've seen so many other guys who didn't do anything while they were in college and now I mean, at least they're like -- they got easy jobs being a cop, or one of my friends who was a Poli-Sci major got a job with a huge business firm named Pratt & Whitney in Connecticut. He's doing really well for them and he's got a Poli-Sci degree! So, you know. If a grad is out there, they'll find these guys and a lot of times they won't care what their degree is, they know they have a little bit of leadership background, the trials that they went through to get there, so they want them.

KT: In that sense, do you think that, not only coming out of a good engineering program or having a solid academic degree, but does the -- did the program work for you, in terms of instilling leadership qualities?

BB: I think so. A lot of people tell me it did. I mean, whenever I compare the guys that I went to the Citadel with, with other people in the private sector, let's say, it

**Brandon Brezeale**

was just astonishing to me how prepared we were for it. I mean in terms of professionalism and just being able to get things done. I don't know, it just seems like a lot of the guys, or at least I know from a civil engineering standpoint, it was just a different breed compared to other engineers for sure. Just a very broad curriculum and you get a lot of things out of it.

KT: About -- when you went to -- you were not out to yourself when you went to The Citadel. How did that process take place?

BB: Well, I -- I dated a girl starting senior year in high school. She ended up going to Charleston Southern University, which wasn't far away, and I continued dating her on and off for the first three years of college. But I always knew that something was a little different. Like, one of my girlfriends in college ended up telling me years later, you know, it's great that -- "I loved dating you because you never tried to put any moves on me, you know?" (laughs) I was like it's not because I'm a sweet guy. If I could have, I would have, but it just didn't work for me. And, I tried. I tried. I mean, like I said, I had a couple girlfriends in college, especially one on and off for three years. And, so I definitely tried, but it just didn't work for me. I knew that I was attracted to men, but I kind of just labeled myself as bi. I always wanted that -- I guess, you know, the American Dream is get a good job, have a wife and kids and the white picket fence, and all that stuff. So, I kind of just put it on the backburner, like it would just pass, and I could still marry a girl and it would be fine. Either that, or I would just marry her and be unhappy, but I'd still have that "Dream".

But, finally, I just broke up with her for the last time because I was just really attracted to some baseball teammates of mine. And, I think I started seeing the mood

**Brandon Brezeale**

swings in myself a lot in school because I knew that these guys who are in my engineering classes and that was on the baseball team with me, I couldn't ever date because they were straight. But, I wanted them not to be straight because I ended up developing a crush on them, more or less. It was difficult handling the emotional stress of that. And, as I alluded to earlier, after I broke up with my girlfriend for the last time, it was -- I believe it was fall of senior year -- and then I'd met a gay Citadel guy two years previously and a faculty member of The Citadel who is gay. Both in my sophomore year. And, would just kind of chat with them on AOL, they were kind of good to console me because I'd come back to the barracks after a night out drinking and just be really upset. I'm pretty sure I cried quite a few times, just because I was so into these guys and just had no shot. And, they would talk about their girlfriends and stuff like that, and it's just like, man, this is brutal.

And, they were kind of there just too kind of console me and walk me through it. And, senior year, one of them called me and was like, "hey, there's this tailgate going on with gay alumni." And this was the homecoming game. I was like, "No, I don't really think I can do that because I don't want anybody catching me. I don't wanna be outed at school" because I actually have a classmate that was outed as a freshman, and he actually made it through all four years, but not after a transfer of companies, and it was bad. I knew the harassment that I would get. So, I was like, no, I'm not going to do that. Then, the other guy, The Citadel grad now, after the one who was a senior when I was a sophomore, he called me and was like, "Hey, there's a couple guys out here, we're in a back yard, it's fine, nobody will see you." So, on the walk back from the game, I ended up going to this house, which was right beside Johnson Haggod Stadium, I mean, it was

**Brandon Brezeale**

two doors away from it.

And, ended up going back there, messing with the guys and had some beers and had a blast. That night, I finally convinced myself that I was gay and not bi. And it was right before Thanksgiving break. And Thanksgiving break, I came out to my mom, one of my brothers, and a couple close friends from high school.

KT: Wow.

BB: Yep. And, I strategically made it to where I didn't come out to any college classmates until we walked across the stage. Because I didn't want to be ridiculed.

KT: Were you ever -- because I know that -- I mean, you know, gay epithets are just a part of the culture there. Were you ever -- did anyone ever suspect you or -- target you --

BB: Nobody had a clue. Nobody had a clue. I guess because, you know, I was -- I grew up in a small town, so, I was always told by my family, "You need to have a girlfriend; you can date all these pretty girls. Why aren't you dating these girls?" So, I would do it, I would date these girls, and being on the baseball team growing up, you are just around this culture of machismo all the time and I guess it just kind of rubbed off on me. I'm not quite chauvinistic but I mean, I was kind of a womanizer that didn't sleep with women (laughing), if that's possible. I loved it because I loved compliments and I liked being flattered. It didn't matter to me what sex is doing it. So, I enjoyed it. What was the question again?

KT: I was just wondering, did anyone ever -- you know --

BB: Yeah --

KT: Everybody is called a fag. Everybody is called whatever.

**Brandon Brezeale**

BB: And especially in a culture of such masculinity, it's -- that word gets thrown around a lot, and more so in that culture, it's so weird because a lot of the guys pretend to be gay as a game.

KT: Meaning, just goofing around?

BB: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I could tell you all kinds of crazy stories of stuff that was so homoerotic at that school. I mean, I don't know if I want to get into detail.

KT: To the extent of that you're -- what's an example of that?

BB: Well, I mean, of course we'd shower together but I remember going into a classmate's room one time after he'd gotten out of the shower and, he was in a towel still and his classmate -- or his roommate was like, you know, throwing gay gestures his way and he got -- he got a hard-on, in front of us! And, I pulled away the towel and there it was! And, he had no shame. There was just so many homoerotic moments. And guys would grab each other on the butt, which I'm sure was just playful banter, and I'm sure it's gone on over all these years, but it was very difficult for me to see that and know deep down that it wasn't a game to me. Then, it kind of sent mixed signals. So, that made it a little difficult.

KT: So, just recently, I don't know if you saw this, but a historian named Steve Estes wrote an article about being gay at The Citadel and more broadly, about gender, I'll send you a copy, it's really good. But, one of the things Steve suggests, growing out of his interviews and sources he's looked at is -- he suggests that for a number of -- probably not a huge number but for a significant number of Citadel cadets in some ways, if you're -- I mean, The Citadel is an attractive place for somebody who is coming out of high school and they are uncertain of their sexuality, because it such a robust, macho culture that it's a

**Brandon Brezeale**

way of -- well, it's both -- it's very homoerotic, it's a homosocial environment, but at the same time it's -- I think that some people are attracted to kind of the idea or the hope that in doing this -- having this very macho experience, it'll settle whatever kinds of ambivalence that they're experiencing -- that is so --

BB: That could be. That could be me going into it. I mean, I probably put that on the backburner, too. Actually, I probably did -- I think I do remember telling myself that in my head, it's like, well, if I go to The Citadel, all male school basically, I should definitely be able to find out if I'm gay or not. What better place? You immerse yourself in a bunch of guys.

KT: So, you had been questioning even in high school?

BB: Yeah, I had my first sexual encounter with a guy whenever I was 12.

KT: So, you'd always had some --

BB: Right. And, it was always kind of in the back of my mind and I kind of suppressed it a lot, you know, growing up, since I was always told to have a girlfriend. I came from a house with two other boys and they were both womanizers, too. So, it was kind of just understood that's what I would do. So, whenever I had a crush on John Stamos, I wouldn't know it because I'm not supposed to be attracted to guys. So, yeah, I know, embarrassing enough.

KT: It had a -- it was before class one day, and a cadet was telling me that he was upset -- how did this go? He was upset because for some reason he found himself in a room alone, that his roommate earlier in the year had dropped out or something. And, so, he had his own dorm room. And, toward the end of the semester, with maybe two weeks left in the semester or something, someone was transferred in and he was grumbling

**Brandon Brezeale**

about this and I said, "Well that's weird, coming so late in the semester," why would this -- well this dude, apparently what he did was he made a knob touch his penis and I said, okay, and he's -- what? He gets transferred for that? That strikes me as a little more serious than -- and --

BB: Yeah, sexual harassment.

KT: And the cadet said, "It's not like he's not gay or anything, he's -- if he was gay then it would be a problem," but you know, he's -- I was like, well --

BB: That's weird.

KT: So, you'd rather have somebody who -- a sexual predator than a gay person?

BB: Yeah, and I heard, whenever I was a knob and it was during baseball season, so I didn't really get called out as much in the barracks by upperclassmen but my roommate ended up having to do PT, physical training, in the showers while his senior was showering, like right beside him.

KT: So, he's doing pushups or?

BB: Yeah, doing pushups or sit-ups or whatever have you, whatever he had him do, right there beside him, in the shower, while he was showering.

KT: Yeah that's a little bizarre.

BB: And I think maybe it's just that, another thing maybe that there's just so much sexual frustration amongst the barracks, they're locked in there all the time.

KT: So, you knew of just one other gay cadet while you were there or a couple?

BB: Yeah, and I've tried to make contact -- because I didn't make contact with him while I was at school. I knew of him because a classmate of mine on the baseball team, when we were freshmen, he was like, "Hey, this guy in my company is gay." I was

**Brandon Brezeale**

like, "Well, how do you know that?" He was like, "Well, one of the upperclassmen were yelling at him and they were calling him a fag and he was like, 'Sir yes sir.'" And, so, they started ostracizing him so much and harassing him that he ended up having to get a company transfer to a different -- actually he got a battalion transfer from third battalion to first battalion. And I guess all the other classmen were really told over there, you know, be really sensitive to this guy. I'm sure he still got it over the years, badly, but I tried to contact him since we graduated but I haven't heard from him.

KT: But he made it out.

BB: He made it all four years, graduated. I don't know how.

KT: That's incredible. Do you think, now that you've had a chance through GALA to meet other cadets from -- do you think --

BB: Not many.

KT: Do you think things got -- at least in the time that you were there -- do you think people became more sensitized and more open on the issue? Or, did you not see any movement?

BB: You mean from the time I got there till the time I graduated? Do I think people became more gay friendly?

KT: Yeah.

BB: No. No. I don't think -- I don't think it will be for a long time and one of the main reasons is because it's in the South and the South seems to be fifty years behind on all social issues. And, a lot of southern guys go there, and a lot of rednecks go there. And, so, I think that mixed with it being a lot of guys and that whole macho thing, you know, I remember surprisingly enough - and I've even told him since then - my

**Brandon Brezeale**

roommate in college, one of these -- one of these evenings, I don't how it came up, but he said he believes in Adam and Eve but not Adam and Steve. I was laughing on the inside but couldn't really say anything because I was like, man that's just such an ignorant comment to make. And, he's from small-town, Easley, South Carolina which is upstate. So, a lot of it is just regurgitating what you've heard your whole life. After I came out to him and he was totally fine with it, like I said, I've been a groomsman at his wedding last year -- I told him about it and he laughed and I laughed together. You just say things, but you don't mean it or you're not educated. Like, I never knew a gay person growing up.

KT: But that's hopeful right? The way that your classmates have seemingly not had a problem with you?

BB: Yeah, it's been great. I was in that wedding last year; I am in another wedding this year with another classmate. There's probably about five or six, well -- maybe closer to eight or ten classmates who I keep in touch with and they're all perfectly fine with it. I've been invited to many weddings from classmates and they don't care. I bring Chris along, it's fine.

KT: One of the things that I've noticed in my classes, just even going back to when I was teaching in North Carolina, is that I think - at least it's my perception that younger people, it's not as much of a hang up generation -

BB: This younger generation is definitely a little more socialized to it.

KT: Even when I've brought up gay marriage in my Citadel classes, I generally don't get a whole lot of resistance. Most -- it just seems like by now, everybody has a cousin, or you know, or a brother, or a friend, or -- it's changed dramatically in the last few years.

**Brandon Brezeale**

BB: Whenever I first started coming out, since I was getting such positive reception from high school and college classmates and family members, I was like, man I'm just going to be an ambassador for gay people because I'm not that cookie cutter, you know, real effeminate guy that Hollywood portrays so much. And all my friends and family are so shocked that I'm gay because I'm so normal, you know? And I'm so masculine. So, I was like, man, I'm just going to tell the world, you know? And that's the way I kind of see it. And, I think it was a little easier for my friends, because they've seen that this is an everyday person that he can be married to a man and he could be the same person.

KT: How was coming out to your family?

BB: It was scary. I think the first person in my family I told was my mom. And I told her on the way back from eating dinner somewhere and it was just me and her, I was like "Mom, I think I'm gay", and the first thing she said was "Oh, shit". That was the very first thing she said. I was just thinking to myself like, Wow, what a reception, you know? She was like, "I played with a lot of women in softball that were lesbians, are you sure?" I was like, "Mom, I totally wouldn't come out to you if I wasn't sure." She was like, "Well, I love you no matter what." And, that's basically -- since then, I told everybody else in my family and it's basically been the same all the way across the board. My grandma, she's pretty big on the Bible and so, she hasn't -- she has issues with that every now and then, but she still loves me very much and her best girlfriend has a gay son, so I think it's kind of a bonding thing for them a little bit. So, and she likes Bloody Marys and we have Bloody Marys together. Yeah, everybody has been fine. I have two brothers, they're both great about it. I'm going to see my older brother tomorrow and his family and

**Brandon Brezeale**

actually, he -- since I've come out to them, to both of them, I was the best man at my younger brother's wedding and the older brother made me the godfather of his daughter. So, yeah, it's been very positive. It's been great.

KT: That's fantastic.

BB: Yeah, it's great because I know it's not the same way everywhere else and I have friends that told me horror stories, how they're families disowned them, so, very grateful, especially growing up in small town, South Carolina.

KT: What about -- by the time that you -- Well, I guess the first women probably had graduated at 2000, I think. Yeah, 2001.

BB: We had two-hundred women at the school when I was there.

KT: What's your sense -- so when you started, that was still relatively new, the presence of women?

BB: Yeah. Yeah, and a lot of people still have an old school attitude. It's so weird. It's like, some of the guys who go to the school -- and you've seen it -- are legacy kids, whose dads and grandfathers have all been to The Citadel. So, they've been indoctrinated from their family that this is an all-male school and they're ridiculous. They have this very old school attitude about everything. They're very against the women thing. It doesn't matter to me, that's the only people I've seen who are really against it, the ones who were the legacy graduates.

KT: Save the males type guys. But being an athlete, did that mean that you got a sort of, more of an opportunity to socialize with the female athletes?

BB: No, the athletes kind of stay to themselves. You kind of stay with your own team. You're around them all the time and I mean, we had thirty guys on the team, so it

**Brandon Brezeale**

was plenty. I didn't really befriend any females until I was a junior and that was because the soccer player - maybe she was a volleyball player -- she was definitely the prettiest girl on campus. She sat at my table and we became good friends.

KT: I suppose engineering, too, you wouldn't have too many women.

BB: We had one female my freshman year and she ended up transferring after Knob year, somewhere else. But, most of them are athletes it seems.

KT: If -- so you think, I'm not sure if I may have asked a version of this question earlier, but do you think -- what would happen if someone initiated a gay student group?

BB: Oh. I don't know. I think there would be chaos. I think -- I don't know how long it's going to take for The Citadel to get to that point. I think these old grads are going to have to go to the afterlife before that happens because there are so many grads that are just so old school mindset. They don't think gay exists, or whatever. I think it would be met with a lot of criticism from the alumni and that would trickle into the minds of the cadets who are there.

KT: That was in the context of -- I'm not sure what we were discussing -- it might have been gay marriage that I brought up in class, but I said "You know, I've noticed a real shift in my students over the last few years, on this issue. I think there's a lot more openness, acceptance for a lot of people, even those who I think are pretty homophobic, they're not that bothered by gay marriage." It's like, yeah, whatever, you know? And then I said, "I think within the next five or ten years, there's going to be a gay student group on campus," and they exploded. They said, "No way! No, that's not going to happen, that's not going to happen!"

BB: Yeah, I think it's a long way away from that. 'Cuz, like I said, it would have

**Brandon Brezeale**

to start in the leadership, in the alumni. Because a lot of things that the students learned about the school are from alumni. So, if it's setting a bad precedent through them that a gay group needs to be banished, then that's the way it is. It's like, whenever I was at school, the hot issue was playing Dixie for the band, I mean who cares? It's not a big deal. I'm sure it wouldn't have been a big deal to anybody, but the alumni were so vehemently against it. It would trickle down to the legacy kids, they would tell their classmates, and all of a sudden, it's a big issue. So, yeah, I think it would be the same with a gay group.

KT: Do you think something like that would be useful?

BB: Yes, I think very much so. I think the gay and lesbian association, Kevin and I don't know if you know Joe in Atlanta, they were kind of the two guys who got together and started this group--or that's what I've gathered. They helped me a lot through senior year. Once I found out that there were others like me, it was just such a relief and to see all these guys, and a lot of them went into the military, to get their feedback on how their life was when they were at school and being a gay person while you're at school, it's great to have that background and camaraderie instantly. It's been amazing to kind of be able to share stories. Because, you can't share that side of yourself to your straight classmates or at least not most of them.

KT: Not yet or for a while.

BB: Yeah, especially me being so fresh out. They're probably feeling bamboozled right now. It's like, God, I can't believe -- I wonder if he was -- one of the first things my roommate asked me after I -- after he finally believed me that was gay - it's like, so, do you think I'm attractive? Were you ever looking at me in the shower? Do gay men think

**Brandon Brezeale**

I'm hot?

KT: (laughing).

BB: I'm like, well you're attractive but you're not my type. That kind of offended him. But, on to that, while I was at school, I'm sure a lot of people were like, man, I wonder if he was kind of sizing me up while I was at school. And, it wasn't really that way for me, oddly enough. A lot of it was me combating it inside my head and not wanting anyone to even suspect. So, whenever I was in the shower, I just focused on myself and getting in and out of there. Even on the baseball team where it was more lax, it just wasn't a sexual thing for me, being around a bunch of guys naked. It was just like, just showering and most of them were gross anyways, hearing the way they talk and stuff like that, so --

KT: (laughing).

BB: Yeah, I didn't think about them sexually and the uniform was whenever I fell for some of them, but it was more of an intellectual thing than anything. Go figure.

KT: The military uniform?

BB: Yeah. And I don't even have a thing for the military uniform, but I think having the uniform and everybody looking the same, you kind of get to know the person more so, and I think that was what helped me fall for people intellectually.

KT: You told me a lot of going through The Citadel was a struggle, but do you look back on those years fondly?

BB: Mixed emotions, it's like, one thing that me and one of my buddies say a lot - and others -- is that The Citadel is a great place to be from, just not at. I mean, you do have stories that you look back on and laugh, like going out after curfew on a Thursday

**Brandon Brezeale**

night to go drink at a bar to watch a Clemson / Carolina Football game, or something like that. I mean, and there was funny things that happened, like, you -- you'd be surprised at things that you can come up with to keep yourself busy and entertained.

Like, as freshmen, I won't go into too many knob stories. But, as freshmen, we did this thing called a water gallon challenge and I'm sure you've heard it. It's where you try to chug a whole gallon and, usually people do it with milk, which is impossible but it's pretty much impossible with any liquid, and we would do it with water because we didn't have milk. We would all get into somebody's room; it would probably be like three or four of us. And, we would just sit there, and we would each have a gallon jug of water and we would try to chug it. We didn't have a time limit or anything but just to try to make it through and everybody would always end up puking all over the floor. One time we were doing it and this one guy was almost finished with it and his stomach was bulging. An upperclassman busted in and he's like, what the hell are you doing? And then we're like trying to explain to this guy what's going on and he thought it was the funniest thing ever. Well, he saw the guy's stomach was protruding so he started poking it.

KT: (Laughing) No!

BB: So, right when he poked it, the guy puked on the floor, of course. This other guy who wasn't even doing it, has a gag reflex, so then he puked all over the upperclassman. So, it was one of the funniest moments of my life, seeing these two guys puke back to back and one of them get the upperclassman. So, yeah, I mean we would just do stupid stuff like that. And it's fun to look back on. But, it's also like I spent four years to where I couldn't go to a big-time football program, because in the South, football is huge. So, we'd have to take weekends or something to go see Clemson, or a Carolina

**Brandon Brezeale**

or Florida game or whatever. So, we didn't have a good football team, so we couldn't tailgate for the football games, we couldn't blow off a homework assignment and go to a bar. So, it's that aspect of the school that a lot of kids do, which, I guess it's good in a way, too, because you focus more on your studies. Or at least I did. So, I made really good grades, but it would have been nice to have that option, I guess.

KT: Right, or to think about what it would have been like coming out in Atlanta or coming out even in Columbia.

BB: If I were at a different school, I probably would have come out sooner. I know I would have. I know I would have. Because it's so easy to find online gay men, you know? So, I would have easily found people online and ended up making friends and going to my first gay bar before I was twenty-one or something.

KT: Is that how you found The Citadel people? Is it online first?

BB: Yes. Yes. Well, actually, I take that back. I met -- the guy who was a cadet my sophomore year, I met through a guy that I was kind of seeing, that I met at a karaoke bar in West Ashley. (Microphone interference) Oddly enough, I was seeing this guy while I was still dating a girl. And it was just kind of sexual. And, he was like "You know, I met this Citadel guy, I could put you in contact with him." I was like, "Oh really?" And it was intriguing to me. He's like, "Yeah, he's a senior, he's really good looking." So, he ended up giving me this guy's AOL screen name and just started chatting with him and we just kind of became friends. He ended up becoming kind of crazy because he liked me, and he wanted me to come over to his room in the barracks and hook up which I was definitely not going to do. Definitely not going to do. I mean, for one, if somebody caught us, that would be sheer embarrassment across campus, but

**Brandon Brezeale**

then we probably would get kicked out. It was just ridiculous. So, I ended up blocking that guy. Well, he ended up getting on this other guy who was a Citadel employee. His -- I guess he would do his laundry at his place on weekends, come to find out. He got on his AOL screen name and put my screen name in there to try to find me, you know, kind of stalking me. We're friends now, it's cool. (Microphone interference) But and I guess after -- whenever he was gone, this guy was like -- he sent me an IM, and he's like, "Who is this?" I'm like, "I don't know, who this is." I've never seen this screen name before. He's like, "Did I meet you on gay.com?" I was like, "Uh, what"?

KT: (Laughing).

BB: I didn't even know there was a gay.com. I don't explore the gay routes. And, so, we just ended up chatting and I became friends with him. So I guess that was the online -- I guess I did meet them both online, but I kind of met the other guy online through a friend. And then once I went to that tailgate my senior year, then I met all the other guys.

KT: Yeah but you were dating men somewhat all through The Citadel?

BB: Not really dating. Just sexual encounters.

KT: That must have been frightening, right? To be -- I mean if you were out --

BB: Yes, because they knew I went to The Citadel. They knew I was a baseball player at The Citadel. Yeah. That was -- that was a big risk.

KT: Being seen by classmates?

BB: I knew I could have been outed any time. Actually, I remember one time, one of my classmates on the baseball team -- I don't think he's gay, I haven't spoken with him in a long time -- but one of the seniors or juniors on the team was like, "Hey, I heard this

**Brandon Brezeale**

guy's gay." He was like, spreading it around the locker room. And, he was like, "Yeah, I know somebody in Charleston who said that this guy was gay." And everybody was so bewildered. It's like, this guy can't be gay. I was just sitting there thinking, man, that could be me. I never approached the guy about it. I'm pretty sure he's straight. But that just really freaked me out that it could happen to me, you know? I was so afraid of losing friendship with everybody and being an outcast, which I wasn't used to being. So, it was why I just strategically waited till I graduated, became good friends with these guys so they can see, hey, I'm a normal guy.

KT: Tell me a little about -- and I'll wrap this up in the next -- just a couple more questions but tell me a little bit about your partner and your -- it's an upcoming ceremony, where you met?

BB: Yeah, we just got engaged last month. I actually proposed to him. Not really sure how you do this sort of thing since it's kind of new. D.C. just got gay marriage passed early this Spring. Actually, I've been thinking about it since we've been dating. We've been dating for two and a half years now. We met at The Citadel gay tailgate through The Citadel employee who worked there. We're mutual friends. I ended up getting his AOL screenname and chatting with him.

KT: But he's not a Citadel grad?

BB: No, he went to the University of Florida. I don't know how they met. They're both kind of tech geeks. They're big into I.T. type stuff and big into web--I don't know what it is--but they're very good at computers, (laughing), which I'm not as you can tell. I'm good at math. And, so they knew each other somehow and Chris, my fiancé now, got hired to be the photographer at the homecoming football game because he's also a

**Brandon Brezeale**

freelance photographer and he's really good. So, he was staying with the employee of the Citadel at his apartment that weekend and brought him out to that tailgate, met him, and didn't really think anything of it. Just got his screen name and we just chatted all through the rest of my college career, that brief next semester. And then I ended up committing to a civil engineering firm, private firm in Atlanta to work. So, since I knew Chris was there, I was chatting him up. He's like, "yeah, well once you come here, I'll show you around the city and we'll throw a party for you at my house" and all this. So, we did, and we hung out for six months straight pretty much every day. And, we just became very, very close friends - nothing sexual, after about six months. And, we kind of got a little sexual and then he expressed interest in me, wanting to date me. And, I was like, no, you're my only gay friend in this city. I'm not going to do that. So, a couple more months went by, we were going to the one-year anniversary of us meeting: Citadel tailgate homecoming, after my senior year, after I graduated. And, once we were there, I was like, hey, I think we should give it a shot and try to date. We've been around each other daily and I'm not tired of you, and you're not tired of me. Been together for two and a half years. I moved in probably eight months after that, because my lease ended on my apartment. I was rooming with a straight classmate of mine, from a different company, an engineer guy -- who was totally fine with me. I moved in with Chris after the lease was up that next May or June and been with him ever since. Been living together, we moved to D.C. together for work and are getting married in Charleston, probably Spring of 2011. Of course, our certificate will be from D.C., our marriage certificate. We're going to do the ceremony there and right now it's looking like we're going to have well over one hundred people. So, and the fact that probably only fifteen percent of that is going to be

**Brandon Brezeale**

gay, that's pretty overwhelming that we have that much support from family and friends.

KT: Yeah, that's terrific. But, not at Mark Clark Hall.

BB: Not at Mark Clark hall. I told Chris that I can probably get somebody to hit him on the ass with a sword but --

KT: (laughing).

BB: That's what they do to the bride as they come out, you know. Yeah, I think that would be a big deal. I don't want to make headlines for that. I've got to think about my future and getting future jobs and you know. I don't want to scare away a future employer.

KT: Is there anything just about your Citadel experience, coming out, GALA, anything that either something that we touched upon that you wanted to elaborate on? Or maybe there's some question that I didn't ask you that you think is important?

BB: Well, actually, yeah, I was thinking about something earlier, I really wanted to let you know that as I was coming out and being a recent Citadel graduate, I was sitting there thinking to myself, since I'm kind of being this ambassador, kind of carrying the torch for gay military graduates, I wanted to really strive to be as successful as I could be as well to kind of show, you know, hey, gay men can be very successful as well, and we're among you. We're leaders in America, just as much as everybody else. And, since then, I mean, and three years - I'm already on my fourth job, but every single time I've been on a new job, I've had a new employer, I've had a pay increase, I'm already making thirty grand more than I was making right out of college, and at every place that I've worked, they all know that I'm gay. I still have former managers who I talk with constantly that adore me, and know that I'm gay and are fine with it. It's been really great

**Brandon Brezeale**

trying to be as successful as I can be, and know that it's just a small part of me, just like being a Citadel graduate is just a small part of me, you know? I mean, there's still so much of my life that I still haven't lived out. That was four years, you know? I came away with a great degree, some great friends, and some good experiences but it's just a small part of me that I can hold onto, but I have to move forward with myself as a gay man, as well.

KT: I appreciate you taking the time and sharing your experiences.

BB: Thanks for having me. Hopefully I didn't talk too much.

KT: No, this is -- I talked to Lindsay Koob for probably five hours or so. Of course, he's in his sixties now. What we'll have to do is have to meet up in ten years and see if your perspectives have changed at all.

BB: We may be in Charleston by then.

KT: Is that your goal?

BB: Yeah, I want to get back to Charleston. I mean, I know it's going to be tough with -- our marriage won't mean anything if we move away from the city, unless we move to a state that recognizes it, which South Carolina won't for a long time. Probably in my lifetime, probably won't. But we love Charleston so much, it's such a charming city, it's got great food. We love good food. I have family and friends around there, and we love the water. I'm thinking, right now we have a short-term goal of five years, we want to get down there. Because Chris is an I.T. executive. He works from home so he can do that anywhere. And, I'm an engineer so I can get a job anywhere.

KT: How much time are you spending back in Charleston? Just two, three weeks a year now?

**Brandon Brezeale**

BB: Not even. I go home either for Thanksgiving or Christmas and then we'll usually go for like a weekend in the summer and if there's any weddings down there. That's basically it. It was a lot easier to go down there on spur of the moment trips, while we were in Atlanta, because it's just a four-and-a-half-hour drive. Now, it would be a ten hour or eight-hour drive or whatever it is, or a flight. So, it's kind of a little bit more of a hassle. So, we don't get down there as much since we moved to D.C.

KT: Well, thanks again. Appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW

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BB Feb 2011

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