

Tara Bonds

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SPEAKERS

Elizabeth Melton, Tara Bonds



Elizabeth Melton 00:00

Hi I'm Elizabeth Melton, the ACLS Leading Edge Fellow for the IDCL, and I'm conducting an oral history interview for the September 11: 20 Years Later collection in the Religions Texas archive. Today is Saturday, [March] 26, 2022, and we are meeting via Zoom. So I'm calling from Boone, North Carolina. Tara, would you like to introduce yourself and tell me where you're calling from?



Tara Bonds 00:27

I am a librarian in Austin, Texas, who has grown up in the area my entire life. I started as a theater teacher, and then got into technology, and I'm a librarian, and it's just been one big whirlwind of twenty years in education, starting in 2001.



Elizabeth Melton 00:51

Awesome, thank you so much for meeting with me today. We'll go ahead and get started with a few questions about your early life. So can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and what your family is like?



Tara Bonds 01:05

Oh, that's an interesting question. I was born in South Austin, which is its own little world in Austin, Texas. And I just adore the place, it just smells like home. We lived there when I was very small, but my grandparents had a house off Manchaca and Stassney, and it was near my parents' favorite pizza shop, and their high school was literally walkable distance. It just is home. I spent a lot of weekends with my grandmother. But my parents, when I was four, they moved us to Georgetown, Texas, which is on the frozen North of Austin at the time, because

there's nothing there in between. And my dad worked at Westinghouse in Round Rock. And we lived on—you were across the street at the time in Williamson County, it was dry, but where we lived, if you cross the street, you were in the wet part of the county.

T Tara Bonds 02:16

So it was really conservative. And I went to K through 12 there, and I have probably a very suburban upbringing, in a lot of ways on the surface, but underneath I had a sibling with a emotional disturbance, and he was aggressive. And the house was loud. There was a lot of fighting between my sibling and my father. And so my mom suffered from massive depression, and I was just like, "I want to go to college," for several years there. I went to what was then Southwest Texas State University, hold that, I did not turn my degree in and get it upgraded to Texas State University-San Marcos. Reason I say "dash San Marcos" is because I was a grad student there they year they changed the name. I attended the school as an undergraduate, and I had majored in theater, but my mom told me if I got a theater degree, I had to get a teaching certification.

T Tara Bonds 03:41

And really, I only wanted to be a theater teacher, because I had an English teacher who inspired me just to be a teacher. And then of course, I love theater, I can bank on teaching theater. I fool. Even though I wanted to be an astronaut. I had this other science math nerd thing, but there's a whole other sidebar on me not pursuing that, that is due to discrimination. I gave up. But I loved my experience in college. It was a really good one, but I finished it in three years because of AP credit. So I was only a freshman first semester, and then I was a sophomore by the end of the summer. So I had a junior year and a senior year. Which actually is one of the reasons why I was as young as I was when I first started teaching, because I had just turned twenty-one the semester I student taught in the spring, and I got a job at twenty-one to start in August of 2011 at College Station Middle School, where A&M is located. So it was very timely. It's up to there.

T Tara Bonds 05:17

And from there, I've taught theater for thirteen years, but I always was that person that people came to to troubleshoot technology. And because some reason my ex-husband had decided I had to stop being afraid of computers and breaking things, so he made me make my own computer. And it worked. And then later on, I was like, "Oh no, that's just an easy—just give me admin privileges already, ugh." And I helped everybody. That was the biggest thing, the soundboards, everything. So I decided to become an instructional technologist, which is a really cool marriage of being with teachers and kids, and also diving in and really getting your hands on the infrastructure of the technology on campus and how it's stored and set standards. There's a lot of cool stuff. I really, really, really enjoy that aspect of being technologist. But I wanted to be closer to home because I was commuting from far northwest Austin, close to Cedar Park, which is a long haul in my mind. I was like, "No, I'm not doing that anymore." So because we'd moved from Round Rock to Elgin to be out of the city pretty much. It was just getting—This is the first place I've ever lived that I can't hear the highway, I-35.

T

Tara Bonds 07:06

And then I really needed out of public education at this time. It seems to be a trend, I think. And there's been mass exodus of teachers from all sorts of fields, and my children, when they came back from being homeschooled in the year of everyone having to do something for COVID—it was the worst year of my teaching profession. It was awful. That's saying something. So it was not fun. I didn't want my schools and districts because they weren't vaccinated, so they stayed home. My mother helped out there and did online stuff. But really, I wanted to try charter school that our friends had taken their child to and will go into again, and that was Austin Discovery School, which is a charter, about central Austin, outside central Austin, that is based on a socio-emotional learning, and teaching the whole child how to handle emotions, and be communicative, and know what a community is, and how to be a part of a community, and have pride in that, and work within that. And then eco-wellness, which is awesome. They garden, they learn how to cook. They have chickens, there's animal husbandry used to have pigs, they have turkeys that are internet famous now because of our eco-wellness teacher, Mr. Tim. It's hysterical.

E

Elizabeth Melton 09:11

That's amazing.

T

Tara Bonds 09:12

And that's pretty much it right there.

E

Elizabeth Melton 09:22

Cool. Thinking about that time when you moved to College Station. Had you lived in College Station ever before or been familiar with that area?

T

Tara Bonds 09:31

I always go back and I think, "Hey, I really wish I had not done X, Y, and Z." But then it's like a series of fortunate events in a lot of ways, even though you had some times you're like, "Oh god, that was so stupid. I shouldn't have done this if I was smart." But that's hindsight is twenty-twenty. I graduated college in 2001 that May. My best friend in the entire world got married the next day, which was a Saturday. Saturday was really busy. I graduated, and then Sunday was—my grandmother took me to Egypt, actually. And so we toured Egypt for two weeks. We met this guide, her name was [Sharmi]. She is this amazingly modern Egyptian woman who's married, and all the things, and has pretty much everything she wants, but she still wants a job. And she just loves to tour. But she had some opinions, and I was never sure if that was because she knew, or if because my grandmother and I were not typical tourists. But also our group really wasn't either, it was just this magic enclave of sixteen to eighteen people. I was the youngest person there. There's all these middle-aged, retired-aged people, and their significant others or solo or friends. It was an interesting group. Some Canadians, there were several Canadians in the tour group.

T

Tara Bonds 11:36

Man, I would do it again in a heartbeat. I would really love to take my grandmother, who's eighty-three, again before—mostly I was like, "Yeah, I'll push you around everywhere. I know you're old and you're not gonna make it, but believe me, we can get to places. I bet there are people who will get you places because that's your job. It's the tourist industry." But we had a really non-typical tour, I think. In fact, we just were a really good mix of peoples. There was an older Jewish couple, and so there was all sorts of different angles and things. We arrived in Cairo and then got on this bus and had the most horrifying—it was the first time I'd ever been out of the country. And they don't really like the lines on the road very much and will drive much different than what I'm used to. My husband can play that game. I've seen him do it. It's just cultural, there are just some things that are cultural, and we all have to own that and still accept each other.

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Tara Bonds 13:00

Which is a lot what this trip was about in some ways, because there were some wariness, because I very well remember in 1989. What was it? It was '89 when we went in because of Kuwait against Iraq and Saddam Hussein. Watching that on television as a kid and my mother having trauma because she grew up watching Vietnam, and so I didn't realize that at the time, but looking back on it, I knew that is was a significant emotional time for all of us. And a lot of that was still in the air as far as the distrust of the Islamic peoples, and there's so much misinformation, and so much propaganda. You don't really see it until you step out of it, or just are able to grasp the concept. I—sorry [pause]. I have a real hard time, not much people just understand [pause].

E

Elizabeth Melton 14:31

You take your time, it's fine [pause].

T

Tara Bonds 14:45

So we're in traffic in Cairo, and I don't know how my grandmother got this, but I know she got the massive package deal on it with the double extra points on her credit card with the airlines and everything, because she is just that way. She's magic. You go shopping with her, you find the best deals. She found me a \$5 Kate Spade purse in a Goodwill, and I was like, "What?" I treasure it, it's my favorite purse. I really, really remember the traffic, to begin. And then just hearing, being immersed in another language in a way I hadn't been. Because again, this is my first time out of the country. And it was so vastly different from the culture I have been exposed to, because I grew up in Texas, and so I was very familiar with Mexican culture and Tejano culture. I grew up with kids in that community whose families were multiple generation Texans. And I've been to quinceneras, and I grasped a lot of that. But then going to Egypt on the other side of the world, at twenty-one, I just really—really, my mind was blown.

T Tara Bonds 16:06

They sat us down, they gave us a beverage. Sharmila is like, "Today I'm going to introduce myself." And she's just going along and just making sure that we understood certain things. She was big about safety. And she always was like—she knew where every single one of us were at anytime. She was like the best mom. We were at a hotel called the Mena House, which sits at the base of the great pyramids, a ways. You can look out from the patio, and there they are. It's the weirdest thing in the world, when you just arrive in a country to see something like the great pyramids being your first experience. My grandmother comes out, and she's like, "Let's have a bottle of wine." We're eating outside, and we're just looking at the sunset over the pyramids. With the jetlag and all, I was just like, "Whoa, okay." That was weird. Breakfast was an experience. I had all these foods I'd never had before. Really, my family was not very adventurous. And so I was opened to a whole culture of food that I wish I could cook every day. And it was so cool, just immediately. Went to the pyramids. We went all the way down, we flew to the coast of Alexandria, where there's the base of the lighthouse. You know that one, the other seven wonder. I've seen two now, right?

T Tara Bonds 18:02

Alexandria was a completely different trip, because they're Greek and Islamic culture is all—the Egyptian culture is just all in here, together. And it's very different, the architecture is different, and just the feeling of the entire city. And they were building at the time, should be opening soon, the Library of Alexandria, they rebuilt it in a big multi-country project. And it's supposed to be the biggest repository. It's supposed to be the Library of Alexandria. We're driving by it, and it's the coolest thing, and I'm like, "What? This is insane." It was trippy, because you think of all those things, and get them together, and you're like, "I'm just 200 yards from a place that—" It's just crazy. It was just really, really, really—crazy's a horrible word. When you're twenty-one and you don't know a lot about the world, there's really not any words for it. You just got to walk around like, "Ah!" But I did my best to learn words and things. Sharmi would be glad to teach me things, and when I asked, I wanted to know how to read the numbers, because we're in Egypt, where they speak Arabic, but they use the Indian numbers and not Arabic numbers, which is what we use. And that was so counterintuitive to me, and so I learned Indian numbers, one through ten, basically how to translate to get room numbers for the hotel rooms and things. I walked around with a little notebook and took notes and did a travelogue because I ended up a mussy old librarian.

T Tara Bonds 20:20

So the entire time I was learning. I was learning, and maybe that's just—I take a tour, I'm not there for all of it. I'm really there to learn about the culture, since I've got to travel since. Even in America when I get the chance to travel, just we're different from state to state. I live in Texas. There are so many different regions here, and every one of them is completely different. Definitely, hands down [laughs]. I think the thing that really got me about Sharmi was that she was very intrigued by our much more—I don't think she worked with very liberal groups often, and we had quickly become this very academic little group for the most part, and we played nice, and there was no drama, we talked about things, and I think we were not typical. She was very used to much more fussy old Americans who came in and were grumpy and demanded

somebody speak English. I learned to say "Hello," and "Where is this?" Things like that. It's funny. My Mimi was doing it. I was like, "That sounds like a good habit." Yeah, it's just their place.

T

Tara Bonds 22:09

So the biggest episode that finally made me realize what a culture shock we were, was we really didn't understand the multiple marriage allowed within Egyptian law, primarily because of the Islamic religion text. But she was flat on it. She was like, "Listen, first off, I'm me." She was like, "He paid for me, and he had a pay a lot. And then he had to provide an entire household of things because that's what my family said." It's very interesting. You don't think— It's like, "What?" She said she didn't normally talk about her husband, she talked about him, and they were a very young couple and learning to live together, and it was funny. The temperature dropped the third day there, and we started out the morning in the eighties, maybe the mid-seventies, and she had a cold, she caught a cold. It was so sad because the day we went to Alexandria, she just sniffed [inaudible]. She said she felt so bad about it, we were all like, "It happens." But I'm Texan, and so that was just like, "Oh bless your heart," in a lot of ways.

T

Tara Bonds 23:45

So we went to Luxor by plane and then saw everything there, like the Valley of the Kings and the temple, and the temple is one of the other things that was a big thing when I talked to Sharmi. You're in the temple there, Karnak, and you're walking down toward the larger buildings, and to the side you notice first really that there's just this big wall. And at the top you look, and there's a mosque. And I'm just like, "I see the mosque there, but then , at the bottom is pretty old stone." She was like, "Oh well, this mosque, local mosque, and this down here is the base of a Coptic Christian church that was on top of the original Egyptian foundation." It was like, "Wow." Good reuse of rocks, or it's just like, "Wow, it's a place where you come to be as a community and pray" I was like, "That's very interesting." She was like, "Yeah, that's how we evolved around the ancients that were here before us." She wore hijab, and I hope I say that right, because I do tend to butcher accidentally. And she was very proud of them, and they were gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous. She was like, "It's my devotion. I get a choice." She was like, "Plenty of Egyptian women here didn't. They just did what they did."

T

Tara Bonds 25:50

Egypt at the time was like the outlier of the Muslim world, and still is in many ways. Even under a dictator, he was like, "Meh." So we never worried in Egypt any time for security. That was one of the things that we had been on at the time, and that was just general because we were in the Middle East, and you never know. Oh, also, we were going to go see the Aswan Dam, and at the time, Israel was threatening to bomb it, which would have resulted in a catastrophe. There were guns everywhere. There were guns on the guys who supported us places. Not guns they were like AK-47s. That was something that was really a wake up call for me in so many ways. I was like, "Wow, I live in a world where there's a guy walking around with an AK-47, scoping up the scene." I was at the Sphinx, and I badly said hello. Or no, there was the time that there was a very young guard who was at the Sphinx, and he started trying to talk to me. He was not the

only one who did this, just young men in general. But he wouldn't pick the right language, and I frequently got asked things in Greek. And I was like, "I don't know what you're saying." And then they go, "Oh, you're English." He was like, "You don't look English." But the guns were everywhere. And the day we went from Luxor, we took a—Gosh, I don't remember how long the cruise was. It was awesome. We cruised down the Nile to Aswan, going through the locks and everything. They stage it so that you're asleep. It's awesome. We stopped. So many cool temples.

T

Tara Bonds 28:02

We get to Aswan and disembark and everything. We're on the bus to go, and Sharmi's hardcore serious this time. She is the tiniest little woman who walks around very straightly. She's got a red umbrella, and she said, "You find me, I am here, always with the red umbrella. Come to me." She was like, "Don't you take the first price that someone says on something," and she would tell us all the things about how not to shop badly. She would stop purchases. She was honest. So the day we went to Aswan was really atypical for Sharmi. She was serious. And she was like, "There are no big lenses. Nothing that looks even suspicious." She was going over like, "Don't make fast moves, or don't duh, duh, duh. We're going to only be here for this many minutes." And there was a lot of guys out there with guns.

T

Tara Bonds 29:12

So we were there, and we toured the Aswan, and we're leaving. Because most of us didn't know at the time that Israel was threatening Egypt with bombing the Aswan. And so when we found out, we're lightly talking about it on our tour just amongst ourselves, and then we got back on the bus, we were really opinionated, started talking about it as a group, because they were like, "That's not okay." And Sharmi is listening, sitting and doing the tour guide thing, and then she starts to turn around and listen, because this conversation is pretty much in support of the West Bank, and a better deal for everyone involved in it, because we mucked it up post-World War Two, and was completely unfair because it did not take into consideration that many different people existed that might be a POC. And that was pretty much a lot of the argument, that was racism, and that's how it started, it was because it was easy. All the fields and things that they used to own, the land, now don't. Absolutely ridiculous.

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Tara Bonds 30:55

So we're talking about all this, and Sharmi, she was like, "So you don't support the Israelis?" Even the old Jewish couple were like, "No, it's a stupid tactic." And it was just like her mind was blown. The kind of things I was experiencing, I could tell, especially in hindsight, it was like, "Wow, that had to be a moment," because she really just had to sit on it for a second and ask questions. She was very good about questions and following details and things when she was asked things, and then she also asked really good questions. And we had this dialogue, I think, that really opened up this entire—she was like, "And you all feel this way?" Like, "Yeah." She's like, "And there's more of you who feel this way?" Said, "Yeah." Because I was like, "You don't understand. Lots of people don't like this situation in America and are not supporting it. Our government is not us, not representative of all of us." Because that's how it works unfortunately. At this point in time, it's not necessarily—the popular opinions are not often

quickly reflected in foreign affairs. I think now, it would be a completely different conversation. You add in the internet and doing that tour, and anything technological beyond having email at work. Just didn't have that. And so things didn't spread, and people didn't realize the communities and larger communities and the world's communities that really put together—I am so sorry. It has been a long week. I apologize, you're gonna have to cut that out.

E

Elizabeth Melton 33:32

No, no worries.

T

Tara Bonds 33:35

I'm just like, "Ahhh." And also thinking back at this time and really tried to reflect, to answer questions that I know will come later, it's like seeing the whole thing again, in some ways, and so I'm just like, "Wait a second. Huh." I had realized that, but I had not realized certain things that really have affected me much more than I think, have thought. Yeah, it was really—all our eyes were opened to each other in a lot of really big ways. Because we talked so much about the religion, Islamic religion, we visited mosques. The Alabaster Mosque, seeing the beauty. We were asked to wear pants, not shorts or capris on that day. I mean, that's the only time my dress was at all restricted. That aspect was really important. So I think after that, the rest of the tour was completely different, because we had a just this complete barrier between us gone. We weren't the groups she was usually working with. She was not used to having these conversations. And we could have much more open dialogue after all that was taken care of. And we learned a lot in those last four days. It just was immensely interesting to learn just the ins and outs in culture past, and not just thinking them as the "pyramid times," and Nefertiti, and Ramses II.

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Tara Bonds 35:40

The whole reason to be in Egypt. I'm twenty-one. I'm going with my grandmother who's probably sixty, sixty-one at the time. Not the typical graduation present. And I was like, "No," because she had me totally addicted to ancient Egyptian culture, because she had gotten me addicted on murder mysteries. I know, this isn't totally—We used to watch *Murder, She Wrote* with Angela Lansbury on it when I was young, like six, and we would, last ten minutes of the episode, predict who it was going to be. And I was always excited when we got it right. Not that they were horribly difficult mysteries, but at six or seven, it was like, "Oh!" But then I got addicted to Agatha Christie, and you have *Death on the Nile*, and all these classics. I still want to go on the Orient Express, by the way. So we talked about going after graduation. And that is what was really the driving force, is I was a mystery addict, and Egypt was just background things I got to know about, because I love research, and my grandmother had the same passion for Egyptian stuff. I have beautiful books and things that she's bought for me over the years, and we've gotten to see Ramses II, and several other things that come through, which is what framed us going, was this love of the ancient culture.

T

Tara Bonds 37:46

But to be there with my grandmother learning in those last several days, we loved all the stuff

we're seeing, but look at all this other stuff we don't see, and these other people. So I went back to America after those two weeks with a different worldview. And it changed me as a young—a student teacher, whatever, I've directed shows through community theater, so I've been in charge of large groups of kids. I came back with a different perspective before I started my real first job as a teacher, and so that really affects a lot of what unfolds post-9/11. I know that's a lot to say about Egypt, but Sharmi made such an impact. One of my favorite pictures of me, myself and my grandmother, is with her, 'cause she's like, "I don't normally get asked to take pictures, and if they do I normally say no," but she was like, "But for you." She could also find shade in the Sahara, really, I'm not joking. It was fact. And to be fair, none of us got ridden into the desert to be hijacked for all your money, then brought back. It was fun.

E

Elizabeth Melton 39:41

Well, it's clear, too, that your experiences were such a unique timeline, and that several of these events were happening back to back at this really key moment. So this was happening in May and June.

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Tara Bonds 40:01

Yes, I graduated, and then yeah, we were there for the first part of June. I mean, if I pulled up the magic internet box, I could tell you exactly what the geopolitical situation there was. But yeah, it was basically a state—it was Israel being a real, "I'm going to bomb you," and Egypt being like, "Oh, do you share a border with us?" Because of Mubarak, yeah, the current leader at the time, he would say no, and he meant it. So I don't know. I really don't, it was just such an interesting time. And so prior to anything happening, John, my best friend, married, I went to Egypt, I came back, I got married to my high school sweetheart, which is sometimes not always the best plan. And I think the events that unfold actually did affect us both a great deal, and we weren't able to handle it because we were babies. It was a bad time. I worked with with an educator later. He was a Black mathematician. And he would say, he was like, "Never make important decisions before the age of twenty-seven. That means tattoos, that means marriage, and that means military." He was drafted in the Vietnam War, so he had that totally different perspective. And I'm like, "Man, I wish I'd heard that when I was—[laughs]." Have babies, that was the other one. He had a whole thing set up.

E

Elizabeth Melton 42:00

So you came back from Egypt, and then did you move to College Station over that summer?

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Tara Bonds 42:07

I've moved to College [Station], yes, over that summer. So we got married. We packed up from Austin at the end of July and had this house in Bryan. BCS is Bryan-College Station because Bryan is the county seat, and it's its own big place, and then College Station, which used to not be right up against Bryan, is the university side of things, but it's also changed so much. But the time I was there, it was only about 100,000 people or so, if you're talking about the core stay there year round, and then everything else was fluctuating because of the university. A&M

is such a big powerhouse. I mean, I grew up in Austin that UT, so it was like going from "always wanted to go to college" town. Even Georgetown had a small college. So it's just always something, and I was always told—my mom, she was nineteen when she had me and didn't get to go to college. All the things she wanted to do. So I'm the first person in my family to go to college on both sides, sort of. And I just—lost that one. No, there was a point.

T

Tara Bonds 43:44

She kept saying, she was like, that was all the mantra I heard all my life, after I basically understood the birds and the bees, like, "You're going to go to college. You're going to go to college." My first real serious boyfriend was not until sixteen, and she was like, "We're going to the doctor," and I was like, "What?" She put me on birth control. She was like, "This is not permission. This is because you're going to college." And so even though I paid for it all myself, because everything that was saved for me got eaten up by lawyers with my sibling. It was just one of those things. I was going to go to college. That's been my [unclear] routine, pull my string, "I'm going to go to college." And I did. So marrying, and then taking my then-husband to College Station just seemed like a awesome idea. We were away from our support system, sets us up great as a new couple, and all our friends who are still in college because I graduated a year early. So we isolated ourselves in that move. I think it was an attempt by both of us to go and be big—"We're gonna be adults." Failed experiment. It all worked out in the end, but failed experiment.

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Tara Bonds 45:09

So yeah, College Station was just a different kind of town because it's a very military town as well, because there's a lot of professors who were there who were military personnel, because that's what A&M does. It's got its own culture, but it's different than Austin. Keep Austin weird, and then College Station at the time, it definitely was not weird. It's was very different. Very military, very strict in one way, and then you have the bar district where there are—Jesus Christ. Oh my gosh, ROTC guys being one way all day long, and then they're being punks in the bars. I wasn't a bar person prior to living in College Station, but there's not a whole lot else to do in College Station in 2001. Actually met my husband in one [laughs]. Because of the chain events that unfurled from from 2001, it is what it is, but I wouldn't have my children or anything. So yeah, it was College Station and a small middle school. I was doing sixth, seventh, eighth grade theater, brand new teacher.

E

Elizabeth Melton 46:39

Do you remember anything from the very beginning of that year? I know that September comes in very early in the school year.

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Tara Bonds 46:48

Well, I mean, if you look at—I'm just gonna pick any calendar. I'm gonna look at this year's. Gonna take the time to—because August, normally, we come back sometime, end of the second week of August. So I had only been a new teacher, if you're thinking about it, about five

weeks. I didn't even make it through a six week grading period before I had a major event occur, and I was in the classroom.

E

Elizabeth Melton 47:35

Yeah. So what do you remember of that day?

T

Tara Bonds 47:38

The first part of the year, I was getting used to just being in College Station. I was very culture shocked. I was the youngest person on staff. I didn't have anyone I knew out here. I couldn't go see my mom or my grandmother regularly. I was struggling, to begin with, with my, at the time, unemployed high school sweetheart husband. So it was hard times a lot of times. So I was going in, I was getting all this culture shock and being indoctrinated in the, "This is how we're gonna do it in College Station." And I was like, "Okay." I had a curriculum coordinator. He worked with us intensively, and we had to go through this program. And none of this was told to us in college. What? I was like, "All right." And they throw me to the sharks. I am blessed in being at College Station my first years for numerous reasons, that have nothing to do with what I'm going to say. But they were the easiest kids to teach, until the kids I teach today. They just were ready to learn. They were there. Some of them could be punks, but I really quickly found out whose parents in the military, and we definitely had less problems.

T

Tara Bonds 49:08

I was very new. And so I was making it up as I go. At times I did finally have to realize that if I faked it, I'd make it. And I came up with stuff on the fly, and we had fun, and we learned, and I was thanking God I was not an English teacher, because I would be really bad at following lesson plans. I'm really bad about following lesson plans, or sometimes doing them. I am that kind of teacher. I have won teacher of the year twice. Three times if you count College Station, because I won it my first year teaching from the local area Walmart. One of my students flat on the floor and wrote an essay, stuck it in a box. I was like, "That was the sweetest thing ever. I think that's the best one." It was just, I was trying so hard to keep up with all the paperwork. And I didn't have a laptop computer. I had a desktop at home, and I had a desktop at school. That day I had a printer in my room, and that will never happen again. And it was the technology integration alone and trying to see how, "Oh gotta check my email, blah, blah, blah." I am lucky I made myself have good habits about checking email. That is not a weakness to have. It's like the most important thing. It's not that hard to keep up on it these days [inaudible].

T

Tara Bonds 51:01

The other teachers were really trying to baby me a lot. And I had this group that I was attached to. Basically, I got put onto a team so that I could have my discipline. We basically took shifts for detention, which, as an educator today, I can tell you, sometimes it worked, most of the time they don't. I actually have discovered while I was in College Station what worked the most, and it was during a detention. So I was on this group of teachers who's like, "These are the

rules for these kids, and they have to be followed, dress code." And I'm just like, "I have to pull out a ruler and check girls' skirts." I'm like, "Why is this what I'm doing? It's not cool." So I'm already having contrary thoughts about education actually in practice. But I was like, "Okay, I can do detention once a week, and then whatever." Because at that point, I was just starting out, and I didn't know what else to do, so I said yes to everything. That was bad. And we started school very normally, it seemed to me, in my middle American experience.

T

Tara Bonds 52:28

The College Station was not very diverse. It was mostly White students, and it was just that ratio of diversity that—ding! "We're perfect schools," and I'm like, "Yeah." Socio-economic status—I had one Title I kid I served. One in my drama club in the two years I was there. And so, for the fact that I only have one kid in poverty out of all of my students in College Station in two years, I was like, "Whoa, that's not realistic." But like I said earlier, I was very glad I was in College Station, having this incubator, where classroom management wasn't an issue. And all the socio-emotional learning problems that we have, because we don't have the medical infrastructure that works in our country and mental health problems are huge in adolescence, and so it can make it difficult, especially you're experiencing trauma. And so it's like going back and seeing that I was just "Miss Perfect," quote-unquote—that's when I say it, sorry—little environment. And so there was very little diversity. Only had a few POCs. Most of them were working Indian or Islamic. I didn't have any Black students during my time there. And that's an odd experience, that's weird now for me to understand all of it. Looking back twenty years I was like [sighs]. I mean, I really only went to high school in Georgetown, graduated with two or three Black students. And then most of the rest of them were long-term Mexican-Americans. So not even that was a large population. So it was weird in some ways, for me coming from Austin, but not really weird from where I actually went to school and stuff.

T

Tara Bonds 55:18

The first beginning of school, I had really very interesting kids. Of course, they signed up for drama, and I was like, "Okay!" So these seventh and eighth graders. And I'd be like, "I'm trying to write a lesson plan and trying to keep up with all this stuff." And I'm like a duck. I look calm on the surface, but I'm paddling like hell underneath. And some of the kids had found my buttons, because I had learned how to hide my buttons yet. And I had been taught and grown up in a very punitive system. And so detentions [negative sound effect]. Staff meetings, learning from my assistant principal, who said, "Once they start chewing gum and wearing flip flops, all hell breaks loose." The staff meeting at the beginning of the year went through the conversation about dress code. He loved dress code. And it was just like, "So why do we got to get 'em on this stuff?" But I played the system. It was really just going like a talk at the beginning of the year. I was not paying attention to anything going on outside of my little isolated world. I was so isolated. And I think that's part of the problems, the experiences I had after that. It was a lot of because of the way we had isolated ourselves. And of course, I'm learning to live with my husband in a completely different environment, and I'm struggling with that.

T

Tara Bonds 57:28

Detail-wise, I remember being given the key to unlock the outside of the building when I

arrived. I remember having a badge, an actual one of those really professional name tags with the magnets on the back. I thought those were so cool. I was very happy and chipper to get mine, and it was like, "Mrs. Harris," that was my name at the time. And I was like, [sigh], and we had those, and those just made me so happy. I remember having just lots more access to stuff in the school. I mean, this is post-Columbine, but I'm a teacher, and everything's just pretty much—we block certain rooms, blah, blah, blah, they have records. And keep your spending information in a locked filing cabinet. The end. It was very open, and nothing was like "it was non-threatening. It was a non-threatening environment. The kids didn't really mess with me much. I would say that in retrospect. And I was loving it. I just needed support. So where do you want me to go? Do you want me to go to the day?"

E

Elizabeth Melton 59:06

Sure, what do you remember from the day?

T

Tara Bonds 59:09

I have the day pretty solidly on my mind. There's not any stopping point. We woke up, did a normal thing. He was working at the library at the time, actually. He had been hired on at the library. And so we got up, we went to work. I go to school. I have first period, speech, actually, and we've just started the school year. The technology I have available for me to give them information that is not me writing on a chalkboard—I had a chalkboard, and had a screen you pull down, and I had a projector, an old school transparency projector. And I just can't even think about it, the age of that technology now, "technology" quote-unquote. It's hysterical now to think about. But I had all these little transparencies, and I had them all written out and pre-written out so that I could just keep them in a folder and kept them in little sleeves, so that when I taught it next semester—because I had speech and theater were only semester courses. And so what ended up happening was that I had this time—gosh, this is actually harder than I thought it was going to be by a lot. I still have the ones from that day, I just realized it. I have this batch of lesson plans I've never thrown away. It's like the only one. I'm so sorry [crying].

E

Elizabeth Melton 1:01:21

No, you're quite alright.

T

Tara Bonds 1:01:24

That makes a lot of sense now, because it was right after I taught the lesson. Because our principal came on the announcements, and he said, "Due to what's occurring, we're on awareness status. Please feel free to turn on your TVs with your students to watch them things unfold, or choose not to." That's how he offered it. I'm sure it was something that came from administration at the superintendent level, right, decision. Bad, poor decision. I was like, "WTF," because I don't have a phone, I'm not texting, I'm not on my computer after I shut down email before the kids come in. And I still have paper attendance I have to take for every period, putting it on the clip outside my door. And so I literally had just dismissed kids. He comes on, they're going to class wondering what's going on. I don't have a next class. So I'm in my

conference period. And I've just done this lesson. I'm about to teach theater. I'm starting to transition. That's what I'm about to do is get ready for a different set of kids later on. But right now, that was gonna be my planning.

T

Tara Bonds 1:02:55

So I mean, honestly, I probably was thinking, "I'm gonna go take a bathroom break." I didn't drink coffee at the time. I had a horrible Dr. Pepper addiction. Now actually, one of my dearest students—I had so many. The kids I had were the best kids in the world. It's probably a lot because of the environment, everything that came in that time. And I've kept up with so, so many of them. And I've seen their babies. But these kids were just amazing. I had this one kid who was a tech genius, who might later have allegedly hacked into the grading system in high school. I didn't hear this, I don't know anything, I wasn't working there at the time. Yeah, and so he decided that he was going to pick up my Dr. Pepper. When he wanted things in the morning, he'd just come over and pick it up. And if it was not empty enough, he would go, "I'll come back later." So other kids started to do it. So I'm ready for the bathroom break and another Dr. Pepper.

T

Tara Bonds 1:04:18

But instead I'm turning on the TV, really not sure at all what could have possibly occurred that we're supposed to turn on the TV for. At the worst, I think I'm probably thinking Oklahoma City, 'cause that occurred while I was in high school. And after that there were several bomb threats, and we always had to go sit outside of the building. But we're literally only sitting in the circle driveway, the green grass in the middle of it, right. And we're maybe two feet from the building when we would be evacuated to the practice football fields. Maybe even too close still. Across the street, at least. So really we were just sitting out there and we were like, "If you really meant to not have us killed, you should move us." And so that was my level of jump to as far as what could possibly be wrong. Honestly, you think, "Those things happen in other places. They don't happen in the United States." But I grew up in the time of the Branch Davidians, and again, Oklahoma City, and the Unabomber, and all these different things. And so it was like wildcard American, most likely.

T

Tara Bonds 1:05:53

So it's like, "All right, what's going on?" And I got footage of the—I remember the first on the screen I got to see—didn't matter what channel, it was all news. I think I was on CNN, 'cause I watched it in the morning, and it was the building falling. It was just this [sighs]. And I watched for a few minutes and was taking it in as they were watching it, and I'm trying to—I'm sorry I actually have to [inaudible]. So I'm watching. I know I was watching something that had already occurred, because we're central time so it was [pause]. Okay, so yeah. It was just all this stuff going on and watching it and just taking it in and barely being able to function because I was frozen. It was like fight or flight or freeze. I was in freeze. The second thing I did was I had a cell phone, one of those little flip phones, and I crawled into under my desk because it was the safest place I could think to be. I probably grabbed one of the stuffed animals, because I brought a lot of my toys with me. And I had a stuffed animal and under my desk and hoped I could get a hold my mom, and the lines were busy.

T

Tara Bonds 1:07:58

They were so overwhelmed. And so the system was struggling, and I finally got a hold of her, and she's sobbing. My mother's in theater, and she's a professional stage manager and director and all this stuff, really cool. So I call mom. She's sobbing, and she's making a sarcophagus for *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. They need one for one of the characters to pop out of. It's a funny bit. But they needed one, and where do you get one in Austin in 2001? They built one. And she's an artist, so she was painting and doing all the outside and decoration. She's on set painting. She went up into the light booth with the signal, in this tiny, tiny light booth in a train station, a converted theater in the train station from the 1800s. And she's sobbing. And our friend is there, and she's on the phone having another conversation with her husband who actually works for the state. And so he's in Austin, at the Capitol, and everyone's trying to exchange as much information as possible. Mom's like, "I heard from Mimi. Don't call her. Save the lines." Those were the conversations we we're having.

T

Tara Bonds 1:09:51

And so we promised to check in later and stuff like that. And it was just the weirdest conversation in the fact that it was out of nowhere. What? Two buildings and the Pentagon. A plane is in the Pentagon. Americans have taken down a plane, because they realized they were gonna die either way, and they were like, "No, you don't get your target." I mean, that's the level of—I mean all the things, there's so many things I can't even express to you. All the things that when you really start thinking about 9/11, and you really think of people, God. Then we get to first responders and everything else, all the days after played out in front of us 24/7. And so pretty much I was just—and I'm isolated. I don't have my family, I don't have my friends. And I just have my husband and I, and we're both babies. And we are functionless in a lot of ways, because we keep watching the TV. We keep watching the TV. TV doesn't stop. It's constant news flow.

T

Tara Bonds 1:11:28

It made me mad. It really angered me, and not because of the event. It angered me because of racism was already the discrimination against Islam. I grew up with relatives that were just so coarse. They wore the Saddam Hussein shirts with bombs and all the bad, bad puns and horrible things about doggies and Muslims. I mean, these were people I was related to and I had to deal with. And so it was like all of a sudden, we were back. The Islamophobia was like, "Woo!" It hit to the ceiling. And all I keep remembering, all I remember, I was defensive immediately, when people started talking about Islam. And I'm like, "I don't understand people —" "This is a general thing. I don't understand people who can't contemplate that we can be separate. That we can be, "Oh yeah. I really don't like that 9/11 happened. However, the country of Afghanistan is not—you never played Risk, and it's not the place the people [were] from, any more than it is Islam." It's a portion of Islam, but it was bin Laden's agenda. And we're mad at bin Laden and his group, not Islam. I mean, these are not the same. And I was having all these conversations, but I'm twenty-one, and it's a conservative place. And my opinion was not very—I worked with some pretty liberal-thinking and diverse people, because there was a lot of educators or families from education. They understood what I was talking about. Accepting it was something different.

T

Tara Bonds 1:14:12

I was irritated. I'm very irritated. I always looked much younger than I actually am, until I had kids, and then they ruined my [laughs]. No, I just always looked younger than I was. So constantly, especially my first years teaching, I would get tapped on the shoulder and asked things or called out in the hallway for stuff. And I'd turn around, and I'd be the teacher. I'm like, "No, I actually am in charged. Going to the line to get lunch. Nope, I gotta badge. Look at my feet—tap, tap." They're like, "Oh, I have to charge the teacher price." I'm like, "Unfortunately, yes." So I was very angry about, number one, being ignored basically, or brushed off. I was angry that people had the really loud and conservative views and racist views that just were suddenly coming out in a place that was pretty chill most of the time.

T

Tara Bonds 1:15:34

But it's a military town. That's the other thing that happened. There was just some kids that I have the first couple of weeks, because remember, it's only about five weeks in. All of a sudden, they're gone. That day they just pulled their kids [whoosh noise]. All of a sudden, they were gone from town. They left. Their parents were called back into the military because A&M is agricultural and military academies. That's the place. And so the Corps is not West Point or anything, but it's very important. And so there's a lot of important military personnel who come, and they'll teach a semester or class, or they're retired. But there were retired military upper—because a lot of upper personnel were called back, and they were gone. We also had [parents] who were able to go without moving their kids, but there were students I never saw again in the two years I was there. Poof. I was wondering what happened to everybody, and finally, someone explained it to me, I was like, "Oh, what?"

T

Tara Bonds 1:17:03

I guess probably until then I hadn't really got the entire, "No, this is a military town," thing. And so I was in a very defensive because my experience in Egypt had been so contrary to all these horrible things that were being said about people, and just misinformation, oh my god. If we'd had the internet up 2002, this would be a completely different situation. It's amazing what a microprocessor, electric board, this and that, now all of a sudden, we've got ourselves internet. I didn't unplug. I couldn't unplug from the news. Every chance I had, my TV was on for, I don't know, months afterward. I don't know when we finally stopped honestly, I think it was probably maybe after the new year. And I might have had a realization that I was watching too much, but I don't think so. I think it's just I limited my time, at that time because I didn't have access. I didn't have a phone.

T

Tara Bonds 1:18:30

Now I have the swiping, swipecy, swipecy. So newspapers, oh my god, I still got newspapers and magazines, because I kept up with politics at the time. I always had, because I'd been told to. It was another thing: "You're going to go to college and pay attention to politics." I was like, "Okay," so I was paying attention to all the chess movements. If you're interested in geopolitics or actions or history or anything like that, then you keep up with current events. My mom is an

Anglophile, and so I grew up knowing primogeniture before I knew Cinderella. Pretty much she actually had a poster, and I'd go, and she'd sit with me and tell me stories about the War of the Roses and things like that. And we also were just readers of news. And so I was just immersing myself in this almost toxic sea. That one I was doing to myself, but I couldn't let go. I couldn't let it go, because the first image I saw was the first tower falling. It was played back and just looped. I just grasp onto it and looped. But the thing is, is I was a teacher. And the first day I had to have kids come in my class after I was literally under my desk with this stuffed animal talking to my mommy 'cause I'm twenty-one. And I'm not really—I'm sorry, we have to parent much longer than eighteen, they lied [laughs]. They lied.

T Tara Bonds 1:20:52

So I don't know what to do 'cause I've only been teaching five weeks. I'm not a mother, all these instincts and mama vibes I haven't developed yet, really. And I'm thinking, "What am I gonna do? What am I going to do? I don't know what to do with these kids." And the lesson plans go away. And I can't think about this, which is what I was teaching. Most the kids, they came in, I turned my TV off very early. I didn't watch more than maybe fifteen minutes after my mom's call. I was like, "I have to get ready for kids." And they came in, and they looked, these children, like they were broken. That was, right there, that was a generational scar. It was open and bleeding. I don't know what to say. I was so scared right there, because I didn't know what to do. Everyone was. We just didn't know what was going to happen next, and who did it, anything. We were getting different numbers. My first [inaudible] for four days.

E Elizabeth Melton 1:22:36

Just so you know, we can take a break at any time if you'd like to.

T Tara Bonds 1:22:42

I'm good to keep going. It's just really sad. It was really hard. Because the kids came in and they were just done already. I can't even describe to you just the brokenness. It was so earth-shattering to them that America was under attack. And I think that's the part we were all really suffering from. I can think now, this is what Pearl Harbor was like. It was like a, "What the bleep?" It was like, "You are joking me. This is a gag. All right, it's April 1, right?" I mean, it is not. You have to completely change your your outlook. And I didn't know. So these kids come in, and they're a mix of seventh and eighth graders. And I've just barely gotten to know them. And I have some kids who have some more conservative beliefs. Fortunately, unfortunately, it was my advanced speech and drama class. I have them all year, this particular class, and they're really smart kids. They're sharp. A couple of really conservative though, and vocal about their opinions, anyway. Very religious. Very upset that I wouldn't say what I was. I'm like, "I don't have to. I'm not supposed to. Also my political views." It was a range of class that was to someone who was almost openly gay but wouldn't come out until high school, but was definitely, it was just his personality and everything about him. They did, he came out to me. I was like, "I'm glad you felt yourself."

T Tara Bonds 1:25:32

So I got this range. And they sit, and none of them are sitting up straight. Some of them just put their heads on their desk. Can't wear hoodies, there's no hoodies, so no one's totally taking it down. And they were just quiet. It's just silent. And I stop, and I go, "Okay, how are you guys doing?" And there was a lot of shaking of heads and stuff like that. I noticed there are people gone at this point. Already, kids have been called. So then I'm like, "There's people missing." Kids are like, "Their dad got them or something." And so it was already happening at second period. So this was nine, ten Am, Central Standard Time, little before 9:30-ish, if you're looking at the timeline of the towers. I'm like, "Okay, let's talk." I was like, "Oh no. I've opened the floor." However, this is what I do. First thing, I was like, "Do you want the TV? Do you need the TV on? Does that help you? I would prefer it off." And they're like, "Yeah." They were like, "I saw it." And the things they said is there were people jumping from building. And I'm like, "I know. That was their only way out. They were in a place where they had no decisions."

T Tara Bonds 1:27:28

And I mean, seventh graders. Not even teenagers. They're just these weird place, preteens, with no experience, growing up in the middle of a town, that's diversity's not so grand. And so I decide rather, that I was like, "Okay, can talk." We talked about a few things and questions, basic little questions. And one of the kids first piping up, of course, was very Islamophobic things. And I was not okay at the time with—so I already, on the day of, I was trying to defend what I knew of the cultures. That started day one. I was just stridently opposed to the racism, because there was no point to it. Because racism—just because I was like, "You don't understand. I've been in this place. I've met these people. They are wonderful. You should eat their food." So I'm trying. I'm scarring and processing, but I'm defending, and this happens period after period after period after period.

T Tara Bonds 1:29:20

And by the end of the day, I've checked in with my husband at some point during my conference. I did call him, but not until I called my mother. He went home. He went home because he couldn't handle it. And so I found him sitting on a sofa. I guess inertia, that's where I ended up. I guess we went to bed at some point. Next day, the next weeks were hard. Everything was hard. And I wanted very desperately to have it go away. So in a lot of ways, after that first day when we talked about it, we didn't talk about it. It was like a, "We're not going to talk about it," kind of thing. That was a joke between me and my grandfather. So that was, again, like, "Not gonna talk about it." I couldn't process it, so how could I help them process it, except sometimes when they got me one on one, and I had conversation with them, and I was somehow able to articulate.

T Tara Bonds 1:30:46

I started auditions. We did *Alice in Wonderland*. I wrote scripts, because I didn't want to pay royalties. So I wrote a version of *Alice in Wonderland*. I'm like, "I have it here." Maybe I should publish it. And we did *Alice in Wonderland*. I didn't have lights on the stage. I discovered them in [inaudible]. I'm really good—oh, I shouldn't say this—I'm really, really good at trying to get keys and access. I prove myself, I get to the point where I'm annoying in asking because I need

something in somewhere, that they finally give in. I'm also always poking like, "Well you know, if I had access I could help." It's always worked for me until the school I'm in now. And I laughed about it. They're like, "Nope, sorry." I was like, "You're gonna make me take a vacation." They're like, "We believe in vacation." Okay. So having access to places. It's weird, because it comes in so much play post-9/11. Going from everyone having keys to the outside of buildings. Oh my gosh, the amount of security that just started to come up in our lives right after 9/11. Nobody was going anywhere. The airlines were closed. And then we had all the shoes taking off and all the other things. I can't watch some of the movies I grew up on with my children without them questioning things, because you used to be able to walk your people to the gate to say goodbye in an airport. So movies didn't make sense. I cry at the beginning of *The Muppets Take Manhattan* because it's got the World Trade Towers. It's a true fact.

T

Tara Bonds 1:33:06

I just was trying to make it go away. We did this play, it was the cutest thing. I had lights. They weren't installed. I decided I'm going to beg forgiveness rather than ask permission, and I get a couple of ladders, and I get a couple of kits, those clip lights for doing workshop stuff, or lizards and thins. Got some lamps and bought some gel, the film that goes over the old stage lighting, and used that on ladders with a bunch of extension cords going pretty much in a way that I knew it wasn't gonna overload our cafeteria capacity, because I did, I had to calculate it out. It was ridiculous. It was ridiculous. And so we were very successful. We would get money. I had money to spend now. It was so much. It was fun. It was a great escape. And I think that's why those kids from that time period are so special, since I had seventh graders and I had eighth graders. The eighth graders are only taught one year, but I kept up with them when they were freshmen. I mean they were still my babies. And I went to their shows. I escorted them on field trips for the high school, because there's two men on the staff, and they wanted me to be with the girls.

T

Tara Bonds 1:35:02

And so I had this connection to these kids that sat in my classroom that first day. They were the advanced theater kids who were in *Alice in Wonderland* because they were the most interested. I got sucked into doing that, because it was escapism. And I know it was for all of us, and I think it was the best thing, honestly, that we needed at that time was that show. Art is healing, and the process of art is healing, and theater is play, is being able to create story, and getting the attention of an audience and stuff has its own appeal, and it really can suck you in, which is exactly what we all needed, because we were wounded severely. We were not safe, we did not feel safe. I put my hands in the air, that's it, we didn't feel safe. But when we were on stage, we were in a special place. And we could forget for a while what was going on. And I did that in class. In my speech classes, that was where the problems arose was in speech, because that's where the current events came into conversation.

T

Tara Bonds 1:36:37

And it was that next semester that events unroll, because I get a new class of speech students. And I noticed from the beginning that I have this student. He's there and everything, and he looks of the Mediterranean area or the Middle East, Middle Eastern. And I didn't know where,

and I wasn't sure if he was new, and he was new. He's knew, they were from Houston. And wow, that kid, he's special. So special. I have this normal speech class. And I have another one the kids is loud and rowdy about his opinions. And I've met Omar, and this kid was practically under a desk when I found him. He was so shy. He was new in a new community. And later I find out he's also starting to practice Islam, doing the fasting, all these things that I had learned about while I was in Egypt, about the different cultural things and when they were taken on, because Ramadan was coming. I was asked if he could use my second room, because I had to connecting rooms. One was a theater room, [inaudible], that was just a bunch of stuff that was there when I got there. And I went, "Oh, we will do this with it." That's good. *Alice in Wonderland* was actually done with butcher paper. We made trees and bushes by stealing loads of butcher paper from the lounge. So you do what you can.

T

Tara Bonds 1:39:17

That kid was just really, really mean and biased. And I remember him, because I can almost see myself. I can step back in this moment because sometimes you can feel a story. I don't know if that makes sense to anyone in the world listening to this, ever. I feel like you can feel a story at times, you have a knowledge that you live within a timeline, I guess, of events, or that something is shifting. I don't really mean it to be hindsight or anything like that. At the time I felt like I'd stepped out and back, could look outside to these times. And this was one of them. I got upset, but I had to be nice, because I can see this boy, and he's talking really bad about Islamic people. And I'm defending them. And Omar, who I later found out was Islamic and Egyptian, and I'm talking about Egypt, and he's just dying on himself. He's falling apart. I get into a righteous southern rage. I know I'm on the Texan side of the South, but I just got into a grandstanding, Scarlett O'Hara, Julia Sugarbaker [yelling sound effect]. And I smacked this kid down in a way that didn't get me fired. [Inaudible]. "I have evidence. You're a jerk."

T

Tara Bonds 1:41:45

And so I defended him without really knowing him, so this kid, we got close because he was using my room. And then during Ramadan, he didn't want to be in the cafeteria. So he didn't eat lunch. We talked a lot, and I convinced him somehow, magic story, I convinced him somehow to do what's called impromptu speaking, which at the middle school level is basically you draw three topics, you pick one, you have five minutes to prep, you give a speech, no paper. And it can be very intimidating to come up with something like that and do well at it. So Omar got to be friends with the theater kids who were about to start *Wizard of Oz*. And so that meant he was in with the cool crowd. And because these were kids who had got a bump from being in the play. There was this whole culture on students going on. And so he was getting a little bit more confident. And then they convinced him to do impromptu speaking, because I was poking him. They'd be like, "We'll be there, it'll be fun. I'm doing all the reading."

T

Tara Bonds 1:43:09

It was his birthday, and he practiced, he made the team legitimately, because I didn't pick him, because I had judges. I brought in judges by the end of the district. But the first was it. So he's legitimate. It was his birthday, and I was like, "This kid's going to be with me during his birthday at a speech conference. Not gonna go home until the late afternoon. I'll get the kid cake." So

this is what I do. I get a cake. A birthday cake. Happy birthday. Got it from our good ol' HEB grocery store and showed up to the speech tournament with it, and he was so overwhelmed. I think about it [inaudible]. It was a moment where—meeting Omar was that moment, at a time when we connected. It was that moment where things shifted, and comes to play because this day he goes in impromptu speaking. He's never done anything like this before. And he wins first place at the practice conference, and then he continues to kick butt and take names all the way to district, which is like, "My boy!" And I was so proud of him. I have favorite students. I don't say I shouldn't have favorite students.

T

Tara Bonds 1:44:58

My College Station kids, oh my god, it's really hard, 'cause they were my favorite kids. Mostly because I was more friends with them than a teacher, because I was so young. We were just much closer in generational thinking and everything. And so it was hard for me to separate myself. Really was glad I was teaching middle school, because I student taught high school, and I was like, "Oh, wait, no, no, no." [Inaudible]. But they were just so special. They made my experience so special. We rocked *Wizard of Oz*, we were ready to claim. My principal was so embarrassed that the lights were on ladders, that he invested in it [laughs]. So I got my lights, a light board. I picked up new kids who were interested. And I was getting seventh graders. I was like, "I'm building a dynasty," feeling my glory right there. Because when I'm escaping from the real world, this whole time. But this is what's going on post-9/11.

T

Tara Bonds 1:46:28

We just stay together, and the eighth graders who went on to ninth grade were very special 'cause they were my first kids. And Omar helped work on the show. It was just delightful how much did. And new kids kids came on, because they loved it, because they needed to escape, and there was not another—they hadn't found another, not another space to be. And the thing is, I worked around people, so you could still be in band and be in theater, and you can still do this. And I put everyone in the show. I was always good about that. By the end of auditions, I always found places for people to be, even if it was making Villager One. "Gonna have you stand there." Because for many reasons, but because I didn't want to turn one or two people away. I mean, how can you do that? It's horrible. I'm not trying to say that everybody gets that merit, a honorable mention, like everyone's getting their honorable mention. It's not really an honorable mention. I'm making them work. I found a task for them. That is what I did. Which brings out a great bit of—later on, this is a really good play because they end up being some of the most people. They just had shy auditions. It was such a play.

T

Tara Bonds 1:48:27

For Omar, he was an eighth grader, and he went on to high school. Too long, find his arc [inaudible]. And he goes to the high school, and I come and watch debate and stuff like that, and he's doing domestic and foreign extemp. No, he was doing foreign extemp. Of course he was doing foreign extemp at that time. And I got to watch him be this young Egyptian-American, first-generation American-Egyptian, standing there in a town that is not very diverse. And he's got a suit on. He's looking sharp. And he's giving these speeches. And I had given him—I have a five point way of doing this, and it's really easy. It's called we write a five paragraph

essay [laughs]. I wasn't taught it at school. My mom taught it to me. And it has been the model for everything I've ever done. And a very, very [inaudible], so I'm like, "We'll just go by it." But it was the best way to teach kids how to think about talking, all those things. And he was great at it. And he got to the point, I remember watching it in high school, but he got to the point where he was that kid who could put—like, "I'm gonna poke you in the end with this last information." And I'm like, "Just send it home." "Vote negative." Whatever it was, right? 'Cause he was doing Lincoln-Douglas.

T

Tara Bonds 1:50:19

I was amazed, always. And then he went to A&M, and he went to law school, and went from the captain of the high school team to the college team, and then it was Harvard and graduation with a dual degree, and immigration lawyer in Houston, and I adore him. We keep it up, we've kept in touch for so many years now. I know I haven't seen him, oh my gosh, in forever, but I should. He's an amazing guy. I think the thing is, is I go back to that moment where I'm defending Omar, and I don't realize the ramifications of that, because he's an immigration lawyer. And I'm thinking all the things he does. I didn't do much. I taught the kid how to be confident. I gave him a place to learn to be confident. To fake it 'til you make it. And I taught him a bit of acting. I just did this. That's all I really did. Mostly, I just talked to the kid. We talked about current events and he was another person. He was another one surprised about my stance on the Israelis. So at the time, it was just interesting. It was interesting times getting to work with these kids, because they're just—

T

Tara Bonds 1:52:04

Meanwhile, my marriage is falling apart because I'm never home, admittedly. On purpose, probably. Not consciously, but definitely. We didn't do just one or two nights of the play. It was two weeks of four shows. And I was like, "Five dollars a ticket. One dollar for students." Just because I was like, "Butts in the seats. We need to make money for bigger plays." Yeah. So I'm starting to take the high school teachers. And so I'm learning ins and outs, and they invite me to go with them that summer to one of the big theater conventions in Nebraska. But I've lost my husband by the end of the school year, and I'm living in College Station, and I know no one at all. And I'm stuck with a lease. And I'm stuck with giving up and going home, or I stay the course. I see my husband at night. There were lots of things going on. But I think the escapism, in the end, was a really crushing factor. In fact, I wasn't dealing with things very well with him. It was hard, 'cause we just grew apart.

E

Elizabeth Melton 1:54:19

And again, you can tell just from your story, how huge this year was for you, and how it was this giant conflagration, almost, of traveling internationally, then 9/11, and your first year of teaching, and moving away from your family. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk through these things. And I know that it has been really emotional, and I was gonna ask for a while, too, what brought you comfort, and what was healing, and so it was really nice to hear you talk about *Alice in Wonderland* and finding these performances and productions. But we

can take a little time too, to fast forward to think about how do you feel about September 11 today? And thinking about, I know you've talked about with your kids and other situations, of how it comes up.

T

Tara Bonds 1:55:22

So as far as being a teacher day, and thinking about looking back on 9/11, so much changed in a short amount. It crept up on us a little bit. But just the way my world worked because a 9/11 is security. It goes back down to that security factor. Like I said, first year teaching, I'm teaching, I got a key to the building. I can get just in about anywhere because they give me this other key. Yay! I can open closets. Right. Okay. Security, everything changes on the streets. There's more presence. So you're already there. Looking back, it seems like a big jump, but then I look down, and I'm like, "We've accepted so much." Because you get the Patriot Act and everything. They slip through a lot of things, and people don't see it 'til it's too late, or not at all, or twenty years later when they're like, "But we can't do that?" I'm like, "Ah, Patriot Act." You have to unmake it a law. You you signed that away, because you went—Oh, and we'll do Iraq, too. There were no decisions.

T

Tara Bonds 1:57:16

It bends my mind that the security got so tight. And by the end of the decade, you just look back and you're like, "Huh," and then at twenty years, you're just like—it's still that way, or worse in some situations. I also, reflect back in the fact that the twenty-four hour news cycle—I mean, I can't even imagine having a smartphone at that time. I sat and thought about that. And I was like, "I don't know if I could ever come back mentally anymore, doing that." I actually stayed a news hound for a long time. I was addicted. I love our Public Broadcasting System location here, and like, "Oh, I get national news and everything." So I rode in the car with news, I watched news at home, I watched news on lunch break, I watched news, news, news, news. And I did that until I had children. And I started realizing my eldest—so it was probably almost the end of the decade before I stopped. And then I had a phone I could do it on. I literally finally just went, "I'm not following any of these things, or I'm gonna—I can't do it anymore. And that's a part of me that's really weird. I've always kept up with the news. I got addicted to it, and I finally had to say, "No." Not just something I can casually come across. I have to want to catch up. Because it's all unrelated, and just everything unfurls, or it's just the trauma of watching other people be in trauma.

T

Tara Bonds 1:59:25

So I think I guess I never realized there's like, "Oh yeah, 9/11 was—" Looking back, I realized how much trauma I have from it, but it's so widespread. I don't even know how to talk about. That's a hard topic there, but it's there. 2010 I did a play that reflected on 9/11. And I had to get the kids in tact, and that required a little bit of, after talking to parents, footage that I made sure to go through in the library. And they were terrified. They had no idea, because they were born right in those years. So my eldest son's girlfriend, no concept, we were talking the other day. I said something about a law and ended up talking about the Patriot Act. And he was like, "Oh yeah," something, and I I don't remember the word right now what he was asking about. I was like, "No, no, no, you don't understand." Perspective. Perspective. These kids have no

problem turning over their anything to people, shoes, going through, taking all the things off at the airport, all the security checks, all this stuff. And I get triggered every time. I just can't do it. I've gotten better, but for a long time, it was really—

T

Tara Bonds 2:01:23

So I think the best thing that I've been able to do, if I can say have—besides change, which I didn't. I didn't do any work. He's an awesome guy. But it's all the lives I impacted and everything over the years, and the throughline conversations about diversity and how things change. I [pause] wish I could go back and do things differently, sometimes. The next year, I did different things. And always, every year, we had some sort of presentation or something, until it slowly just faded away, as far as school, with connection with kids with it. They have no concept, unless you directly engage them with it, and then they're horrified. And then they're upset, because they're like, "But they did this because of this?" "Uh-huh." And then if you follow through with the conversation all the way, "Because of that?" And I go, "Uh-huh." "Wait a second. And then [inaudible]?" We're like, "Yes." So you keep having these conversations with these new kids. They're just like, "Ah, I don't know what you're talking about. That is not us." I'm like, "Yep. Yep, yep, yep."

T

Tara Bonds 2:03:03

But the internet is making them much more savvy. And they, the kids I work with, the eighth graders, the seventh graders I work with now, they have the savviest conversations. They are so social justice warriors, historians. I'm like, "I have faith in humanity," when I work with these kids. I have hope out there, in the world in general, I think that's what teaching someone means. When I feel insignificant in the universe, and I remember that. I try, like, "Let me just—I'll count for a second. How many people have I literally taught that? I'm gonna literally think about the just the sheer amount of people who I've crossed paths with because of teaching in twenty years." I did a pretty good job.

E

Elizabeth Melton 2:04:12

That's a long time.

T

Tara Bonds 2:04:12

It is, it was a real long time. It was just, I didn't realize until this interview came up that a lot of it was affected. My opinion's always been contrary to a lot of the places I have been in work. And so I try to avoid things, up until where I work now. And I'm like, "Yay, it's my group from Egypt. They're all in the chill, diverse area." But I had to stuff a lot of anger and "Ugh!" over the years because sometimes I just want to do that southern girl, stand-on-her-soap-box, and I think that I'm so good at it. And I can't if I want to keep my job. Very contrary to a lot of people's popular opinion, over the worst of everything. Make me real upset, like, "Oh my gosh, this is a prevailing opinion." I know there are people who don't think like this, but you're killing me here. Meet some more people. So it's nice to see that my son's generation is pretty savvy as far

as a lot of things go because of the evil internet. My son was the one who made me aware of what was going on in Ukraine, because I missed something. I mean, because I don't follow the news, so I got connected. Uh-oh, nope.

T

Tara Bonds 2:06:32

So being able to talk to kids and be real with them about my opinions, without being like, "I'm gonna play devil's advocate. I'm really good at that." So I have done a heck of a lot of that over the years to just try and offer them a different opinion, or look at how they perceive things, because their parents' role was tainted by 9/11, either in how the trauma for their experience was, was completely different. I mean, I literally had a kid in the classroom I was teaching on the first day, on the day of, that her family, her uncle was a maintenance worker at the Trade Towers, and he passed away. And she was gone for several days. And she came back, and that's when we found out. And I was like, "Of all the places, it was right there." It was the World Trade Centers.

T

Tara Bonds 2:07:47

So I wish my children could experience a world like my childhood where you stayed out until dark, and your parents called you in. I wish they could go to the gate with me when I'm leaving to go somewhere. I wish they lived in that world and not at 9/11, and then follow up with Iraq. Really, I think just really destroyed a lot of the ways I see the world, and the way my childhood was, because it was just different, security-wise. Twenty years later, we still live in a [post]-9/11—We will always live in a post-9/11 world, I mean, always. And there are some things that we instituted that, since we released certain freedoms because we got up in the middle of it. Okay, sorry.

T

Tara Bonds 2:09:10

I have to say, I got really trained with all the security measures, because I was scared. So I bought into a lot of fear. I've let a lot of that go. But realizing that was hard and very recent. I did all the drills, I did all the things, then Sandy Hook happened. That totally changed our world at the school. And then there's all these other security measures in my life, and I feel locked down, and we have to have badges now to get into buildings. Not everyone has every key to everything, that sort of thing. So it changes the environment. [pause]

E

Elizabeth Melton 2:10:11

Well take your time, because we've been talking for a good long while now.

T

Tara Bonds 2:10:14

I'm sorry.

E

Elizabeth Melton 2:10:15

No, no, it's quite all right. But I do. I feel like we've been able to hit on a lot of topics that have been really important. And again, I'm grateful, and I'm thankful for what you've shared. I do want to say thatâ€”

T

Tara Bonds 2:10:32

Oh my gosh, the time, I apologize.

E

Elizabeth Melton 2:10:34

No, it's okay. We typically, in our interviews, say, if there's anything you'd like to say for future generations, that final reflection, thinking that this oral history will be here and will persist hopefully long after we do, what would you say? What would you say to those future generations?

T

Tara Bonds 2:11:03

Wow, I'm trying to be brief. I think the biggest lesson is that the fall of the Twin Towers really signifies in a lot of ways buying into fear enough to let go of your rights. And be wary of people who play that card, because those are the ones we should be watching for. And it has proven true. So that, and follow the money [laughs].

E

Elizabeth Melton 2:12:09

Always good advice.

T

Tara Bonds 2:12:11

That's always good advice. But seriously, a lot of it for me is this letting go of freedoms and letting it just be, "Beep!" They just go, and you don't get them back. So that's the thing. Twenty years, I'm sitting here, not back.

E

Elizabeth Melton 2:12:34

Well, thank you very much. I think on that note, I'll stop the recording.