

160. Almira Bradford Winans: Make Your Dream Work

Gavin Kelly 00:18

Hey everybody! You're listening to Beyond 1894. This is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. My name is Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications, and our guest for this episode is Almira Winans. She is a 2016 graduate of Louisiana Tech, and she's here in the middle of a campus visit. This is her sort of 10-year homecoming back on campus. We have her in the middle of her visit for this podcast, but tonight at the time of recording, she's going to give a special talk in University Hall on campus. But like I said, in the middle of your busy schedule here visiting us, we appreciate you making time for us on the podcast. Welcome!

Almira Winans 00:55

Thank you so much, Gavin. Absolutely, I'm so happy to be here. It's honestly like I never left. It's a, it's really so interesting. 10 years, like poof, just like that, and you're back, and all the memories come rushing back, and it's really wonderful experience. So again, thank you.

Gavin Kelly 01:12

Yeah, talk to me a little bit more about that. So like, I tell people all the time, like even if you graduated three years ago, campus is going to be different because it's always changing, and there's a lot of construction going on right now, and things, you know, they different roads and blah blah blah. But like you said, it kind of parts of it are always going to be kind of how you remember because you have associations with your time here. So talk about what like being back on campus has been like.

Almira Winans 01:34

Well, I got a little bit of freedom earlier, and I kind of explored on my own. And of course, I went to Talbot Hall. I have so many memories there, which is

Gavin Kelly 01:42

very different, probably from your time here. Yes, it is, and

Almira Winans 01:44

this is a fun story. So I went to go get a coffee, and I was just reminiscing how my first year here. I don't know if students still get that, but we got like a stipend for food, and all of my stipend went to coffee, and I started engineering, so there's some correlation with that. But the lady that took my order, she was like, "Oh, you look so nice, or something. Just being super friendly, you know. People here on campus are so friendly, and and I was like, "Oh yeah, I'm visiting. I graduated 10 years ago. And she was like, "Oh, I was here 10 years ago, and I think I remember her. Isn't that crazy? And we were talking about how the Starbucks moved and where the coffee shop was. She's like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was like, "Oh my gosh! So I met somebody who was, you know,

Gavin Kelly 02:31

yeah,

Almira Winans 02:31

here 10 years ago, and it's like so amazing.

Gavin Kelly 02:33

Small world, but also kind of speaks to the familial vibe at Louisiana Tech and kind of how you know? No matter how long you're away, usually when you come back, there's somebody here that's connected to your time here.

Almira Winans 02:45

Yes, and the retention too, like like my professors. So many. I was visiting with students this morning, and they like threw out a name, and I was like, "Oh my gosh! Like he's still here. It's like 10 years ago. I was like, "Wow! So we were talking about that, but a lot of professors have stayed, and looks like a lot of staff members too. And that speaks, I think, a lot like to the community, right? And like the work environment, and because you know, happy people like they don't have a lot of reasons to leave, right? I think so.

Gavin Kelly 03:14

Well said. Well said. Well, again, thanks for making time during your visit, and good luck with your your talk tonight at your gallery-it's going to go great. Let's let's drill down into your Louisiana Tech story, though, kind of your life story. I think for a lot of people that we've had on the podcast, and I'm not saying this is a bad thing, but their sort of origins-you know-they they're they're born and raised in Ruston, and they come to Louisiana Tech, and like they're born knowing that Louisiana Tech is where they're going to end up, and that's all well and good. We love having those people come here, but I think your story is a little different. So, talk to me about where you're from, and then you know what it what it was that brought you here to the United States.

Almira Winans 03:54

Absolutely, yeah. My story is a little interesting. Sometimes when people, you know, they hear the accent obviously, and every now and then I get like, "Why Louisiana? But you know, I kind of didn't have a choice, which I have zero regrets. It's been wonderful. So I was born and raised in Petropolis, Kazakhstan, and I was born not into a super amazing family. So I'm not going to give you like a whole young life story, but and and I was 14 years old when the craziest thing ever happened. This family from across the world who didn't speak my language decided to come and get me, and that's my mom and dad right now. So they adopted me when I was 14, and it has been like such a life-changing, incredible experience. So they took such a huge chance on me, and I feel like if they didn't, I would have probably never gone to college, or let alone Louisiana Tech. So every now and then, I like kind of think about it, and really hits me like, wow, like they really changed the trajectory of my life. So being 14, you know, like. Who wants to adopt? Like I'm like, oh my gosh! And I know we are on like a podcast, but the the photo that they took of me it's just you know just picture this like very Slavic like non smiling child very pale. My hair was like a bob cut, like it was like you know poof, like sticking out. I'm looking kind of at you like from under my eyebrows, and it's not the most pleasant photo. But that's

that's they're like this is the child I will take home. They knew. Yeah, they knew. So I that always cracks me up. Well, I'm like, wow, kudos to you, because I would have been a little scared. So,

Gavin Kelly 05:35

so where are they from? Where do they where do they bring you home to once?

Almira Winans 05:39

Monroe, Louisiana. Okay. Yes. So, like here, local.

Gavin Kelly 05:43

It sounds to me. So, you know, if you're listening, I don't know if I've made this clear, but you're an artist. You know. Yes. So, how early on was that something that you started developing as a passion? It sounds like it's been a lifelong thing. But at what point were you starting to tap into your potential as an artist?

Almira Winans 06:00

That such a loaded question because if I I can go on so many tangents here, so I'll give you like this is the cheesy answer and you hear that a lot like I was always artsy I doodle as a child but I if it's true it's true it's true yeah it's like that that's what I did and I always remember that and then even now like you know internet and stuff and I came here actually like as the smartphones started coming out, but even then I was able through Facebook, not MySpace yet, Facebook, so connected with some people from back home, like my old classmates, and they they all are like, oh, you're like doodled all the time, like so that's how they and I was like, wow. So yeah, but I never like as a kid, and didn't even come into the states. Not right away. I had those opportunities to like really kind of like dive deep into this gift that I had and like explore like like how far can I push it, right? So a lot of times, and I'm a teacher now, and I have students who like so much better than me than more than I was at their age, and I I always like make sure that I tell them like hey like stick with this you're so talented like you will surpass me like 10 times because I share like some of my professional stuff with them, but I think it's so so so important for them to get that validation and to know that this little like hobby or like whatever it is at that time because it doesn't necessarily have to be like art, right? Right. To give to give it a chance to pursue it a little bit more. So, yeah, just art has always kind of like followed me. Sometimes I try to like run away from it, and then it like catch me and then like come back. So life is interesting. That's all I gotta say.

Gavin Kelly 07:36

Did you know that you wanted to pursue some type of art as your college degree? Well, I mean, like I guess even walking it back further, what point did you know you were going to go to college? What point did you realize that was something you wanted to do or needed to do?

Almira Winans 07:49

Well, my parents, my mom was like, "And mom, if you're listening, I love you. And she's like, "You are graduating, even if you get a degree in general studies, like you're going to graduate. So, well, when I moved to the states and I went to high school, actually three years. So I I skipped a grade because I was adopted older and I held back for like English language things like that. So I skipped that. Actually, I skipped a grade in middle school and then high school. So I kind of knew early on, like my parents,

like you are going to college. But I came to Louisiana Tech actually, you know, like not like this wasn't like to be complete transparency, like it was close, it was convenient, and it also had a program, just an amazing program in engineering. And so, with my like kind of my life story and like my childhood biases, growing up really poor, I was like, I'm gonna go engineering and I'm gonna make a lot of money, and that that was kind of the reasoning behind that because I didn't really know what I wanted to do.

Gavin Kelly 08:50

Yeah.

Almira Winans 08:51

Um. So that's kind of shaped my decision. And but math, so I was really good at math, and even coming from a different country, our math. Like I remember being in sixth grade English when I first came, but my math scores were, and I was in with eighth graders in math. Yeah, yeah. So universal language

Gavin Kelly 09:08

math. Yeah.

Almira Winans 09:09

No, absolutely was very interesting. But anyway, so that that's kind of how my path started. I spent about a year and a half in engineering when I came to Tech.

Gavin Kelly 09:17

Yeah. So for a lot of people, switching paths, especially a year or more in, can be a little daunting because it's easy. I think to feel like I wasted time, or I'm gonna now it's gonna take me longer to get my degree or whatever. Absolutely,

Almira Winans 09:31

and money too.

Gavin Kelly 09:33

Yeah, exactly. It can be a hard decision for a lot of reasons. It ultimately, for most people, I think, ends up working out. I think you're a testament to that, but when the when the time came for you to consider switching majors and shifting gears to art, what made you confident to follow through with that decision?

Almira Winans 09:50

Well, the first memory comes to mind is like when so like because you know engineer it's like a lot of hard work and there was even some I'm sure these jokes are still going around like you can either like. Like have sleep or have friends or have a social life. Like you can only have like one of those something. Yeah, two of those. So it was the same thing back then. And but even like when and I was getting decent grades. I'm not gonna lie. Say I got all A's. But like when the big project, the robot was built, a big you know group presentation was done. Like there was no satisfaction. And I went to my

what are they called? Like instructor? No, advisor. Advisor, that's right. To like voice my concerns because I wasn't you know like happy kind of like and all this hard work. I'm like wow, this is what those were like beginner courses. I wasn't even a senior yet. They encouraged me to stay, and I usually like I like to like give it my all, and I actually stayed a little bit longer. My my math grades were really good. I was like some crazy calculus classes. I can't remember at this point. So they're like you know like this is it'll get more manageable. Like it won't get easier. It'll get more manageable. I was like all right, but then after a couple more quarters, I was like no this is not working out. And so because that wasn't the

Gavin Kelly 11:00

problem, right? The passion wasn't. Yeah, it wasn't.

Almira Winans 11:02

There wasn't even just like a little bit. I met a lot of amazing friends that I still kept in touch with, but again, yeah, like the personal gratification wasn't there. And but then when I I still tried to like I didn't full on switch into the arts, like fine arts, but I made another like a little bit of a safer choice. I went into graphic design, so I was like, you know, like for getting a job, it seemed like it will be a more practical choice and more, you know, more job opportunities available, and that's what I got my degree in graphic design.

Gavin Kelly 11:35

What was it like, you know, going through the graphic design curriculum here at Tech, and you know, learning to turn art into a skill set that you can turn into a career, and also like figuring out what parts of art as a profession you liked and didn't like, and like what was it just like shaping your your own art skills through the program here?

Almira Winans 11:54

Oh, that's such a good question, and I'm actually going to talk more about that tonight because when I was invited back to speak, and I started kind of reminiscing on my time at Tech, and I actually was able to pull up some old photos from you know my time here and like looking through them and old projects and you know I kept photos of all of that. It was really interesting to see like I was in the graphic design like kind of cohort, right? But then for electives and stuff, like any, I noticed that any time I could take a class that was a little bit more creative, like drawing or like painting, I always like that would be the class that I would like steer towards. And it was really amazing because the professors, like the fine arts professors, like let me in those classes, and that was really incredible because a lot of the like the seeds and the foundational skills were planted in those classes. Like for example, I took my very first oil painting class here, and I remember the class was full, and I had to like go get a talk to the professor and get a permission, and I was like, nothing's gonna come out of it, like. But when I went to speak with the professor, he actually saw he he like knew of me. We never met, and he saw one of my graphic design projects on the walls, like at the at the building, and he was like, "Oh my god! Like, I that's your work. Like, yes, we'll get you in the class. And now, professionally in my practice, all I do is oil paints. Really, like I paint giant florals in oils, and I sell them, and people buy them, and it's like really interesting. But it took a little bit of time, you know, for me to like really develop those skills. But the foundation was laid here, yeah. And I think it's pretty incredible.

Gavin Kelly 13:37

And also like realizing that that was what you had a passion for, because if you weren't able to take those electives, you're the way that you practice art today might look very different.

Almira Winans 13:45

Oh, absolutely! And like oil painting, it's like ooh, oil painting, like so scary. But in that class, like and it was like the very first one, so like breaking it all down, like the tips, techniques, blah blah blah, and and I was like, wow, like I'm actually like decent at this, you know, because you have those critiques. You're next to other students, so it's like some validation, and you know, you get a little bit more confidence, and that's kind of what happened. So it's interesting to see how that like actually came back. But if at that time you told me that you know I would be doing this right now, like professionally, I'll be like, "Wow, no way! So, yeah, it's just really amazing.

Gavin Kelly 14:25

You got to give things time to shake out. Yeah. Also, too, during your time as a student, so you had some involvement with the Vista program here, right? Before

Almira Winans 14:33

there was even a yeah, exactly. It is now. It is

Gavin Kelly 14:36

now kind of a proper curriculum here at Tech. But at the time, yeah, early stages. So talk to me about what it was like to kind of be one of the guinea pigs for the Vista program here.

Almira Winans 14:46

It so when I when that class was you know became available to students, I already have taken some classes with the professor, and even though it was like a. End up class, or if you think about like graphic design, and then I was taking this like one digital painting class. Really didn't know like what to, what will come of it, or but it seemed like really cool. And like you know, here I feel like the professors stay. You know, like again, like the professors that I had, they're like still teaching here at Tech. Like I trusted them. I'm like you know like if they're teaching this class, and they're recommending, "Hey, you should take this class. Like, I'll absolutely take that class, and and it was just fantastic. It was it opened up basically like a whole new way of making art, because I was one of those students that never held a pen or like digitally or anything. But I've heard of concept art, and I like you know send pictures and stuff, and I just thought it was so cool, and I'm really glad now that I put in that work because this is a really cool story too. A few years ago, my principal came to me and she was like, "Hey, I want you to teach like a year-long class at the school, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, like you know, more added to my workload. But then she was like, you know, like here's kind of the parameters. Like, think about it. Let me know. And then the idea actually came to me pretty quick. I was like, oh my gosh, like I could like build something. Like you know, like I could do anything I want. So I was like, digital painting, because it was a class. It was advanced class. It was for the eighth graders. I could pick my students. Like you know, like this student gets in, this one doesn't. Like just based on like have they taken Art One? Have they taken advanced art? Was that like just the serious students who were not there to play around? They were there to like push the limits and really develop their own skill set. And we made it

happen. And like at first, I remember bringing my tablet that I got as a gift here at Tech as a graduation gift. Actually, after taking that digital for very first digital painting class, I was like so in love with it. So my parents gifted me this tablet, so I brought it to school, and there was so much interest. It was insane. Like the kids were, like they'll come with lunch, they come after school, and I'd have to be like, okay, mrs. Lynne is like not here at lunch today. Like I'm gonna go eat lunch with my friends. Please, like come back later. But then I was able to like come back to my principal and I like showed her like actual tangible like this is the work they're creating in their own time. It was ridiculous. It was like I was like wow and and anyway. So now we're going in two years strong in our digital painting course at my school and just have some exciting things planned in the future. Hopefully, I'm really, really just excited about it.

Gavin Kelly 17:24

Yeah, that's great. Yeah, and and again, the kind of the seeds of that and the foundation of that being planted here at Tech and and and with the Vista program. By the way, if you're, we've mentioned it before on different podcasts, but if you're listening and you don't know what Vista is here, visual integration of science through art. So it's kind of a combo program between biology and those sciences and the art programs here at Louisiana Tech, and it's just a cool opportunity for students in typically in graphic design, but in our different art majors to kind of be challenged. It's a challenge to kind of illustrate medical complex medical things. Talk about that a little bit. Yeah.

Almira Winans 18:03

Yes. Well, I still remember our final in that class. Well, at the beginning, it was a lot of like foundation work, like skill set, and then at the end of the quarter, it was like a client-based project. And if I remember correctly, like we had some scientists who came in, a couple of scientists, and just working with them through their research and the notes, we were given the task to like visually illustrate those scientific notes, like the text, right, and like show the visual representation of that. And it was really fun. And I still remember how it was my senior year too. How a big deal it was winning the cover of that, I believe it was called the research, the frontiers and biomedical. Yeah, new frontiers and biomedical

Gavin Kelly 18:48

research. I think yes, yes, you got it. It was the

Almira Winans 18:50

cover so validating. I was like, wow, like I, you know, like started tried something totally new and was able to like the gratification of that, so that was really really amazing. And then years later, a few years later, like six or so years later, I was able to implement that at my school. Even some of the projects are kind of similar, just because there's no curriculum. I was like, what, what, you know, where do we start? And then I was like, oh, we started with this, and then just kind of slowly, project by project. So it's like a full circle. So it's kind of really incredible to see.

Gavin Kelly 19:24

Very good. Well, speaking of you know projects that you did in your time as a student that have stood the test of time. So the Bulldog Project back then. Anyone who's who's been in Ruston is familiar with the Bulldogs throughout the city that have different designs on them. Yours is still around at the Lamb

Bright Center, right? Yes. Talk to me about what it was like being selected for that project, and kind of what your artistic process was like as you took that on.

Almira Winans 19:53

That is one of the most, I think, incredible, like truly incredible opportunities to like leave. My mark on a place that I feel like did so much for me, like shaped me quite literally, and so what happened with that is I moved shortly after graduating. I was living in Texas for about a year at the time, and someone reached out to me that there was this contest going on, and that as a recent graduate I could also apply, and I really like immediately had the idea for my design because I was just thinking, you know, coming from a different country as a teen, you know, like I teach teenagers right now, and we they come with their own set of you know interesting personalities, and so yeah, when I was thinking like more in depth, like what my design wanted to be, I really, really wanted to kind of show like that transformation because I remember like high school, even middle school, especially middle school. I was like really shy. Like the accent was very thick. It was so it was harder to make friends. I would be that kid in the corner. I'd sit in the back. I would never put myself out out there. Like and you know make conversation. But then when I came to tech, I met people from different cultures, different backgrounds. We even at one point had some foreign exchange students from Kazakhstan. I was like, no way. Yeah, it was really cool to connect and like hear a little bit like what was happening in my home country, like be a little bit more current with the events. And so for my design, I wanted it like the statue. And if you've ever seen it, you can see underneath. It's like silver, and the idea is the bulldog is like there's it's in motion, right? There's movement happening. The transform like the bulldog is in transformation. So like you come to tech as a blank statue, basically as like one person, and then throughout your years here, like you meet people, you have different experiences. Like you know, you fail, you succeed, all of that good stuff, and then and then you come out like a different person. So like you become basically a tech bulldog, not like in the littlest sense, but like you become you know like once a bulldog, always a bulldog. That kind of thing is like that is so true, and so and I wanted that transformation kind of to happen and kind of reflect also on my own experience here and like paying my ode to Louisiana Tech for like shaping me into the person that I am today. Yeah, I'm gonna get emotional. No, that's good. That is kind of what yeah what the design was. So I

Gavin Kelly 22:20

appreciate your explanation. I've walked past it many times, and I knew that you were the artist, but I've obviously never had a chance to hear you talk about your artistic process behind it. So it makes it a little bit more meaningful now. So thanks for that.

Almira Winans 22:32

Of course.

Gavin Kelly 22:33

So you you mentioned that was after you had recently graduated. So let's talk about your career a little bit because while you do get to put your degree to use a little bit in teaching art, I don't think from talking to you this far, it doesn't sound like you envisioned yourself as a teacher necessarily as a student. So, talk to me about kind of the steps of your career that led up to where you are now.

Almira Winans 22:56

Like a windy, windy path. It took me a couple of years to after graduating to really see like what I wanted to do because switching majors like so later on and even taking summer classes. I even I remember like I applied to some graphic design jobs and then when they would send me that brochure that I had to like design or redesign and send back and I was like, this is just not for me. So, like, I wanted, I wanted more freedom, more creativity, exploration, just things like that. So, it took me a few years. I moved to Colorado, which was like one of the best decision I ever made. But I was at that point in my life, like I was still young. You know, I'm like kind of yeah, I was a little a little crazy. So I was like packed up my car and I was like, "Shew, 1000 miles away, but I was really able to find myself there. I would take on some commissions here and there. I never really like pursued fine art, like painting, drawing, like intentionally. I would just kind of opportunity comes, I'll take it like here and there. But you know, like life at the end of the day, you get bills to pay. Like life will hit you pretty hard sometimes, and so I was making a lot of practical choices. And then around COVID, I got into teaching, and then I feel like it's interesting. Art found me back because I originally was working at an immersion school about 2019 or so, and I was teaching Russian, like Russian literacy, math, things like that, and then the there was like an online class. So like then COVID like rolled. That was like in 2019. I was about to go online to teach my math class, and the I still remember this is so crazy because I was like, wow. The principal sent me email, and they're like, hey, position open up as a charter school. I had a you know graphic design degree, so like in BFA to fine arts, and she's like, "Do you want to take this position? Like our teacher is leaving? And we, I did not see that coming at all. I was like, "Sure, and it like literally kind of fell in my lap, and I accepted it. And the rest is kind of history. So this is my sixth year teaching art. I do love it. I. It has a lot of personal connection for me. It's very gratifying, and I mean, I'll be lying if I'm gonna say that every day is like butterflies and rainbows. But overall, like it's it's very it's it's very satisfying, like very fulfilling job to have. But I just kind of never thought that that was gonna be me. So it's like so interesting how just came came back, so

Gavin Kelly 25:22

and still getting, like I said, still getting to use your degree in a in a way, but for sure getting to use kind of those artistic pillars of your education that you are now passing on to the next generation of artists. My question now, talking to you about this, is, you know, how do you, because art is something you now do professionally, how do you find the balance between doing it professionally, whether as a teacher or as someone who's making paintings to be sold, versus doing it as a fulfilling hobby, as a personal thing, or are those two things the same? What's it like for you?

Almira Winans 25:58

I'm like, where do I start? Because we only have we don't have all day. So about three years ago, like three four years ago, one summer because you know I I love this another reason I love teaching and I know all teachers will validate this. I love my summers like I love the breaks. It's it's lovely, and I just kind of decided you know, like because when you teach you a lot of student examples, you give so much of yourself. Like I was running after school clubs with my graphic design. I was the yearbook advisor for a few years. Like it's a lot of work, and you bring a lot of work home. And I was like, you know what? Like I, what if I just like commit, like just to see what happens? I was like, what if I, you know, do one like just intentionally, intentionally make that time for my own practice, and really, I just wanted to become like not only a better artist, but I wanted to become a better teacher for my students.

And I don't remember like really how it started. Was it like a video I watched or something? But it was like that quote, the adage, the "Who can't teach? And I was just like, really like worked me out because I was like, I can right, and so yeah, and that's just kind of it. Started like over the summer was easy. I was like creating paintings, like was intentionally dedicating the time. And then when the school started, I would still like after school, I would go for a couple of hours, even sometimes even 30 minutes, like have you read that book? It's called Atomic Habits. Listen to it. Yeah. So that you know, like just that habit of just like a little bit, and it it does add up. So I would say you don't have to wait to have like a four hour, five hour painting session. Just a little bit here and there, and then when you look back, and I like to take pictures too. And then by the time Friday rolls around, I was like, "Oh, holy cow! Like I just did a quarter of my painting, so just a little bit here and there. But that builds discipline, and you will like you will maybe not in the moment, but just give it a few months or a couple of years, and you will see like tangible results from because you keep developing your craft, right? And so that's kind of how I did. And then once I started developing this body of work, and I had a bunch of paintings, I'm like, "What do I do next? Right, and I started to apply into local galleries, getting my work out there that way. Built a website, and it just kind of like snowballed. Right, it felt so natural, like how one thing led to another. And then through education too, and this is really beautiful. Where when you sometimes do something like giving, it pays like 10 thfold comes back to you in a better way. I had an opportunity to participate at a really huge local festival with my students. So just you know, sweating buckets in July, volunteering, you know, out of the goodness of my heart, because I do love my kids dearly, we were like raising supplies for school, and then my kids won this grant to bring a piece of art from an actual artist. So went with them to help them choose a piece of art. Well, just supervised; they were the one doing the choosing to bring it back to the school community, and that was a really cool experience. And then through that, I learned that this gigantic festival had an emerging artist program for artists who are at the beginning of their career. So they will give you this chunk of money, and they will give you like advice and guidance, and you can participate in the festival. And I was like, you know what? I'm gonna risk it for the biscuit. And I applied, and there was like 200 something applicants, and only five grants were given, and I got the grant, and it was like kind of really beautiful.

Almira Winans 29:29

And then this last year, when I was at the festival, well, this this summer, my students came to see me, and I was like, oh, and it was just like a full circle. And some of my former students from my previous school, oh, it was amazing. I was just, I just don't even have words. It was such a lovely experience. So yeah, and that kind of really helped me get my work out there in a way that I did not expect, and have genuine connections and interactions with people. Like looking at my work up closely, you know, versus like. Online or like Instagram, gosh, social media games like that-that's a hard one to play. So, like having in-person, like one-on-one chats, it was incredible connecting. So I will definitely be keep doing that more of that in the future for sure. Yeah. So just kind of okay. Then just like there, there is a lot. There is a balance between you know I get personal enjoyment out of this, and it's also something I do professionally. And it sounds like sometimes you just gotta go for it and figure out where that balance is at. So yeah, and for me, it was like, and I'm sometimes a little bit competitive and can even be a little bit harder myself. But like, just that, just that those who can't teach, and I like, and I wanted to show my students like right like oh look this is like your art teacher and like it was so cool, but then also like personally too like coming home at the end of the day, you know like going to my studio and I'm like like ah like this is my moment to relax and like do something for myself. So and not every single day I felt

like I really wanted to be there, but and if I just would start, yeah, like in the Atomic Habits he was talking about, you know, like going through the notions, like you know, you go for a run, maybe just start with tying your shoes. Yeah. So maybe I just start with getting out my brushes, and then, and honestly, and I know if I'm, I don't know if I'm jumping the gun, but really, like it's so simple, but at the same time so crazy that if you just dedicate the time. If you literally just do it and show up for yourself, it will pay off. And it just took me, I guess, so long. Like I heard that before. Like you know, it was not something new, but when I actually did it, yeah, it it truly did pay off. And it's you know like an investment in yourself. Yeah. Let's let's

Gavin Kelly 31:38

piggyback off of that. Let's let's talk about kind of, you know, as you as you talk to your current students, as you talk to students here, as you give this talk tonight, and you reflect a little bit about your own journey and your own personal life and your own career, you know, you're kind of as you give advice about, you know, people who have passions in anything, you know, in art, sure, but in anything, and are thinking about their future and can I turn this into a career? And what about this thing I love? And and how do I pursue a passion? You know, what is your advice for those people?

Almira Winans 32:14

You just got to do it. Just do it. Like the night. Just just do it. You know, the sheil above. Like just do it. Yeah, that's like if you if you're picture that, but honestly, like it's really interesting because, like ever since I was little, right, I knew that I was decent in art. Like I was always the artsy kid, right? Like other students or classmates would ask me to make little drawings for them, and as I got older, I tried to still stay on the path of doing art. But with you know my biases and the way I grew up-I just did not want to fall in the starving artist, right? So definitely lack of self-confidence, but absolutely, and surround yourself with people who believe in you. Like you know, my family, my husband now, but my fiance boyfriend at the time, like he was very, very supportive. My friends, I actually just did this really fun commission for a friend, dear friend of mine that I met here at Tech and that I was friends with, and I worked with together like outside of tech actually at Super One. Shout out to Super One who had at the bakery department. We had a great time, but she was always like, she's like, wow, like you are just so cool, and she's like so fun and bubbly, and then just to be able to do this commission for her now was it kind of like really cool because it's like you know those people who were there for you when you did not make a single sale when like you know you were in though there you will have those times where you're gonna be like why am I doing this for because like I've had some wins like you know at my time at Tech I had some wins like later on in life professionally, but I also had some losses, and those hit you hard because you're like, wow, like because I would, you know, it's like my husband, my cat, and my dog would like see my art. I have a home studio, and then you're like, what am I doing? You get that rejection, and you're like, you know,

Gavin Kelly 33:56

imposter syndrome is real. It's always looming.

Almira Winans 34:00

Yes, yes, absolutely. So, but I mean, I really, and this is I also wanted to mention I I used to teach at one of those paint and sip places after I graduated. You know, like the fun. You're like la la la, and I had

this boss, and there was a couple, and they were the coolest people ever. And I'm still in touch with them too. And I remember like we would go like we'd have meetings, like get pizza, would like you know like how's business going, whatever. And he and his name was Josh, and he was like like he recognized that we're not going to be there our whole lives, right? It's just like a chapter in our life, and he said this. He was like in life, really, if you get to the bottom of it, you will either make your dream work or somebody else's. And it's like if you really think about it, like, oh, I'm getting goosebumps right now. It's true. Like, I mean, like I work at a school now, and I love it there. But at the same time, you know, like I am an employee at that school, and I just all that if I do stuff with this too. And like different accomplishments that makes yes the art department, but also like the school better. But like ultimately for me personally, yes, that's gratifying. But like, what is your dream at the end of the day? Like, is it you know like staying teaching, which is it is my passion, but at the same time, like chasing your personal goals. Like, are you willing to make those sacrifices to make your dream work, and not somebody else's.

Gavin Kelly 35:24

Yeah, beautifully said. Beautifully said. Thank you for that. That

Almira Winans 35:27

really stayed with me throughout all these years. And if, and I will send this podcast to his wife Rebecca because she's a professional artist too, and she inspired me greatly. But they were real and honest. They weren't like you know, you know, like break your back, work for us for as hard as you can. Like you know, we'll give you all these back-to-back shifts. So it was none of that. They recognized that we were there for like part of the time, and they wanted to support us on our own journeys. So yeah, it's beautiful.

Gavin Kelly 35:51

Yes, thank you, and thank you for for helping us get down into your story a little bit. It's it's very clear talking to you today about where your passions lie, and the focus you put on your work and your job as a teacher, and and you know we've just met today, but I can tell you care about your students, and you care about your work, and you care about your time here at Louisiana Tech, and the the people you met here, and the time you had here. So it's been great chatting with you today, and good luck at your talk tonight. You don't need luck. It's going to be great, and hope you've been enjoying your visit. And thanks for joining us,

Almira Winans 36:25

Gavin. Thank you so much. It's been an absolute pleasure. I hope to be back someday.

Gavin Kelly 36:43

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