

Interviewee: Kellee Kosiorek
Interviewer: Elaine Cavaleri
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Abstract: Kellee Kosiorek was born in 1992, in Lebanon, New Hampshire. She moved to Worcester to attend Clark University, where she double majored in cultural psychology and international business and then earned a master's degree in non-profit management. Although she had primarily been exposed to her conservative, white family and neighbors growing up, attending Clark opened her eyes to a variety of different cultural backgrounds. Since then she has fallen in love with exploring other cultures. Her dream is to join the Peace Corps, but for now she works for the Seven Hills Foundation in Worcester. Kellee works on multicultural and ethnic projects at the foundation. Seven Hills' global outreach programs include countries such as Haiti, Jamaica, Ghana, Liberia, and Guatemala. She also works with the International Center of Worcester, which keeps her constantly busy. Kellee is only 25 years old, but she realizes how blessed and lucky she is to have the life and job opportunities she enjoys so much.

EC: Okay so what is your full name including maiden name and married name if acceptable?

KK: I've never been married. But my full name is Kellee Ann Kosiorek

EC: And when were you born?

KK: [] 1992

EC: Do you have children?

KK: No

EC: What cultures ethnicities do you identify with, your family background?

KK: Sure, so my dad is 100% Polish so I identify a lot with the Polish, and my mom is a very mixed background a lot of French and Irish but a little bit of Native American and a little Canadian I think as well, yeah a lot of different stuff

EC: Where have you lived during your life, did you grow up in Worcester or

KK: Yeah, so I'm from a very small town in New Hampshire right on the Vermont line and about half way up the state right near Dartmouth College and so it's very different than

Worcester in a lot of ways. One, very visually 95% white compared to Worcester, which is one of the most diverse places I've ever seen in America at least. So I grew up there, went straight from New Hampshire to Clark [University] when I left high school, and have never left Worcester. So officially lived in two places and studied abroad once so I count that as a second home for a little bit as well

EC: Let's see going off that what challenges do you think that Worcester faces, what would you change about the city?

KK: Yeah, I would say accessibility in a lot of ways. One, just transportation I think it's very hard to get around the city and there's a lot that the city has to offer. And going off that I don't think everyone realizes how much the city has to offer which I didn't either living here for 5 years and only started to understand the city when I literally had to research it and find out what was around Worcester and what there was available to everyone. So I would say definitely that and I don't even know how to categorize that. Maybe publicity or like marketing or something because Worcester is a very up and coming place and I don't think to many people realize that especially with the bad rep it had for so many years after the post industrial revolution and all that stuff so I would say that.

EC: Have you seen any changes like since you started at Clark to like now in Worcester?

KK: Absolutely yeah, some good and some bad, I don't want to put Clark under the table but there's a lot of community driven-projects over there which go back and forth. Some displacement which is unfortunate, but in the end Clark is really helping out the community I believe, but a big thing I was part of last year was the POW! WOW! Worcester, the mural festival so I think that has been one of the most concrete and very in-your-face changes of Worcester. So you can really start to see that arts and cultures is really important to the city here and that's what's bringing more color and life to the city on top of all the grey buildings and especially with the weather today it doesn't help.

EC: So now we are going to move to politics and community involvement, do you consider yourself active politically?

KK: Yeah, nature of the job absolutely needs to keep up with politics. Right now it's very hard and very draining to keep up with politics for a lot of different reasons but that's another thing I've really loved about this job because I always have had an interest in politics, but it almost seemed like a foreign concept. It's really hard to find the correct resources to listen to and read to actually stay informed, but now with this job it really helps you and pushes you to learn a lot about not only national politics but foreign politics as well because we have visitors coming in all the time from different places and if you really don't have any sense of what the environment is politically or otherwise you can't really put on a good program because there could be something as simple as they don't eat meat which is a very simple thing but you bring them to Smoke Stack which is a barbecue place like obviously those are just cultural differences and a lot

that go with religion or politics that you need to always keep in mind when your programming for people

EC: What role has religion played in your life? If any?

KK: That's an interesting question. I grew up in a somewhat Catholic family; went to church every Sunday and was confirmed when I was 16 or 17 whenever that is. Always knew that wasn't my place and tried to go against my parents a lot for it, but being my parents they kind of always pushed me to keep going which in some ways I appreciate just because it's interesting to understand how the church works and just like references in the Bible, but it's not my belief absolutely not. And I'm still finding that which is an interesting journey to go on now and not influenced by my parents or my family, because my extended family is also pretty religious. Any holidays we go to it's like blessing of the ham or whatever it might be. So it's interesting. I remember sitting in Church just trying to pass the time reading the verbs or not the verbs the hymns or whatever as fast as I could just to see how many times I could before they finished. Literally anything that made me gets through there as fast, and donut Sunday made me go there. And I even helped teach Sunday school for a little bit and it's very strange and now I've looked a lot into Buddhism and am trying to learn about that to see if that's the path. But yeah, I don't know if religion will be a constant in my life and I've thought about that a lot when getting closer to having kids, not any time soon, but my experience with that was kind of forced and if I think about it now and was that almost a disgrace or disgrace to the church of putting nonbelievers and forcing them to recite the Bible because it's kind of a joke to you and that kind of sets you off for life. So that's a very interesting question absolutely.

EC: Ok so moving on to health. How has health issues impacted your life or the ones in your family?

KK: Sure, I haven't had many health issues and neither has my immediate family I've broken one bone and my mom didn't believe me for a week so that was kind of tragic. But there was actually a period of my life that did take kind of a toll on my extended family, my aunts and uncles. We had like twelve deaths within a seven month period for a variety of reasons cancer, heart disease, like pretty serious issues absolutely. So that was a very interesting time that I think made my extended family become a lot closer because we were together all the time in weird circumstances, but other than that no one in my family has ever—like my immediate family has gone through a surgery or an extended time in the hospital—so very fortunate in that region.

EC: Are you responsible for like anyone else's health besides or than your own? Like do you take care of anyone?

KK: Fortunately not [laughs]. That's how I can stay on top of my things. I only have to worry about myself.

EC: So, for just a little conclusion, how do you get through tough times? And what kind of like, maybe like distressing things do you do because I know you are busy.

KK: I do a lot of meditating. Kind of not formal meditating but just always keeping positive thoughts in my head and taking that time at the end of the day to like really stop and think. I also really love coloring books so I color a lot. I have recently started watercolor painting too so that's been really fun to play around with like sponges and splatter paint and stuff. I also really love plants so I think that brings me the most calmness. I'll find myself just hanging out with my plants and hanging out with them, watering them, picking off dead leaves, repotting them and now that it's becoming spring, we usually have some sort of little vegetable garden in our yard so that's always really fun.

EC: That's fun. This is kind of a tough question. How do you define success in your life?

KK: Oh wow. Currently?

EC: Yeah or has your definition changed.

KK: Sure, that is a hard question.

EC: Yeah

KK: I don't know I think it would just be honestly living in the moment is what I see as successful because there is always anxiety and other things coming into play, but if you can focus on what you're doing now and not what happened in the past or what's going to happen, you find yourself the happiest. As well as just maintaining really good relationships because I don't think you really realize how important those are until they are gone. So yeah. I would say that. Just living a happy life for yourself above anyone, but knowing that everyone else in your life is just as important.

EC: That was a really good answer. So one last question based on your life experience what advice would you give to a woman today or in the future generations?

KK: Wow

EC: I know it's a big question.

KK: I don't want to sound to cliché, but I think it is important to work towards whatever you think is in your heart, and know that is approachable or reachable, because as long as you work hard and focus, I think you can really get wherever you want. And I will say again I think I mentioned this in the first one is networking. Network as much as you can because those people will really help you even if it's not in the way you think it will but it is really in a way you have learned something from them and that really changes your direction or whatever it might be. But

getting to know as many people as possible and learning their story because again, that can really change your whole thought process in one topic or set your life to do something completely different.

EC: Well thank you so much

KK: No Problem!

EC: I really appreciate you meeting with us again

KK: Of course, for sure.

[this interview was conducted in two parts]

EC: So what was your first job?

KK: My first job was actually at an ice cream shop in the small town I grew up in. Actually, technically the town over which shows how small my town is. But I worked there for eight summers so that was like my favorite past time almost even though it was a job. But yeah.

EC: How did you come to do the work you do now?

KK: Long story. So I grew up in New Hampshire came to Worcester to go to Clark University and did my undergrad as well as my master's program there and through my master's program two of my professors are in senior leadership at Seven Hills Foundation. And had no idea what I was going to do after. Honestly wanted to join the Peace Corps, still do. But it's been a little [?] and they said, "There's this kind of internship available if you want it. Not sure what you are doing." But it was an advancement and I got my masters in non-profit management so kind of the development and fundraising and grant writing side of things. And so I started with Seven Hills Foundation literally probably four days after I graduated with my master's which had started a day after I graduated with my undergrad so it was just very streamlined. And started there like 20 hours a week which was awesome exposure because they are huge. They are like 112 million dollar non-profit or something with a lot of different programs so it was cool to be able to write about a lot of different things and learn a lot of different things. So then from there I actually got promoted to 30 hours a week still part time, and then actually someone in the advancement office ended up leaving so I got promoted to full time. But within all of that, since I had known my professors I had kind of beforehand told them my interests lie on more of the international side of things which is one of the reasons I wanted to join the Peace Corps and I did my undergrad in cultural psychology. So big focus on the global issues and different traditions and what not. So we have an affiliate with Seven Hills Foundation, actually two affiliates that do international work and it's a very, very small office. Only two full-time staff, so I was like throwing out my interests there and didn't see the possibility of transferring over there, but within the year I had been promoted to full time with the advancement team. Someone left the

international side of things and they kind of put my name in there and now I'm over there and I've been there since June. So it's still less than a year and [I'm] learning a lot, but now I work for Seven Hills Global Outreach which does development projects in eight different countries including Bangladesh, Haiti, Jamaica, Syria, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia and what am I missing? Guatemala. Then I also work for the International Center of Worcester which is kind of the inbound programs, and so what we do is mostly work with the State Department and mostly bring visitors here to the U.S to do professional development training so [laughs] I'm kind of all over the place.

EC: So what has this work meant to you? Like why did you get into what you do?

KK: So I have always been really interested in culture and it didn't really I guess ignite until I came to Clark because I grew up in a very—probably a 98% white small town in New Hampshire and you aren't exposed to a lot. I always knew there was obviously something else and my family traveled when I was younger, but not really out of the country. And then when I came to Clark, Clark is obviously a very international-based school so I was just surrounded by so many different people and culture and all these different things which was awesome. And then from there I decided to go into international business as well as the cultural psychology and Clark does a 5th free year. So it's awesome. You get your master's program right after that so that's when I did non-profit management, but it kind of all just tied in very nicely all the different culture and the business and the non-profit. I think I'm kind of getting away from the question [laughs]. So what it has meant to me now is that it has kind of been ignited and I have really fallen in love with the cultural side of things. Every day is a little different and when you are working with so many different cultures you're just really immersed in learning so much all the time. Right now I have a program coming in from Belarus and there is a woman who is a wheelchair rider and that has been a whole other level of culture and how they deal with accessibility and how we are trying to deal with it here in the U.S and how to create a program for this person. So it can be anything from accessibility to Halal food. So you're just kind of always learning which is why I really, really love the job which is why it's stressful too because there are very different cultures, and many different mentalities. And I'm still very young so that plays a weird role in things like hierarchy and gender norms and that kind of thing. It's been a very interesting process, a very busy process. Like I said there is only two full time staff, actually two staff in general. We don't have any interns right now so it's just a lot going on trying to run these two non-profits. Will you repeat the question?

EC: What has this work meant to you?

KK: It's really it's just it's kind of helped me one, find myself and my spot within the world just because you're exposed to all these different cultures, but also it's just I guess overall it's really awesome to be able to love your job. That's basically what that is.

EC: So you've kind of covered this, but how have you balanced your different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life? I know you're busy, but do you have other interests you put time into?

KK: Absolutely and that's also what I struggle with because I mean I'm sure you guys know. You're in college, you're always going whatever and leaving school leaving school and going into a job. That's kind of similar to the research and constant learning you still don't know how to balance your time. And in my free time I actually help out with Pow-Wow Worcester that mural project that came to Worcester last year. So I'm on the events committee for that helping plan out all the events for the week, but we meet monthly moving to subcommittees so there's just a lot of time committed to that as well. I now help with Sofar Sounds Worcester that is actually a global music movement that started in London I think probably six years ago. It's now across 300 cities. It just came to Worcester four months ago so we've been doing that and pretty much what it is, these pop up VIP music experiences in different spaces around the city. So you're activating these really cool spaces. It could be anything from someone's private home to a business or commercial space. I think our most recent one was—where was the most recent one? Not sure. But we've had them in like a brewery or 20 Franklin which is where Action! Worcester is housed. It's kind of like an open work space and we are looking at Figs & Pigs [Kitchen + Pantry], different restaurants like that so always busy.

EC: Let's see, what do you think are the pros and cons of the path you've chosen?

KK: Yeah, that's a good question. Pros, like I said it's been an awesome learning experience. I feel like my mind is always working or trying to work which has been great. Plus this job has really let me meet a lot of people in this city and just fall in love with the city because when you're in school here, obviously it's a huge college town, but you're stuck in those bubbles. I left campus a little, but you're still within that little area hanging out with those people all the time. And now my job actually pays me to promote Worcester so I have to find all those cool little places around Worcester and it's awesome because you really, really learn what's going on and the different movers and shakers in the city and that kind of thing. And there's also a lot of young professionals that are staying around right now which is really exciting to see and we all meet up together. A lot of us are on POW! WOW! together and what not which has been awesome because you just get a whole new breadth of friends and new ideas and new things they are trying to do. But cons, I do feel like my youth is slowly running away. I just turned 25 last weekend so that was a big one, but yeah just moving straight from school to work and just constant. I work a lot now. I'm definitely over 40 hours a week, but it's hard to say that as a con because it is such an awesome job and awesome opportunity. So yeah, it's a weird balance because like I said I really want to join the Peace Corps, but I feel that slowly loosening but yeah.

EC: Do you have any regrets with what you're doing?

KK: Not really. I don't think so. Yeah, I really think you have to have the mentality of just going with the flow which is what I've done my entire life, and I feel like I've been really fortunate with all the opportunities that have come to me. So yeah, I don't think you can look at it like that because then you'll just regret it and nothing terrible has happened yet.

EC: Well thank you very much for coming today. That should conclude our interview.