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# Here to make friends

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Monday, December 7, 2020

## Getting run out of town

"I had no idea that you felt driven out of town and college here, it makes me sad. I thought you left because it was impossible to finish your degree from here. I know academia is often as cut throat as business or government, I didn't know that this is what happened to you."

It was "impossible" to finish my degree at a distance, which of course, people are now doing due to Covid. So many things which were "impossible" were just excuses not to make education accessible to more people, part of what is so broken about higher education in general.

In 2007 when I was the interim director of the developmental education program at Adams State, I applied for the position when it was advertised. The job description indicated MA required/PhD preferred but not required. At the time I had an MA, relevant experience at other schools/orgs, and was successfully doing the job. The committee decided to change the requirement and told me I was not eligible for the position. They then had a failed search, finding no one to fill the position. I continued to do the work, and the business office just renamed my position to something else (a "coordinator" rather than a director). It kept the same budget code for my salary. I basically did the same work, but seemed to have been reclassified as non-faculty. No clear answers about who decided what, what things meant, etc, so my boss basically empowered me to keep doing the work I had been doing but to be wary and innovative, to work on grant funding opportunities, so that if at some point they eliminated my position I would have other options. There was a lot of precarity starting in 2008 through to when I left in June 2015 (you'll recall 2008 was a recession year as well).

In 2012 I started a (mostly online/summers) post-masters Specialist in Education degree, because my then boss said I could get a pay increase. I completed the EdS in 2014. Was then told there were no funds for a raise at that time.

As you'll recall, the RGFP lawsuit was occurring during that time. Before I agreed to be a plaintiff, I asked my then boss what he thought about my participation with the case, if there was a conflict of interest, if there was any reason he saw that I shouldn't become a plaintiff. He saw no conflict, didn't think I would receive retaliation for participating in the lawsuit.

The EdS degree was essentially the first two years of a doctorate of education, and the university where I completed the EdS was willing to accept 24 credits of it into their doc program, which I applied to and to which I was accepted. Before I applied, I talked at length with my boss about the feasibility of me being able to do a leave of absence for the four semesters that the university REQUIRED to take place in person. Over several months the doc program director, my boss and I put together a personalized degree plan which would allow me to attend in-person for the sixteen weeks of the semester, to keep my health insurance through ASU, and to do my research projects as ASU-benefitting research projects, including me promising to write my dissertation as an ASU project. I planned to return to Alamosa during breaks from the semester and summers, and to do my fieldwork for my dissertation in Alamosa.

Two weeks before the end of the fiscal year (and my contract renewal date) in June 2015, I learned that my boss' job and my job, our whole division, were being eliminated and

reorganized. He had tenure, so he lost his VP role but is now warehoused in an academic department awaiting his soon retirement. My position was eliminated.

I had a few short weeks to figure out what to do. I wasn't planning to sell my house or step away from my relationships with the LFC (I was board president) or the other organizations I was involved with, but suddenly I was faced with lost income I had planned on, trying to rent/manage my property from a distance, or find a house sitter? Plus manage my expenses with out of state tuition, (no tuition support from my employer) and full-time student status? I needed to liquidate the equity from my house. I decided it would be best to sell and make a clean break since there was no future guarantee of employment there. I ended up selling my house at a loss to the university because of the short time frame of getting my affairs in order after losing my job (and health insurance) with so little notice. I had also just started long-distance dating my now partner and knew I would be attending classes in North Carolina starting in the fall--it was likely I could find full-time work there if I was open to it. So I made the decision to sell the house, give away everything that didn't fit in the trailer, and start a new life wherever I landed.

That isn't exactly getting run out of town, but it certainly didn't feel like I was "appreciated" for all the work I had done in the community. I know I'm an asset to employers, but ASU definitely didn't signal that to me. In fact, since the strange job search that wasn't in 2008, I had felt like I constantly needed to justify my existence, to take on more and more responsibilities in order to legitimize my role there. As if I was merely tolerated. I had always been a high-achiever kind of person, but that specific set of pressures caused me to throw myself into grant-writing, creating new programming, developing and teaching new courses, bringing the AmeriCorps program to campus (Mary Hoffman had been trying for years to make that happen), partnering with TSJC, partnering with all the Valley K-12 districts, organizing an all-valley HS junior visit to campus for ACT academy, teaching faculty development workshops, integrating service learning into the curriculum of a dozen different departments, serving on planning and hiring committees, inaugurating the common reading program, redesigning the library/renovation. There were days I was on campus at 7 am. Sometimes I'd be in my office late into the night. Unsurprisingly, my marriage ended in 2009.

I cannot claim that I lost my job because of my involvement with the Farm Park, but I know the lawsuit created a rift in the broader community as well as the university employee community. As I said, I felt like I was merely tolerated because ... maybe I made people look bad because I was doing so much? And also the only way I could make a little more money was to get supplemental contracts for projects and teaching overloads--there was no promotion line for me to any salary higher than \$40k. Forever. I also wrote grants in order to have money to do programming--there was never enough money for things like tutoring and supports (ADA required) for students with disabilities, mentoring, service learning, etc. My AmeriCorps program alone brought in \$250k of scholarship money for our students.

Five years later, I see my leaving ASU as saving my life. It was a toxic environment. My inputs were not appreciated, or perversely were simultaneously required and yet scorned. I gave a lot of loyalty to that place, and it was not reciprocated. I was made promises which were broken, such as getting a raise if I pursued a terminal degree. I fulfilled my promise to write my dissertation project about ASU and did my field work in the valley in the fall of 2017. After I defended my dissertation in 2019, I emailed it to everyone whom I interviewed for the project. The only feedback I got back from anyone at ASU came from someone who said they were deeply disappointed that I had chosen to characterize the university--I used a pseudonym in the manuscript--in a negative light.

I also need to say that the campus police department extorted \$250 from me during those weeks. As you probably recall, my house was across the street catty-corner from the McDaniel building. As I was cleaning out my house, I threw a few empty 5 gallon buckets (clean meadmaking equipment) and trash into that dumpster in the parking lot, which is technically illegal dumping according to the campus police chief. I repeatedly asked for the police chief to give me an email or something explaining what the \$250 was for, and not getting an answer and yet feeling intimidated, figured it was safer just to pull out my checkbook and be done with it. To be a smartass, I wrote in the memo line: "paid in full". He never deposited that check.