

W&L After Class: The Lifelong Learning Podcast

With Guest Sascha Goluboff

Episode Transcript

Ruth Candler

Welcome to W&L After Class: The Lifelong Learning Podcast. I'm your host Ruth Candler. Our guest today is Sascha Goluboff, associate professor of cultural anthropology. After earning her master's degree and PhD in anthropology from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, Sascha conducted ethnographic research in Russia and Azerbaijan, for scholarship includes a wide range of interest, including Jewish revival movements and race and ethnicity in the United States. Sascha has been a faculty member at W&L since 1999, including a five-year stint as chair of the Sociology and Anthropology Department. Sascha has also served as Director of the Office of Community Based Learning since 2020. Sascha thanks for joining us today.

Sascha Goluboff

Thanks for having me.

Ruth Candler

So, let's begin with a simple question. What is ethnography?

Sascha Goluboff

Yeah, ethnography. So, when I talk to students about what cultural anthropology is, I say what I learned from my advisor in graduate school, and he said, to make the strange, familiar and the familiar, strange. And so, the idea is to maybe if you come across something, a ritual or an idea or concept you're not familiar with, first, it seems strange. But then if you read ethnography, which is sort of the detailed observations and participation of an anthropologist, either from the community or from outside the community to explain it, then after a while, it seems sort of normal and natural, you get to understand why people do it and the reasoning behind it. And then once that happens, then I really encourage students to think about some of our practices and practices they do. And if we can apply an ethnographic lens to it, they can see well, and then comparing it to the practices they just learned about, they can see, "well, maybe the way we do things isn't so normal and natural." It's just a product of culture, too. And so, bringing those two experiences together really leads people to be reflective about why we do it, and what we do and ways to make things more humane for everybody.

Ruth Candler

What a great explanation. Thank you, I love the way your advisor explained it as well. So, of all the places in the world, you chose to begin your career in ethnography and Moscow during the mid-1990s. Were you a little nervous? What made you venture off to the Soviet Union right after it fell apart?

Sascha Goluboff

Um, I was interested in Russia, because my father's father came from Ukraine. And I had discovered also that on my mother's side of the family, there was a series of photos that my great aunt had. And one of those photos on the back it was wouldn't written in Russian, to her daughter who was immigrating to United States. And I was the only one who could read it in the family because everybody else didn't know Russian. So, for me, learning Russian, I started in high school. And it was a way to connect with my past. Both my grandparents didn't talk much about the past. I mean, that's the way things were done back then they were really focused on assimilating and mainstreaming themselves, not like it is today are people really celebrating their cultural differences. So, I was just interested in that. And then I was able to go to Russia when I was an undergrad at Colgate University. It was a study abroad. And it was the Soviet Union then. And I just fell in love with it. I liked the experience of being in another place another culture and not knowing what to do next, just sort of freestyling it.

Ruth Candler

I call that brave more than freestyling.

Sascha Goluboff

Theology, I really enjoyed doing excavations and working in the lab. But in terms of thinking about that society, it was based on reading and my own imagination. And then here, I was entering into a different world, especially when it was the Soviet Union, because we were cut off there wasn't the internet back then. So, we were cut off from America. And we just had to experience life as lived there. So, I just love that, love the challenge and the thrill. And I wanted to go back.

Ruth Candler

So, after you completed your dissertation, you conducted your research while living in a remote village in northern Azerbaijan. What was it like to live in that environment as an outsider?

Sascha Goluboff

Right, so, I had become interested in the population of Jews living there, they're called mountain Jews and their languages Juhuri, which is they speak a dialect of Persian, they're part of the Persian Empire, and then were spread up there over time. I met a lot of great folks from that community in Moscow and I was just really interested in going back to the one remaining village in Azerbaijan. A lot of people had left due to economic hardship; that one village remained and some people would stay there and others would come back on holidays. So, I met somebody who used to live in the village, and she contacted a family who could host me. And it was very unusual for an outsider to live with a host family, because that community is really close. And everybody knows everybody. And also, because I was a grown woman, I couldn't live in a family with any grown men, because I wasn't a relative. So, the family they picked to host me was a mom and her. She was a widow and her three young children, so I lived with them twice. I live with them for one winter. And then I came back in the summer to finish my research. Once I took a taxi from the capital, Baku, and he dropped me off, and I had originally had gone to Indiana University has a great summer language program. And I went there to learn Azeri. But I took it over the summer. And then I didn't go back until the following winter. So, I had forgotten some things. So, when I got to the village, I was told that the family members there didn't speak their native language, Judeo-Tat, they didn't speak it, but when I got to the family, they did speak it. And that's all

they spoke amongst themselves. So luckily, my Azeri was really weak, but the daughter knew Russian. So, I was able to converse with her. And then I started to create a notebook with different words, so it can help me communicate. It was isolating, but fascinating.

Ruth Candler

So, the experience sounds challenging on many fronts. Did you make any friends while you were there? Or was anyone that you could lean on for support? I mean, you talked about this daughter who spoke Russian and you could communicate that way. But if you don't have internet, and, you know,

Sascha Goluboff

By that point, I had bought a phone. And actually, somebody lent me a phone and I got one of those SIM cards. I had made a friend in Baku, and so I was able to talk to her. But no, besides that I was basically on my own.

Ruth Candler

So, you had completed your dissertation, and you were living in this remote village? What exactly were you studying?

Sascha Goluboff

So, one of the things that really fascinated me about the mountain Jews was their ability to hold on to certain traditions, even through the Soviet times. So, one of the main traditions that you see among a lot of peoples who live in that area, as well as around the Mediterranean was our extremely long and detailed death rituals. And women play a big part in those rituals. Women in the role in the mountain Jewish communities, there's a special woman as her role is to gather all the women who are mourning the death of an individual, gather them in the room, with the usually with the coffin of the individual. And she reminds them of all the hardships they've faced all the deaths they've had in their individual families, so that they mourn collectively for the dead. So, her job is the tear maker, it's called girjesox, she makes the tears and she has to know the family history of each individual person in the village. So, I was interested in that.

Ruth Candler

So, you mentioned that you had studied Russian and Azeri languages at Indiana University's language workshop. These are difficult languages; did learning these come naturally to us since you had studied Russian in high school?

Sascha Goluboff

No. I studied Russian in high school, I also studied French. So when I got to college to Colgate I had to choose. And I thought since I suffered so much with Russian I should continue like what, what is that about?

Ruth Candler

Well you also had that family connection. Right?

Sascha Goluboff

Yeah. It's all about suffering the long cold winter. So, I chose that. And you know, they say with Russians, the alphabets are hardest, but it's really not. It's every word changes its form depending on where it is in the language.

Ruth Candler

Can you give us an example?

Sascha Goluboff

Oh, it's been a really long time since I spoke Russian but if it's part of a preposition or it's a direct object, the word changes and words can either be masculine, feminine or neutral. So, you need to know all the different versions. With Azeri it's a Turkish language and so the verb goes at the end of the sentence. So, for me that summer was a really brain trip trying to force myself to put the verb at the end. And also, there are a couple of letters that were hard for me to pronounce this sort of the "oh" with the umlaut sort of "euu" sound and I remember my teacher saying like, just pretend you're about to kiss somebody.

Ruth Candler

I wish I had a picture of that so that we can post it on the show notes because that was fabulous.

Sascha Goluboff

So, it was my mouth would be really tired by the end of the day and my brain would be fried. But I would I just spent a lot of time studying, it's a lot about repetition, writing out words, repeating words, it never really never came easy to me.

Ruth Candler

Later, you became interested in Race and Ethnicity in the United States. Tell us more about that transition.

Sascha Goluboff

So, I got married, and our first son was born, and I really did not want to bring him to Azerbaijan. I know people do that really brave anthropologists who will travel with babies to different countries, but I didn't really feel comfortable with that. So, I had moved. We had bought a house in Brownsburg, Virginia, which is not that far from here. And one of the things that really fascinated me about that area was there were two churches, there was the New Providence Presbyterian, which is a mostly a white congregation. And then there was Asbury United Methodist, that was mostly a black congregation. And it's a really small town. I'm from Philly. So, I just was really interested in why the town had two churches and just chatting with people at Asbury really nice open people and just became interested in the idea of a place, a home church, that people would go to every summer to reconnect. And this notion of home place that a lot of those families had been there for generations. So that was a really sacred space for them, just the town itself, and the church and the cemetery. So, I was able to get some fellowship, money to transition in my project, to studying that, that topic.

Ruth Candler

What great timing, right. So, we'll return to your local research in a little bit. But for now, I'd like to talk about your teaching. You've already enjoyed quite a fascinating career. And I'd like to turn to another unusual chapter, which your time in prison. Let me rephrase that, your, your time spent teaching in prison. Sorry about that. Yeah. I understand that this experience has become part of your coursework at W&L, a new program called Inside Out, would you tell us more about that program?

Sascha Goluboff

Right. So that program Inside Out, started at Temple University. And it was a way for faculty to bring students into the carceral setting to learn alongside incarcerated men and women. It's a really revolutionary process, because you literally turn the world inside out, right, so. So, university students enter into the world of the prison, and they connect with inside folks, as fellow students on an even sort of playing field, so to speak. So, I wanted to teach at one of the local prisons here, and I was really inspired by the work of Howard Pickett and Jeff Schatten, and it was taught at Augusta Correctional, but I felt that I needed more training. So, I signed up for the inside out training. And this was pre-pandemic, they had trains across the country, and I was trained in Detroit. And the way that trainings worked then was they had chapters of guys who had gone through the program, who, in the prisons, and they had these working groups there. And so, we were able to go into the maximum-security prison in Detroit. Macomb Prison right outside of Detroit, and the guys inside basically taught us how to teach. So, we were taught by incarcerated individuals how to teach incarcerated and non-incarcerated students.

Ruth Candler

So, what did that look like? How is that different?

Sascha Goluboff

Well, first of all, for me, I seem to pick things that make me nervous. So yeah, so death and dying makes me nervous. So, what do I do, I go off and study that being in a prison makes me nervous. So, it's, it's that it was the first time I've ever been in a prison. So that the process of entering into the prison, and then meeting guys there who I've never met prisoners before, but they all lined up, and we interacted with them one on one as equals. So that was really eye-opening experience for me, I really enjoyed and really appreciated the humanistic perspective of that and breaking down barriers. And so basically, we spent a day and a half at the prison and they did some icebreakers with us. They talked to us about ways to formulate projects we had, we had worked previously, before we went on a project, we presented the project to them. We had somebody join us to help us flesh out the project. And so, we did some final presentations.

Ruth Candler

Well, just getting back to what you said about prison makes you nervous. I'm not sure there's a person out there that would not be nervous by going inside the walls. But you spent a lot of time inside the prison walls with people who have committed a variety of crimes. And I can't imagine what a strange experience Since this must have been. The Inside Out program now involves W&L students, how do you help them prepare?

Sascha Goluboff

Right? So, Inside Out program has a particular protocol for how to get students ready. And the first thing is that they have to go through, as all students would, a training at Augusta Correctional. So, they have a day where they're trained about what to do and what not to do. And so, the prison has its particular rules for people to come. And of course, all the students and myself have to have background checks and everything like that. But more than that, I think what I try to do is provide, I would say, a model for how to interact. The Inside Out Pedagogy is very much hands-off. And so, we set up people to have conversations amongst themselves. And we're just sort of like the guide on the side. And so, empowering them to take on the material and to connect with one another. So, the first day, one of the things I did was when we had we were in the classroom, and then the inside guys were coming in, I greeted them individually, shook their hands, gave them information and just tried to show students that we're all equal, and treated them equally as, you know, as possible. I think that goes a long way. And we also a great thing we did is part of the inside that program is the last day is a celebration, where we invite administrators from W&L and ACC to come and the students give presentations together and give a testimonial of how important the project and the class was to them. So, they give it really, they really get a sense of pride and ownership.

Ruth Candler

Can you share some of some of the responses? Like what are the benefits to students? And how did they, how did they respond?

Sascha Goluboff

One of the things I was really fascinated by which actually I gave a presentation on this was the idea that talking with inside students, they said that the best part of the experience was a felt that they had had the chance to feel humane, again. That they were full people, not just offenders. And for the W&L students, it was really surprising to hear that it was the constraints of the situation where we had to go through checks, you know, go through scans that couldn't bring anything in but a notebook and a pen that they were cut off from the outside world and they could actually feel like themselves. And they didn't have to have any extra sort of buzzing in their head about keeping up with Instagram or checking their email. And they felt that all their sort of class or sort of group allegiances fell away, and they could just be themselves in that class at that moment, and connecting which they don't really get that experience anywhere else. So, in a way, it was only within the realm of that course inside the prison that they felt free enough to be themselves and to connect with others, which is seems contrary but actually makes sense.

Ruth Candler

So, I'm curious, do students share how this experience may have changed their perceptions of people who are incarcerated?

Sascha Goluboff

Well, I think it has. One of the differences of the Inside Out program, what we're taught as facilitators is never asked what crimes the inside guys have, or women have been incarcerated for. The point is that, the idea is that once you know that, then you can't see them any other way. And it blocks your ability to connect. So, when I never we never asked them what their crimes are, we don't expect them to tell us

and so the students don't know, the students just know them as their classmate. Because of that, they have a better sense of get some really thinking about what our justice system is like, and why do we punish people in certain ways we punish them. It really brings up questions of forgiveness. Is it possible to forgive? Is it possible to change? And I think what it really teaches them is that we all have a connection to each other as fellow humans, which transcends any other differences. So, students, most students leave with a sense of social justice and wanting to make a positive change. And that they have come to know people who they thought were others actually very close as friends.

Ruth Candler

Are there any are they allowed to stay in touch after the program ends?

Sascha Goluboff

No, they're not, they're not allowed to stay in touch. They originally in the Inside Out program, we're supposed to call each other by first names only. But ACC rules are by last name. So, some students actually, if they had a really unique last name, they might decide to use a different last name. The point is that the inside students should not be able to contact the outside students and vice versa. The only contact that is to, me personally, if they inside students would send me a letter, let's say, I could respond to that but not pass it on to the outside students.

Ruth Candler

Thank you for sharing that. Bringing this conversation back home for a moment. Tell us more about the research with the church communities in Brownsburg and Rockbridge County that you mentioned earlier.

Sascha Goluboff

Eight, so, I had they were gracious enough to allow me to attend their meetings and go to church services. I was really, really fascinated by the idea of Home Church and connection to home. One of the things that I started to do is do some background research on individual families. Because as I say, once you get to know people, you realize that they're related somehow, it's a small community, a lot of people moving in and then staying in the area. And so, if you go back far enough, people are married to somebody who's married to somebody, right? It's just the way it is in small towns and people that have been there a long time. So, I was just really fascinated about that and started to do some research on that. Then I went back and I looked at the records for New Providence church. And what the narrative was, is that after emancipation, former Black members of New Providence Church left to join Asbury, they found at Asbury. So, looking at church records and doing some research back into families, I was able to find out that those black families who stayed after emancipation, a lot of them stayed and worked for their former enslavers.

Ruth Candler

Wow.

Sascha Goluboff

So that was quite fascinating to me as to what the reasoning and of course, we don't know the reasoning behind it. But there are lots of different hypotheses.

Ruth Candler

Would you share a few of those?

Sascha Goluboff

Sure. One is that it was really important for them to stay in the area, those that wanted to stay love the area, they felt connected. And it's hard to find work, especially if you've been enslaved, those who are skilled laborers can do that. But others are domestics and work in agriculture. And so, my hunch was that a lot of folks decided that they knew what their sort of former slavers expected. And they knew how to handle them. They knew their expectations, how to work within the system. And so, they decided to do that, and work within the system, because it made the most sense, economically, and it probably made the most sense politically in terms of keeping a low profile.

Ruth Candler

So, this research on enslaved families in the Brownsburg community introduced you to different methods of storytelling. And it's funny how one thing leads to another. In 2021, you earned an MFA in Writing from Pacific University. Was it your focus on enslave communities that sparked your interest in creative writing? Or was it something different?

Sascha Goluboff

It was definitely that. Once I had done some research into former, you know, so once I've done research to find out that folks were working for those who were formerly enslaved them, I tried to really understand the reasoning behind it. And I read a lot of socio-cultural theories. I was trying to write ethnographic, anthropological articles and I felt sort of stale, it felt didn't feel, I published a couple but it didn't feel like I was really getting at it. One of the things that really stood out to me as I was reading over a court case where this enslaver named Preston Trotter had decided that when he died, he wanted to his free slaves. But then the Civil War happened before he died. It's his people that he enslaved were leaving. And he wrote how he felt betrayed by them, that how can they do this to him? How could they leave him alone when he had done so much for them? And after he had died, his widow decided that she shouldn't have to pay any of the former slaves who ran off because this was the idea that he was going to leave them some money and so forth. And so, in the end, the court decided to award a certain amount of money to two former and enslaved people who had stayed alongside him and one got like a couple dollars, I guess. And people had come forth to testify about how Preston Trotter his friends talked about how he felt betrayed. So, I've been really interested in the anthropology of emotions with lots of research, even on the philosophy of emotions, anthropology of emotions, psychology of emotions, but I really wanted to explore the inner workings of relationships get deep into that. So, I turned to fiction as a way to do that with giving myself license to imagine in ways that I couldn't, and that just opened the floodgates. I was taking some writing courses at Writer House up in Charlottesville. I had great writing mentors there. I wrote a book based on research I had done but at the time, I was going through divorce and having a midlife crisis. So, I guess instead of going out and buying a fancy sports car, I just got some student loans and went back to school, I guess is a good way to

Ruth Candler

A little more practical, I guess.

Sascha Goluboff

Yeah. So, I had first I thought it wasn't possible to do this. But then somebody brought my attention to these low residency programs where you go for a couple of weeks, every six months. And then the rest of the time is through correspondence with your advisor and Pacific University was one of the places I applied, I got a little bit of a fellowship from my first year, and I enjoyed, really enjoyed, Oregon going out at West and so different from here. So that was fun. And then the pandemic happened. So, I wasn't able to finish in person, but I did finish virtually.

Ruth Candler

So, it's really historic fiction, when you're using your research, right? And,

Sascha Goluboff

Well, that's how it started. But as I brought my book project to my advisor, she at one point sent me a list of, you know, A through Z, what's wrong with this project? For so many reasons, and I felt very overwhelmed. So, she suggested Why don't you switch to the short story, because you can learn a lot about how to craft something small and it's doable. And in the process. People said, "hey, you know, you're sort of funny, you've got you have some sense of humor, why don't you try some contemporary stuff." And then I did that, and it seemed to go over well, and, and so I've moved in that direction, too.

Ruth Candler

So how much time are you spending writing fiction now?

Sascha Goluboff

Well, I'm working on a project right now. I have a mentor from AWP, which is the Association of Writers and Writing Professionals. And I'm working on a novel draft. I won't say what it is just in case it doesn't work out,

Ruth Candler

I won't ask.

Sascha Goluboff

So, we meet regularly and I have a chapter due a week, right now

Ruth Candler

Sounds like it's easier little bites instead of

Sascha Goluboff

It is and she's pushing me to not go back and revise myself into a hole, just keep moving forward, which is the problem I've had in the past. It's been really fun to connect with her once a week. Joanne Smith, by the way, shout out to her, connect with her once a week, and just brainstorm the story. It's, I can really see the appeal of writing as a team because you can just bounce ideas off each other. And it gets really great. I've also done some writing workshops. In the summer Kenyon Review at Kenyon College has a great one where it's, it's generative. So. you go in and they give you you're put into groups and your instructor gives you a theme and you have the next 24 hours to turn it over and bring it

in share it with the class. The class really loosened me up. And the ability to produce and to know everybody's in this the same situation. And we're just sharing raw work, and it's quite invigorating.

Ruth Candler

It sounds very high pressure. If you've only got 24 hours to turn it around.

Sascha Goluboff

And then we're supposed to read in front of the entire group, one of our new pieces. So, for five minutes, but it's been good, I really enjoy it.

Ruth Candler

So, let's change gears a bit now and discuss your current role with the Office of Community Based Learning. What is the mission of community-based learning?

Sascha Goluboff

Right, so community-based learning. The office about four years ago started by Tammy Hellwig was Mark Conner, Provost, Mark Conner, who decided to create an office that would help faculty connect with community partners to create enhanced course experiences. And this is a lot what is happening in the Shepherd Program. They connect with a lot of key partners, students do a lot of volunteering, but that's basically within the poverty realm. And so, the idea was that they couldn't really work with faculty who wanted to maybe do something outside of that. The idea was that this office would be there to connect faculty and students with community partners. And what's really exciting about community-based learning is that it's a reciprocal and mutually beneficial process. So, it's not as if faculty are going in and say, "I want to do X" and then the committee partner, it's like, "okay, well, I guess you can come here and study." Yes, it's not that it's actually community partner and the faculty get together and talk about common interests. And through those conversations, they can create a project, or ideas for, say, student volunteering that benefit the community partner, as well as the faculty in their objectives for the course and the students and the sort of professional and academic development.

Ruth Candler

Could you paint a picture of one of those projects and what that looks like?

Sascha Goluboff

I created a new course called Intro to Computer Based Learning, CBL 100, I was really interested in exploring race and racial history in the institution, as well as in the city and I met with several different constituents. And the idea that came out and it was students and folks in the community was maybe doing something called, the students called it "The Unheard Voices of Black Lexington." So, it would teach students about uncover the racial history, part of the racial history of Washington and Lee, at least connection to the community. But also highlight some histories that as white folks in the community we don't know about. And one of the main one was all the black businesses that existed during the time of segregation. If you think about downtown Lexington, and if you think about where Haywoods is right now, it's sort of down the street going down a hill, that was a black business district. And then behind that Diamond Hill, Green Hill was a black residential area, which a lot of that is, a lot of those homes have been demolished because of VMI, you know, construction of, of their core trading

facility but sort of around there. And looking at a lot of the documents that Washington we had to from the Woods, Walker Woods family, a prominent business owner in the area. They owned that house, that's if you look up Henry Street, land on that big white house at the top that was their house that they had on that. So, from that we were able to glean a roughly around 10 different businesses, black owned businesses, we're able to find out more information, get pictures, and I worked with two students the summer before the class started Tunisia, Moya green and Kim Ghazi and we went to the courthouse and looked up deeds. So, by the time the class had started, actually, that was in the fall sorry we did in it the fall. And by the time the classes start in the winter, we had files for every student to work together to put together a narrative and pictures about the black owned business. And then I worked with Brandon Busey in IT and I created a digital map. So, I had connected with, mostly with, the Rockbridge Historical Society, he was always Eric Wilson's always doing interesting projects on black history. And also, I connected with the Regional Tourism Board. And they wanted something for the Lexington Visitor Center, they wanted to highlight these histories in a way that was packable and manageable. So, what we created, what the students created was this digital map, which is then linked to the Historical Society website and also the visitor center. In the visitor center, we also created these little pamphlets with information they could the QR code, they can actually go and find the map and then do a tour walking tour on their own. And the following year, I worked with Lexington city council, Architectural Review Board to create plaques to go on some of those buildings, houses, businesses, and that was when students interviewed some community members about their experiences, which then became a podcast that was also linked to the map.

Ruth Candler

And you talked about the Walker Woods family. Is that where the Walker Program came from?

Sascha Goluboff

Yeah. So, the Walker Program was inspired by the Walkers and named after the Walker family. And they owned the Walker Woods Meat Market, which is now Macado's.

Ruth Candler

And do you work at all with the Walker Program?

Sascha Goluboff

Right, so, the Walker Program, we are connected, the universities connected with them, a lot of students in different programs have worked with them and a lot of times, working alongside entrepreneurs in getting them to think broadly about getting the word out about their businesses, so sort of advertising and digital stuff.

Ruth Candler

I'm realizing we should probably take a step back and I'll ask you to explain what the Walker Program is for our listeners who may not be local to Lexington.

Sascha Goluboff

Stephanie Wilkinson started the Walker Program as a way to help, I say, assist entrepreneurs of color in getting their businesses started in terms of helping them apply for grants, to get seed money,

bringing in expertise from the law school and the undergrad, to get seminars about the legal aspects of owning a business, and how to do accounting, to help people get a leg up and get support from a community. And they've had several different rounds, and they're very successful. So that's, you know, that's one way that these courses can happen. But there are other ways. So, whether it's a project or there's learning side by side is another way that happens. And that happened with the Augusta Correctional classes. You know, Professor Pickett and Professor Schatten, and I've taught classes that fall into CBL category. There're also ways that students volunteer their time in local service organizations, and then bring that experience back into the classroom to reflect on how that experience has enhanced and/or challenged their understanding of the reading. So, it really brings a real-world aspect to the students learning and I think one of the best things I think students get out of it is a sense of connection with Lexington. Lexington is so small, but it's really surprising how much they don't know about Lexington don't even venture down the hill. So, they feel a lack of connection. And this is not just like a connection that's sort of ideological or sort of, sort of fantasy connection, but it's actually like they meet actual people and have actual conversations and connect and do tasks together for some greater good and that really gives a lot of give students a lot of excitement, a lot of satisfaction and feeling like that their time was well spent here in Washington and Lee.

Ruth Candler

I can see where that would create a deeper connection with the area. Before we wrap up our conversation, I'd like to talk a little bit about your life when you're not on campus. So, you have two children, Liam and Aiden, would you tell us a little bit about them?

Sascha Goluboff

Right. So, Aiden is 10. He is a powerhouse of imagination. And Liam is 17. Liam is interested in engineering, but he also has high functioning autism. And their dad is Alan MacRae, he's in the math department. So, we got divorced a while back. So, we share custody of them and raise them together and share parenting.

Ruth Candler

You share that you homeschooled Liam from kindergarten through fifth grade? What was that like?

Sascha Goluboff

Right, so, Liam was a late talker. He didn't, by the time he was three and a half, he wasn't saying much. And because of high functioning autism, he didn't really have the skills to cope with stress. So, it was pretty obvious that he wasn't going to do well at school, and my mom is a teacher. As they say, in the south, bless her heart, she guided me and said "you can do this, you can homeschool him" and what I found is that I was able to create lessons and luckily in Virginia, what you can do if you're homeschooling, there are two different ways to go about it. One is while there's you can join a cooperative, you can do it on your own. And for like, they want to know how the progress is going. So, you they can either, the student can take a test or you can have an outside evaluator come and see how they're doing, you can write a report. So, we went with that. And I was able to figure out how well, how best to learn in small chunks with breaks. And so, I just divided up small chunks with breaks. And the way Allen and I worked it, is that I would teach here at Washington and Lee in the morning, professors have flexibility, and he'd teach in the afternoon so he would stay home with Liam in the

morning. Driving him in the minivan. I'd meet him at a garage at noon and we'd switch places. I drive Liam back. I do my stuff for school at home as well as homeschool him and somehow managed to survive having kids.

Ruth Candler

So, you had your hands full. Since you have your MFA. Let's talk about creative writing for a minute. Do you have a favorite author?

Sascha Goluboff

Oh my gosh. Right now, I say right now because I always have a favorite author depending on what I'm reading. So, Charlie Jane Anders has written a three part Sci Fi series. I think the first one is, the second one is "Dream Bigger than Heartbreak." And I read the first two, I'm in the middle of the second one. I really enjoy it. I like the Sci Fi, I was a big Trekkie fan growing up. I like alternative worlds, different ways of being and I just love books that just blow my mind. So, it was a great one.

Ruth Candler

On that, one that will blow your mind. Do you have a favorite? You can't, you can't select what you just talked about.

Sascha Goluboff

Yeah. Philip K. Dick, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?", which was the basis for the Blade Runner movies, but it's a lot different. But I really like thinking about what it'd be like if we had androids who look like us and act like us and what the problematics of that would be and how we interact with them. So, I really enjoy that. Even though it has its problems, because it was written a long time ago. But it's a good book.

Ruth Candler

Interesting for an anthropologist is select that. So, what is the best piece of advice for writers that you've heard?

Sascha Goluboff

I think the best piece of advice for writers is what I also heard from my dissertation advisor, which is sit your butt down in the chair and do it. Just do it. That itself is hard enough. Just keep just sort of like Dory in Finding Nemo. Just keep swimming. Just keep writing. Just keep writing and eventually something good will come out of it. Try to put your ego, just don't listen to your ego, put it somewhere else.

Ruth Candler

I hope it's okay that I share this but you also dabble in improv and perform with a group in Charlottesville. Who's your favorite comedian?

Sascha Goluboff

Well, I've liked Nick Nemeroff, he just passed recently, but I really like his work because you feel like you know what he's going to say. And at the last minute, he'll like switch it and it'll change your

impression of exactly what we were just talking about. And I just love those switches in perspective. So, I'd say his work is really great.

Ruth Candler

Right, so, you've been onstage a bit?

Sascha Goluboff

Well, sort of. It's an improv class. It's through big blue door and I did improv one and we did a show and my kids came, my partner Mike came as well. That was really nerve wracking. I'm improv two. We're preparing for our next show. And then if I still stick with it'll be improv three and then the teacher says, Joel says maybe we'll go to around in the summer, but I don't know.

Ruth Candler

Oh, what fun! Are there any embarrassing moments?

Sascha Goluboff

Every time is an embarrassing moment.

Ruth Candler

What is it with you in these massive challenges? How about telling us a joke?

Sascha Goluboff

No.

Ruth Candler

But it's improv right

Sascha Goluboff

That is different, that is stand up. Improv is when you have to join what, somebody starts the scene and then you have to join in, and you have to build off them. And if you start to tell jokes they call it, you know, showboating and not to do, you're supposed to do that as a team.

Ruth Candler

Okay, that I did not, I did not know. Alright, so you have, I'd like to end with a story of your experience with a Ouija board here on campus.

Sascha Goluboff

Right, so, I taught a capstone for Anthropology Concentrators in sociology and anthropology. And what the capstone is, is all the students come up with their own projects. So, I had a student who was really interested in students understanding of spirituality and sort of otherworldly phenomenon. Now, part of anthropology is what I didn't mention is there sort of the main method is participant observation. So, one is that you observe what people are doing, but you also participate. And so, she had lots of observations, plus interviews, we had to come up with some kind of participatory exercise, because that was part of the class. So, I suggested "Why don't you do a Ouija board?"

Ruth Candler

So, this idea came from you.

Sascha Goluboff

It did, it did. Now her parents were, again, were not in favor of this kind of line of investigation. And so, she knew if she ordered a Ouija board on Amazon, they would find out because so she made her own Ouija board, she looked online to find that out. And we started off in Newcomb Hall, I had invited some people to join us. Some who were skeptical as well, some students and a friend of mine came. So, the idea of a Ouija board is it set up and then you have this little like planchette or something, and everybody holds on to it. And the idea is that the spirit would move your, move everybody's hands around to different words, different. And he asked questions. So, we tried it in Newcomb Hall. And she had read the script that you go offline. And we try and we try and nothing happened. We just all just sitting there with all of our hands and granted, like, maybe like somebody's hand is moving it right. You don't know. That's the point. Right? So, I said, "Why don't we go to Payne Hall" because I have heard stories about Payne Hall being haunted. So, we went to Payne Hall and immediately that planchette thing started flying around the board. Afterwards, everybody was freaked out.

Ruth Candler

And the skeptic?

Sascha Goluboff

He was less skeptical and very silent afterwards. So yes, I do believe that something's going on in Payne Hall. The fact that we tried Newcomb and nothing happened, the same group went to Payne Hall and something happened. So, you won't catch me there at night.

Ruth Candler

No, No. I have heard stories about Payne Hall. Well, Sascha, thank you so much for sharing that story and for joining us today. It was a great conversation.

Sascha Goluboff

Thank you for taking the time and I appreciate your asking me.

Ruth Candler

Thank you and our listening audience for tuning in today. We hope you'll visit our website wlu.edu/lifelong. Where you'll find our show notes for today as well as a truly great selection of other W&L Lifelong Learning opportunities. Take a look and until next time, let's remain together not unmindful of the future.