

## **Going There Episode 3: Pronouns and Freedom**

Recorded February, 2020

Released March, 2020

A Lake Superior College podcast exploring campus mindfulness, equity, and community hosted with Tara McCoy, Steve Dalager, and Dan Riihiluoma.

In this episode, LGBTQ+ Club president Mystic Raddatz explores finding community on campus and in the Twin Ports. This is the third in our series exploring LSC's tagline, "Out Community's College."

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Mystic Raddatz - I used to be that kid in high school, who if I hadn't met these certain people I would have probably been doing drugs. We want visibility, we definitely want to educate. Just knowing that it was there, kind of helped me feel a little bit more comfortable that I could come to somebody. My English professor asks immediately for a pronoun. Yeah, I do feel free.

Tara McCoy - I'm Tara McCoy and I'm riding out the COVID-19 virus quarantine watching a lot of Harry Potter.

Steve Dalager - I'm Steve Dalager and I'm in a bunker with 100 packages of dried mango, my favorite.

Dan Riihiluoma - I'm Dan Riihiluoma and I'm quickly going mad waiting for the world to re-start.

Tara - And although we're recording facing over the phone we're not gonna let the virus stop us from

Steve - Going

Tara - There

Steve - This time on Going There, we'll interview Mystic Raddatz another LSC student who happens to be president of the LGBTQ+ club.

Dan - Like before we're interested in Mystic's experience finding a community on campus.

Tara - You're going to hear some important information about pronoun usage.

Steve - Which is exciting for English teachers

Dan - And get a real coming out story

Steve - Some technical footnotes to this episode are Tara, you weren't there were you?

Tara - I was not there, no. But at the same time I was, hashtag technology

Dan - I still can't believe you phoned it in from Arizona.

Tara - It was Minnesota in the winter, I think I can justify going there.

Dan - Eh, fair enough.

Steve - Also we interviewed Mystic a few weeks before the Coronavirus shut us down.

Dan - By now were practicing some extreme social distancing, the campus shut down.

Tara - So, that explains this conference call. Uh wait, Steve are you recording this?

Steve - Mmmm maybe if I hit record.

Dan - Oh geeze. Let's just get to Mystic's interview.

Steve - Okay, here we go there.

Mystic - My name is Mystic and my favorite ice cream flavor is Cotton Candy.

Steve - Tell us a little about yourself, like where you grew up and how you got to Lake Superior College.

Mystic - Ohh that's a rough question. I grew up in five different states. So, it's a little bit interesting.

Steve - Can you name those states?

Mystic - Mississippi, New Jersey, Virginia, Duluth, which that's Minnesota, and then Superior, which is in Wisconsin.

Tara - Mystic do you want to elaborate on why you moved so much?

Mystic - My dad was in the military. So I had to move around with him a lot.

Steve - And how did you end up at Lake Superior College?

Mystic - I went to Superior High School. Basically I was told LSC is the cheapest school to go to.

Steve - All right, cheap is good.

Mystic - Yeah

Dan - Cheap is good

Mystic - But I've actually learned that it's really nice here.

Steve - And how long have you been at Lake Superior College?

Mystic - I've been here for three years, three and a half.

Steve - And what is your goal as Lake Superior College

Mystic - My goal at the moment is to finish my LPN program and eventually, I don't know if this really applies to LSC specifically, but I want to go and move up the chain and get towards medical school and go into surgery.

Steve - As a Doctor?

Mystic - Yeah

Steve - And when do you expect to finish?

Mystic - Spring 2021 About a year and a half from now.

Steve - How would you describe yourself?

Mystic - I guess I'm kind. I think I'm a little bit funny. I don't know, I care about a lot of people, which is probably why I'm going into the healthcare field. I'm the president of the LGBT club.

Steve - Did you begin the LGBTQ+ club?

Mystic - Basically! There just was not a club before. Our club was five people who met every week and we were lucky if maybe two people showed up. We didn't have any visibility on campus, so nobody even knew about us. I was looking for getting that club running and getting a lot more people to join and make it a bigger deal than it is, or than it was on campus.

Dan - And what is the size of the club now?

Mystic - Right now we're looking at about 5 or 6 people. But then again we still have to put up posters and have our student success day. And that's going to bring in a lot more people. Our last semester for student success day we had about 40 plus people sign up for the club and on our e-mail list too. So that's a huge improvement.

Steve - So you have an e-mail list with lots of people on it.

Mystic - Oh yeah.

Steve - But, as far as active people, attending meetings, maybe a fraction of those 40 people?

Mystic - Yeah, it's pretty small.

Tara - So Mystic what's the mission of your club?

Mystic - Our mission is mostly we want to feel included in campus activities. We want visibility. We definitely want to educate anybody who is willing to be educated about any LGBT issues. That's the majority of it.

Tara - So if I came to a meeting, what would I see?

Mystic - Mostly we're looking at just getting the club up and running again for the semester. So that's a lot of talking about what people are looking for in those meetings and also what kinds of events they want to look for on campus. So right now, we're moving towards actually starting to educate people and getting those topics to be able to start talking about those in the meetings instead of just all of the administrative stuff. Just kind of searching for topics that could interest a lot of people and really just focusing on things like that.

Steve - So Mystic is the focus to educate the greater campus about LGBTQ+ issues?

Mystic - Yup.

Steve - Not to educate the LGBTQ+ members of the club.

Mystic - If it educates them too that is also the goal because there are a lot of things where it can get really specific. There's gender pronoun terms that can get really specific and a lot of people just don't know how to go about that. So just kind of going over stuff like that.

Steve - Let's talk about that right now.

Mystic - Okay

Steve - And maybe we can all be educated. I'm well aware that there's been a lot of talk about how we use gender pronouns and I know I've heard a lot of people introduce themselves by saying they use specific pronouns. What can you tell us about that issue and is there an awareness of that issue on this campus?

Mystic - I'm not seeing a huge problem with it, it's more of people assume somebody's gender before they know. Thinking about maybe somebody who wants to have pronouns of they them. Somebody else who might have just met them will instead assume that maybe you are a specifically a girl or specifically a boy and they will use those pronouns instead of maybe asking for what you want to be called. One of the other problems too is when that does happen and when they are called a different gender than what they want, sometimes us in the LGBTQ community we don't exactly

Dan - You don't like calling out on it?

Mystic - Yeah, they don't call 'em out on it.

Dan - Right.

Mystic - Then it's a continuous battle with, well now I've gotta correct you 20 days later and then everybody's uncomfortable and they don't know how to use those terms.

Steve - So that said Mystic, what pronouns do you prefer?

Mystic - I prefer she her, they them sometimes, but mostly she her.

Tara - Can we go around and say our pronouns?

Steve - Let's do that

Mystic - Yeah!

Steve - I'm Steve Dalager and I prefer he, him, his pronouns.

Dan - I'm Dan Rioloma, I prefer he, him, his pronouns.

Tara - I'm Tara McCoy I prefer she, hers

Mystic - There is one where it starts with a z instead. So it's Zhe, and it's a combination of the two.

Dan - So zim?

Steve - No Z. Z

Mystic - Z yeah So there is Zhe, zis

Dan - Oh!

Mystic - another one is like zer. Using those, kind of combining the two. Most people don't generally use those, but it doesn't mean that it won't happen. This is pretty common It sounds strange when you first hear it and when you first see it.

Steve - I think the Z pronoun is sort of the same as the they pronoun but it's an attempt to

Dan - Middle ground there.

Steve - Grammarians kind of have a problem with the they pronoun because it's plural, but it's used in a singular sense. So the Z is an attempt to make a new pronoun

Mystic - Make it more normal.

Steve - that's singular but not gendered

Mystic - Exactly

Steve - But it hasn't really caught on.

Mystic - Yeah, which is why people are still using the they them.

Steve - They seems to have caught on and I think that's the way that we're gonna...

Tara - And I would just like to mention that the American Psychological Association's new manual came out and it now recognizes they them as singular or plural in scientific writing.

Mystic - That's amazing

Steve - Let's hear it for the APA!

Mystic - Woo hoo!

Dan - A P Yay!

Steve - So Mystic your goal is to maybe educate the general community about LGBTQ+ issues. That implies that there is

Dan - An issue

Steve - A lot of misunderstandings, not understanding, ignorance about LGBTQ+ issues on campus.

Mystic - There kind of is, we've definitely gotten better. We recently just had, we had a speaker come in and talk to all the teachers during their teacher conference day before class started. And that I think really benefited everyone and helped them be able to go about those situations, if somebody were to come to them.

Steve - Right, there was a training, it was optional, it was not mandatory. I will admit I did not attend that training. Which is bad on me, my excuse is I had a conflict at the time, but I probably should have tried to make time for that. But I know many of my colleagues did, but many of them also did not. It was a step in the right direction, but it wasn't comprehensive.

Mystic - Exactly. It was the first time around though, so we are definitely planning on having the speaker, we want her to come back and she actually might also be coming back to possibly do a breakout session for a student success day, possibly next semester.

Steve - Can you think of any positive experiences that you've had on campus in an academic setting where you've felt LGBTQ+ people were positively included in the community?

Mystic - Yeah actually my English professor Mr. Kapke he does this great thing at the beginning of every semester where he hands out a sheet of paper and it asks immediately for your name, your pronouns, which that kind of makes everybody feel a little bit more heard too, and then it just asks for one other thing that you want the teacher to know. I felt like that really just kind of opened the door for that conversation if it ever were to come about.

Steve - Now is this something that gets shared with the whole class or just with Mr. Kapke

Dan - No just...

Dan - He hands it to you and you hand it back to him and then that's it.

Mystic - Yup.

Steve - But it opens the door between you and the instructor. So that's a positive experience you had in a academic setting.

Mystic - Yup.

Steve - Have you had any uncomfortable experiences or negative experiences that you can remember?

Mystic - I guess the only real bad experience I've had on campus was, I was trying to actually promote the LGBT club, and this was when I hadn't actually restarted it yet, I tried to communicate and talk to some people about having more awareness of our club and it was almost like we got shut down. It was only me talking, so that didn't help. I didn't have anybody to back me up. Basically I was shut down and told that you know we're not really a club, it's not a huge issue on campus, we shouldn't have to worry about anything about this. That kind of didn't feel great.

Steve - So, Can you expand on that a little bit? Who was making you feel shut down?

Mystic - It was administration. I was speaking to someone about how we can build up the club and it was administration who I was talking to and that was the response I got and it didn't feel great.

Steve - So how did you get past that?

Mystic - Basically re-started the whole club when that semester was done and I actually had time to do so. But I made sure to go and talk to pretty specific people higher up in the chain. So I talked to president Rogers. I've talked to the new executive leader of the intercultural center, her name is Sarah Lyons. I talked to her already and she just started like three weeks ago, but she has been so helpful and already, you know, including us in everything and she wants to include us.

Steve - You've been here for three and a half years. Did you come directly out of Superior High School?

Mystic - I did, yeah.

Steve - The high school campus is different than the college campus

Mystic - Very different.

Steve - As far as an LGBTQ+ person, what can you say about that transition?

Mystic - The transition I will say when I was in high school I was not out yet, so it was very different for me. My high school they had a club, it was a GSA club, which is Gender and Sexuality Awareness, but it wasn't very active and it didn't really want to include a whole lot of people. It just like, whoever had started the club stayed in the club and that was it. And then anybody else like in the whole high school was very, we weren't a very open high school. I guess it's kind of different because in here there's no judgements right away. Or you come up here to LSC and it's like a fresh start. You don't have anything, any residual relationships. So I'm thinking about, 'cause I also went to the Superior Middle School, we knew people from there and that was the majority of my class in high school.

And when you grow up the way I did where my middle school class was also not very open to LGBT issues and LGBT people in general and then deal with that in high school again, doesn't really give you enough support to really make yourself be out there I guess.

Steve - When you were in high school you said you were not out.

Mystic - I wasn't

Steve - Was it culture there such that you were afraid to come out?

Mystic - Almost, yeah. It was very cliquy, which I mean most high schools are. It was almost in a sense, it was so cliquy that if you weren't in a clique you were extremely bullied. Our high school was pretty terrible about that. Even if you were in a clique you were bullied too but.

Steve - The LSC campus has a whole different culture

Mystic - It does, yeah.

Dan - There's not a lot of cliques.

Mystic - No.

Dan - If any, maybe sports teams.

Mystic - Yeah that's the only thing I've seen. And I mean sometimes I'll see even nursing students

Dan - Right. Who maybe we'll talk about RNs who are studying with LPNs who are not even in the same group and it's just kind of nice to see how they're willing to support them in that. Even though they've already passed that level.

Steve - Would you be willing to talk a little bit about your coming out? Did you..

Mystic - Tell you my story?

Steve - Yeah, tell us your coming out story

Mystic - Okay well like most people who come out I had to come out multiple times. There's some stages you go through. So there's coming out to your family, your immediate family, coming out to maybe your grandparents, and then coming out to your friends. So for me I actually came out to my grandparents first, which was a little bit different than most people's experiences. So my grandparents were very open-minded about a lot of things. One of my close cousins is actually transgender. And they've been very open about talking with them and, you know, being supportive. I was pretty sure that they were gonna be supportive of me too, except my only problem was my grandpa was a pastor. So, there's a little bit of hesitance there because you never know. I know exactly what his church is like, but two days before I actually came out to them I learned for the first time that his church was actually supportive of LGBT issues. And I never heard that in my entire life until two days before I did it. I think that really kind of segwayed me into actually being open about coming out to everybody else too because if somebody's gonna support me in this then I should be okay, hopefully. I mean, that's what my thinking was anyways. So, you know, and then there's the stage of coming out to your parents. They were also really supportive, which was nice. I found out that my mom is actually a bisexual and I never even knew. So you just never know. I mean, it's a very different experience when you actually do it. And then I came out to my friends last and I mean I really only had one best friend and I told her and she was very supportive. She was almost kind of questioning me on why I was the way I was. I'm a lesbian and if you're wondering what it is that I'm labeled as. So, I know I'm being really vague about everything.

Steve - Okay so you're the L.

Mystic - Yes..

Steve - Okay.

Mystic - The L in the whole long acronym. Yeah but when I came out to my best friend she was very supportive. She did have some questions 'cause she didn't understand it she's open about that, we used to have friends in high school that had also been LGBT, part of the LGBT community, but she just had never really thought of me as that. So, she had some questions about like why I thought I was that and how I was going about telling my parents and stuff like that. I was very straight with her because I think that helped.

Steve - Was that a joke you just said?

Mystic - You know, I think it was! I'm gonna take it, yeah.

Dan - I wasn't gonna say nothing, but I was like haha

Mystic - I definitely tried to do that

Dan - Okay good job.

Steve - Okay all right, nice job. Okay well thank you for sharing that 'cause that was a very personal journey that you went through. You came out you said after high school, so was that while you were a student at Lake Superior College?

Mystic - It was, yup.

Steve - Did anything happen associated with LSC that sort of encouraged you in that process

Dan - Or discourage you?

Mystic - I mean it did kind of encourage me that there was a LGBT club on campus even though it was really small. Just knowing that it was there kind of helped me feel a little bit more comfortable that I could come to somebody and talk to them about whatever issues I was having. Like if my parents hadn't accepted me for who I was. That kind of made me feel more comfortable to be able to come out.

Steve - Just knowing that there was an LGBTQ+ club on campus, even if you weren't part of it actually mattered.

Mystic - It was like right before I was part of it.

Steve - Right. You know you're a student here, do you work somewhere off campus?

Mystic - I do yup.

Steve - Where do you work?

Mystic - I work in Superior. I'm a driving instructor.

Dan - Oh fun.

Steve - Really?

Mystic - Yeah

Steve - How terrifying

Dan - Okay

Tara - That's scary.

Dan - Could be scary yeah

Steve - As you

Mystic - It's not as bad as you think.

Steve - Interact with people in the community does your

Mystic - Label?

Steve - Label mean anything in that context?

Mystic - I mean really it doesn't even come up in the community unless it's something where somebody's asking me " Do you have a boyfriend" or something.

Dan - Right.

Mystic - That's when I have to set them straight.

Steve - And you answer that question mostly? You don't avoid that?

Mystic - I do yeah.

Mystic - I actually right at the beginning of when I came out in the community right away because I didn't know, I don't know a lot of people very personally. So at first I was a little bit kind of hesitant about that, but the more I did it the more I was comfortable with it.

Steve - Right, and what is the typical reaction. Lets say you're with this driving student in the car.

Mystic - I think there was one time 'cause one of my students had painted their nails and it was somebody who in the outward appearance looked like a guy. So he had painted his nails and what you would expect somebody to look like if they were looking more towards a they them pronoun. So, having some girlier clothing or...

Dan - A purse or something

Mystic - Yeah, so personal accessories, or personal style, or even just gender neutral clothing. Where it fits you but could fit either gender. I was speaking to the student basically and it came up that he was talking to his, he said something about, "Oh I was hanging out with my boyfriend last night", or something and that was one of those things where I was like, oh hey a fellow member. Fellow member of the community, how cool. I was like "Oh my gosh that's awesome" and he was like "Really?" and I was like "Yeah, I'm in the community too". And it was just kind of heart warming to see him kind of feel more comfortable to talk about it once I explained that I was also a member of the community I guess.

Steve - So I hear you using the term "the community".

Dan - "The community".

Mystic - Yeah, we want to include everyone if we can.

Steve - Right, so LGBTQ+ people do gravitate toward each other and identify that way and support each other that way?

Mystic - Yeah I mean I would say for the most part if you identify as somebody in the LGBTQ community, most people do tend to gravitate towards others in the community as well because they can share those experiences that they may not feel comfortable talking about with not as close friends or something. They can be a little bit more open about that. I won't say that it happens with everyone, 'cause you know there are some exceptions, so. 'Cause there are some people who they might be open about it, but they might just not want to make it a public thing. Slap a label on everything. Not everybody wants to do that.

Steve - Right.

Steve - So when Lake Superior College uses our community's college, does that have special meaning in the LGBTQ+ community?

Mystic - I would say it probably doesn't really resonate right now. We're trying to be more visible, but it's just started last semester. Getting our heads in everybody else's faces. And you know trying to make yourselves more visible, but I think we're getting there.

Tara - What's one thing you would want them to hear from today's interview?

Mystic - I don't know. I mean I guess the best piece of advice I can really give is, it sounds really cheesy when you hear it but, be yourself because really that's what you gotta do to be able to be successful. Like, yeah everybody has their own definition of being successful, but, you know, you gotta embrace your own personality and if that personality includes something that may be part of the LGBT community or maybe you're like a tennis



player or something. So if it's included, you know, embracing that that's gonna bring you almost a lot further than any other thing. I never expected to be the president of an LGBT club right now. Never thought in my entire life that would happen. And here I am sitting doing a podcast as the president. I've already done a student panel over at St Scholastica, so. First time that happened and I freaked out afterwards. I was like "Wow this is insane, I never thought I'd do this." Yeah, I would just say be yourself 'cause it really does bring you really far.

Tara - So it sounds like you're saying that you have embraced yourself. Excuse this assumption if you were ever questioning, you went through the questioning process, or maybe you knew the whole time, but then you went knowing and not telling, and then you're now almost free? Is that something that's appropriate to say?

Mystic - Yeah, that's definitely appropriate. That's exactly what it feels like. I'm not gonna lie, when I first kind of had my suspicions about who I was, I wasn't open to it. And it wasn't even like, I have always been very open to the LGBT community, but I didn't see myself that way. But the more I was okay with it and the more when I came out to people and the more I experienced that lifestyle and experiencing what it's like to come out to everyone and stuff like that. It really kind of changed me a little bit. So...

Steve - To repeat, I think Tara you asked if you feel free?

Mystic - Yeah I do feel free. Like I was saying, I never thought I would be here. I used to be that kid in high school who if I hadn't been, there was a program that I was in, if I hadn't been in that program and if I hadn't met these certain people, I would've probably been doing drugs and drinking. And jumping from that to now, I feel like in my life right now I'm, for the most part, pretty successful. So, that says something and definitely I do feel free.

Steve - What do you think has enabled you to reach this point?

Mystic - That's a loaded question. Kinda of, sharing my life I guess because I've been so open with being out and all that and sharing my experiences with that, even through this podcast. My experiences as even like a driving instructor or when I used to work as a cashier, stuff like that. Sharing my experiences with other people and then hearing their response back to that. And their own comments kind of help me to grow.

Steve - And would you say coming to Lake Superior College opened a door to allow you to do that?

Mystic - I think coming here actually did help with that because I dorm at UWS. When I think about the campus over there, you know everybody there pretty much. You know your professors, you're there literally all day long. But at LSC you come here and you can be a whole different person if you really wanted to. And you can kind of embrace those things that you want to embrace. If it is LGBT related then it kind of makes it a little bit more open.

Steve - So you dorm at UWS.

Mystic - I do, yeah.

Steve - And so you know a little bit about that campus.

Mystic - Mhm

Steve - Would you say that that campus has a different vibe about it than LSC?

Mystic - Definitely. If we're just talking in general terms, it feels like you have to slap a label on it there. Because if you're not slapping a label on it, then it's odd when you're acting a different way because it's like being in high school if you're not in the cliquy group. You're the one who's left out, you're the one who's looking different and acting different and all of that. But at LSC you're not there

24/7 you're there sometimes two hours out of one day or maybe seven hours out of one day and you get to just do what you want. You can change how you want to be every single day and there isn't cliques here, so you really could do that and feel comfortable doing it.

Steve - You know what strikes me Tara and Dan? Just the fact, even before she was a member of the LGBTQ+ club. Just the fact that having enlisted was an empowerment for her, gave her confidence.

Tara - You say before she was part of it, you mean before she created it.

Dan - Well I think she like re-created it.

Steve - Yeah I think it sort of existed, but sort of dormant. She knew that it had existed in the past.

Tara - Yeah I just want to give her due credit that it wasn't just

Dan - Oh yeah. joining a club.

Steve - Yes, credit given.

Tara - Yeah I mean I think that that's sort of a powerful statement that just simply have resources available. Even if they're not utilized and in this case the LGBTQ+ club, makes it feel like a warm and welcoming, or more so a warm and welcoming environment than otherwise.

Steve - Right and I think we often think that nobody's going to those LGBTQ+ meetings. Okay, so we think it's really not doing anything, but I think it may be doing a lot more than we know.

Dan - Right, just giving people something to mentally lean on I guess.

Tara - Yeah I like that.

Dan - I mean I was really struck by, I mean I have a lot of respect for Mystic herself. Sounds like she really went from zero to hero. Wasn't much and

she grabbed it by the horns and made it into something much better. Very impressive.

Steve - And just how open she is and how free she feels now. Free to be herself and just how empowering that freedom is.

Tara - Yeah, I really appreciated her sharing about her unfortunate struggles sort of re-vamping the club. And especially my heart sort of went out to her hearing about her middle school and high school experience. That's one thing we don't, at least personally I don't think about very much is the fact a lot of our students are PSCS students who might be dealing with the same type of bullying and coming to LSC is like a little bit of their reprieve. So having this club or being inclusive like her English teacher was is I think more important that I had realized.

Steve - Right. They seem like little things and they seem like they don't matter but they matter a lot. That's what I'm taking away from Mystic's conversation here. How important those little things are that we can actually do and they actually matter.

Tara - Agreed.

Dan - Absolutely.

Steve - Well okay. I think that is a wrap on episode 3, what do you think?

Dan - Sounds good.

Tara - I think we went there.

Steve - We totally went there. Episode four we're gonna talk to Joe Fusick

Tara - And Joe's gonna talk a little bit about his experience here at LSC as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Steve - Yes. Until next episode, see ya Dan, see ya Tara.

Dan - See ya.

Tara - Bye

Steve - You've been listening to Going There a Lake Superior College podcast. Special thanks to puppet master Kelly Halsten Erickson, prison breaker Theresa Leopold, sound breaker Brandon Leno, and finally to a band called Truman for rocking the theme song. Mic drop.