Hello, and welcome. I am your host, Neil Ward, and I'm grateful that you are taking time out of your day to learn more about Design Educators' paths to Tenure. I truly appreciate it.

On this episode of Tell It To Neil, we're chatting with Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, Natalie Tyree, from the Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Let's listen in.

**Neil**: Thank you for being on the podcast, Natalie.

**Natalie**: Yeah, thank you for having me.

**Neil**: So, let's get started. How did you get into the world of Design?

**Natalie**: Oh wow! So, I actually went to...I grew up in a small rural town, small rural high school, you know the situation, you have to have Art or Music and we usually had either or instead of both, so I kinda got into Art in high school but we didn't really have a robust Art program but I remember when I was looking at colleges I was trying to figure out like what I wanted to do. I was really into science; my parents kind of were trying to steer me towards, you know, the medical or science field and I actually thought that I wanted to like major in Chemistry and maybe like teach Chemistry at some point. I know that's crazy but I actually I had a Chemistry…my Chemistry teacher in high school told me that unless I was going to research, it wasn't worth the charm so I tried to figure out a different route to go.

**Neil**: That's from a handy recommendations earlier on!

**Natalie**: Yeah, exactly. Well she actually, before she taught in the high school level she worked at Oak Ridge in the research facility, so she definitely knew what the difference in money was there, but I remember touring colleges, I toured the Art Department at UT Martin and it's like a light bulb went off and I didn't really know a hundred per cent like what Design was but when they were talking about it, it was like, OK, that sounds cool, so I kind of fell into it but looking back, like I always had that in me. My mom actually has this Santa Claus that I drew in Microsoft Paint when I was like eight years old and she…

**Neil**: Oh no! Microsoft Paint!

**Natalie**: Yeah! So I started early, I just didn't know what I was doing. And she actually printed that, laminated it and she hangs it, still hangs it on the fridge every year at Christmas and I'm just like, I'm partly embarrassed when I see like how much more I've progressed because you know, illustration's gotten a lot better! But it's sweet that she kept that and you know, it dawned on me, I'm like, that is when it started, I didn't really think about it but that's when everything started!

**Neil**: It's always a clear path when you look back on it!

**Natalie**: Yeah, yeah, and you know, I took drafting classes in high school, lots of design, you know, things in that too so it seemed like it was a random choice but in the end it really wasn't!

**Neil**: So then, when you were looking at institutions for your Bachelor's degree…Bachelor BFA or BA?

**Natalie**: BFA.

**Neil**: Was there any…were there any qualifications on that or did you just kinda think well, you know, it's in my city or nearby home, I'm just gonna go there?

**Natalie**: Yeah, really I was kind of looking into which, you know, my parents didn't know anything about choosing an Art program and they were not familiar with that all, but you know, I kinda talked to my high school Art teacher and checked into programs and kind of asked her some questions but they were, mainly it was just geographic, like what was close enough but not so far away. My parents wanted me to stay home and go to Community College for two years but I just really, I don't know, I felt like I would lose some steam after those two years and I knew I would've, you know, followed up with the four year but I was just like, no, I just want to go to one place and get it all done in one place so just selecting UT Martin, because it was about two hours from home and it was a smaller institution. I actually had a friend that went to UT Knoxville and I wanted to go and follow her but my parents were like, no, you need to stay closer to home so basically a geographic choice but it wound up being an excellent program because it was small enough that I got the one on one attention but the Faculty were really supportive in helping direct you to what you wanted to do after School so I feel like I made a good choice.

**Neil**: It sounds it! So then did you go out and work in the industry for a little bit or did you continue on for a Master or an MFA degree?

**Natalie**: Yeah, so I actually did just go out and work in the industry. I wound up getting a design job at UT Martin so I spent an extended period there. I tell people, even today, I like college so much I just decided to stay here, so most of my experience has kind of been like in-house Designer, like at a University either like working for instructors and helping them visualize their research or working just as, like, for Communications and Marketing purposes.

*(05:10)*

**Neil**: OK, so then at what point in time were you thinking, you know, maybe I need to go back for an MFA or…because you mentioned that you had a little bit of…education in your background, like you had mentioned you were going to be a, that you were thinking about teaching Chemistry.

**Natalie**: Yeah!

**Neil**: So there's that, that seemed to kinda stay with you but what was the turning point for that?

**Natalie**: Well, I'd worked at UT Martin for about a year as a Designer and I was trying to kind of figure out like what I want to do in the next few years: do I want to, you know, continue another education path and because I worked at the University, you know, you can take those classes. Not initially for free but you know, your work will pay for them. I was actually about a year and a half after School I was actually considering K12 Art Education and I was taking post-Bachelor classes so that I could teach and then I got about three quarters of the way into that, because I already had all the Art credits so all I had to do really was take the Art Ed chunk of it, and I decided, you know, I don't think I want to teach, you know, high school or elementary school; I think I want to go to grad school, so almost at this point was about three years that I'd worked full time in the field and you know, just said, hey parents, I think I want to quit my full-time job and go to grad school and they were like: what? But they were…and they were super-supportive, like my dad was actually, bless his heart, he told me he was like, you know, I really have no clue what it is that you want to do but if you think this is a good path for you, then that's what you need to do. So that, yeah, had still some more education kinda under my belt but even that experience was great to have because you know, learning how to build a curriculum and learning how to draft a course plan, those are something, those are the things that they don't really a hundred per cent teach you in grad school, even though you go to grad school there's not like a whole like, OK, here's how you do all this, necessarily, like you talk about it, but it's not something that you super-dive into and taking those Art Ed classes actually gave me an excellent foundation in that.

**Neil**: Which is really helpful!

**Natalie**: For sure!

**Neil**: Because I knew even for myself, you know, I went to UT Knoxville for their MFA program and there, you know, I wanted to go because I wanted to be an educator so that was my goal and they kinda had not correct me, but they kinda helped me switch my perspective from saying, oh, I'm here to learn how to be an educator to well, you're actually hear to learn your craft and hone that and while you're here, we have Graduate Teaching Assistantships that can help you figure out best practices in creating a syllabi, creating a lesson plan, creating a course and then actually teaching a course! Unless you're in an education program, I don't know the percentage of how much information you get on how to teach in a classroom versus the craft that you're trying to home.

**Natalie**: Yeah, for sure, because I know even in my grad program at Indiana State University, we had a course, I think it was called like a Research Methods class or something like that but essentially it was the class that you took if you were interested in being a Graduate Teaching Instructor, you had to take that class first to be considered for a position the next year and so I took that class and that's when they talked about, that's where the Art Ed stuff kinda kicked in too because that's where they talked about a syllabus and course plans and you know, but very vaguely and you know, I came in and knew how to build all this stuff and like my classmates were like, how do you know how to do all this? And it's like you know, well, in another life I was going to be a K12 educator but it came in handy, for sure!

**Neil**: *(laughs)* So, how did you…how did you decide on Indiana? Correct?

**Natalie**: Yes. Well, I'd looked at a few programs: again, kind of geographic location also came into play, you know, money, funding as far as Assistantships or total cost situation, that sort of thing, and I actually had a friend that was already in grad school at ISU and she was like, well hey, you should come up here and check it out and I'd actually been to visit her in Terre Haute, Indiana, which is where ISU is located. I've actually had been there before to kind of visit her but I'd never really toured the school that much or anything, so I went up there and I met with the Faculty, I kind of toured around and I'd applied to other institutions but ISU was one of the first ones that I heard from and it would up being, you know, I applied the first time around and that wound up being the first one that I got into and I was kinda of weighing the options and decided on ISU. I actually had looked at UT's program as well but I'd missed the application deadline by like a month, I was super-bummed about that…

*(10:47)*

**Neil**: Oh no!

**Natalie**: Yeah! And I looked at East Tennessee State, but even geographically like where my family lives in Middle Tennessee it was actually closer for me to go out of State than it was to go to ETSU if that would've been an option. So…

**Neil**: Wow!

**Natalie**: Yeah, isn't that crazy? Tennessee's a weird place, it's a long State. But yeah, a couple of different factors, you know, knowing that I already knew somebody there, kinda how to build a network, being able to, wound up being able to get some Assistantships which helped and yeah, just kind of those factors, I liked the feel that I got when I visited. I'm very big on like, you know, gut feeling so when I was there I was talking with Faculty, I felt like it was a good place for me to kind of grow and like you said, hone the craft.

**Neil**: Absolutely. So, what did you hone during your MFA degree? What were the projects that you worked on?

**Natalie**: Yeah. Well, our first year was kind of just, we had kind of more in-depth instructions and programs and if we wanted to focus specifically on certain things we could say, OK, I want to be more in-depth in this area or X-Y-Z and the first year was just kind of exploration and starting to make things. I did a lot of…I got into digital photography and studio photography, they actually had a darkroom and traditional photography and I was actually in there, it was a stack course so I was in there with the undergrads taking the Photography courses. I didn't care; I got credit for it and it was something I was interested in. I got into kind of, you know, photo collages and digital multiple exposures after experimenting with that in the darkroom I figured out how to kind of manipulate that look digitally and I got really into that. And I also got into…really interested into like paper engineering and pop-ups and illustrations and my thesis wound up actually being a focus on, again, kind of an education component, a character named Clara who went through kind of this whole world discovering things and I tied that together with like literacy and reading comprehension, so that was, in a nutshell, that was kind of what my big research wound up being in the end for my thesis project but I spent the first year just kind of exploring and getting more in-depth in other programs and techniques. Yeah.

**Neil**: That sounds fascinating! And fun!

**Natalie**: Yeah. Three years in like a few short minutes. There you go!

**Neil**: So then, after you graduated, then how did you get to Western Kentucky? Was there a couple of stopping points along the way or was that kind of I step out of my MFA degree and right into my first Tenure Track job?

**Natalie**: Yeah, well I was actually kind of an interesting path because I graduated in December and so that's kind of an awkward time to you know, graduate and start, especially if you haven't applied to a ton of jobs before, and I'd applied to a few and had some phone interviews but nothing super-panned out, so I actually wound up going back to Martin, Tennessee. I didn't work at the School but I had some friends that still lived there, I found a job there working as an instructional designer at a company Savant Learning Systems and so they do, you know, if you're taking an online course and it's module-based and there's these interactive things and there's graphics that go along with the course; I worked with the team to design those sort of things, so I did that for about six months. They knew that it was kind of like a stepping stone, I was looking for a teaching job, so I worked there and then in May, June of, I guess it was 2017…2017? 2018? No, my dates are wrong. Anyway, May or June after I finished my MFA…time goes by so fast now…about six months after that, I had a couple of interviews during the summer and of course, you know how it is, people retire at the last minute and put in their notice and instantly, you know, the recent grads become super-attractive because they're the only ones that don't have jobs yet!

*(15:02)*

**Neil**: Yes!

**Natalie**: So, I was, you know, I definitely exploited that a little bit. I actually got a job, my first teaching job, at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, which is actually about two hours south of Memphis, two hours north of Jackson, Mississippi in the Mississippi Delta and it's a small school, there about maybe thirty-five hundred; it's basically a private school but it's a public institution, but it's the size of a private school and it was a small program that kinda reminded me of the program that I went to school in as an undergrad and I just really, you know, vibed well with the Faculty and I felt that it'd be a good place to start out, because it was a smaller school, you know, it wasn't like a huge institution where the stakes were super-high so I felt like it would be a good place to start. So I worked there for about three years before coming to WKU and that was, you know, it wasn't like, it wasn't a bad place or anything, I just felt like, you know, well do I want to stay…I was in that point where I've been here for about three years before I get super-into, because it was a Tenure Track position but I had to start asking myself, was this where I wanted to stay? And started looking for, again, kind of geographic, I started looking, looking closer to things that were, you know, Tennessee, Kentucky because I'm in, again, I'm from Middle Tennessee, that's where my family is, and my husband's family actually lives in Paducah, Kentucky and that was like six to seven hours from both of them and I'm an only child so my parents like have to see me a lot!

**Neil**: Yes!

**Natalie**: They feel the need to see me a lot, which is great, I love them, but you know, being six hours away, they were, I mean I did that when I was in grad school and it was fine because it was short-term, but they didn't super-love the idea of being that far away and having to drive that far, you know, for a two day weekend visit to come visit us and the same with us making that trip too, it's a long trip. So, looking for different institutions, I had interviews at a couple of different places and the WKU position was actually one that kinda opened up towards the end of my search; I'd actually turned down a position and I was at the point where I was like, um…was that a bad idea? Should I have taken that job? And then this job randomly popped up and my husband actually went to school at WKU for a couple of years and I told him, I was like, there's a job at WKU and he was like, you should apply for it, and I applied and you know, a little while later, you know, interviewed and yeah, wound up here and it's, you know, geographically it was great but it just seemed like out of all the interviews I'd done, again, that gut feeling, I just felt like this was where I was supposed to be.

**Neil**: Interesting. So…so you touched on a lot of topics there. So…one, congratulations on getting a Tenure Track job directly from MFA program!

**Natalie**: Yeah, it was a pretty big deal. I mean, I was not opposed to like one year appointments but definitely when I saw this was Tenure Track I was like, OK, you know, lets do that!

**Neil**: So you also touch on leaving a Tenure Track job.

**Natalie**: Yeah! I know. That's crazy, right?

**Neil**: I'm sure that that is not a unique situation.

**Natalie**: No, no.

**Neil**: I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what was going through your mind, but you have already a little bit. But, so in terms of more of institution, so you were working in Cleveland, Mississippi, and you were thinking, OK, I don't know, is this where I want to be? It's a little far away from family and whatnot, but did it ever enter your mind of, if I start looking for a job then my colleagues are going to find that out and I need to have references and who do I talk to for a reference?

**Natalie**: Yeah.

**Neil**: So how did you navigate all of that? Because that's…that's a tough position to be in.

**Natalie**: For sure. Well, I didn't...I didn't have any of my DSU colleagues because you know, I was trying to keep it kind of on the DL so I didn't have any of them as references but I had…I had some kind of colleagues in other departments that I knew I could trust that were references and also had references from grad school, like my Assistantship Supervisor, so I had two different Assistantships; I had a teaching gig and I also had an Assistantship where I was practically a full-time Designer and so I kinda had contacts from there; people that had known me for a long time, for the longest time I had my former Department Chair from undergrad as a reference, just because I kinda worked with him a lot and had a good relationship with him and he's since graduated off the references, but I had him on there for a long time just because he was a solid reference. But yeah, it was, I felt like I kept it under wraps. I mean, I don't know if I actually did, my colleagues never let on if they knew, but one of the things I felt a lot of pressure, like you said, is them finding out is DSU, since it's a small institution, at the time, it's changed a little bit since, but at the time there's, you know, the forever struggle of you know, budget cuts and low enrolment and all that and I didn't want them to be like, oh well you're looking for a different job; we'll just, you know, we'll just get rid of you, which I know couldn't have actually like happened that quickly but I was just very…very conscious of not advertising that I was looking for a job so it was tricky because yeah, I mean, I liked my colleagues and I didn't want to leave them but at the same time I felt…I felt like there was somewhere else that I was supposed to be. Again it was a smaller institution and it was even the situation at the time when I was there where you now, classes, if they weren't Major classes, you know, if they weren't meeting enrolment, they were cancelling courses and you know, it was as a new Faculty member it was kind of a scary situation. It may have not been as bad as I thought it was in my brain but just never having experienced anything like that in Higher Ed, it was like, well maybe I want something a little bit more secure!

*(21:28)*

**Neil**: Yes, definitely security is a good thing to have!

**Natalie**: For sure, and you know, everybody, institutions all over the country are seeing budget cuts and WKU's kind of had the same situation, budget cuts and all that but I tell my colleagues here, I feel like I have a completely different perspective because, you know, a school of thirty-five hundred versus a school of like, you know, eleven to fifteen thousand, you know, a budget cut here is way less than a budget cut at a much smaller institution, so I may be a little naïve, but I feel like I have a different perspective on things!

**Neil**: You know, when you were hired at Western Kentucky, did you negotiate any years towards Tenure there or did you take the full time? Or actually, I guess, when do you go up for Tenure?

**Natalie**: Well, it's kind of a weird, I have about another…I think I've got another year here at WKY, a year, two years, time all that kind of confuses me because it's like you actually go up a year before you go up; I know it's weird. But a year, two years, but speaking to that, I tried to negotiate some time but because the Department Chair at the time, because the Tenure structure was a little different and it was a larger institution, he was like, well I don't, you know, since you only have you know, about two and a half years, I don't advise it, but you do have an option later to go up early, so I'm actually that's why I said one to two years. I'm actually in the process of, I've kind of casually mentioned it to my new Chair but I may try to go up early and use that, that Service at Delta State as leverage, but you have to kind of petition that and get approved so I'm in the beginning stages of doing that and if I get, I'm going into my third year at WKU, if I get that, then I'll be able to go up as soon as my fourth year so we'll see and it's actually, I mean it's not as high stakes as one would seem because if I go up early and they're like, no, you need to wait, then I can go up in my sixth year, so when I would actually go up for Tenure, so I'm thinking about it because I feel like I'm in a good place and my colleagues are really supportive but you know, Tenure is just that little bit more of a safety, you know, that safety net, you feel a little bit more stable. So I'm trying to go for that, so, fingers crossed.

**Neil**: So, what is the Tenure and Promotion process at WKU?

**Natalie**: Yeah, so when we, when we come in and I want to jump back just a little bit. When I was at Delta State, it was every…every two years you turned in your big binder and in between you did like a little super-short annual report which was supposed to be for, you know, merit raises, but it wasn't like a full dossier. Here at WKU I turn in a Continuance binder every year and then in my sixth year I would go up for Tenure unless I decide to go up early, so that's what the process is like here, a binder every year. They actually just recently switched to digital, so the one that I turn in August will be digital. That's exciting!

**Neil**: Hurray!

**Natalie**: Yeah, 'cause we were still on the huge binder system and me and my other colleagues that are Tenure Track, they were like, OK, this is way too big, so now it'll be big, it'll just be a digital document, so it'll be easier to get through, hopefully. But my first year I kinda got the short end of the stick; everybody has to do it but you kinda get the short end of the stick because you turn in a binder after your first semester and then you have to turn in another one in August, like as if you were turning in, you know, turning in after the whole year, so I actually did two binders in my first year but…

*(25:23)*

**Neil**: Oh no!

**Natalie**: Yeah! It was crazy. It actually wound up helping though, because when I went to turn in the one in August, that was for the full year, I already had the previous semester's so that was super-helpful. This year I'm in the situation where I've got notes everywhere but I've got to compile everything and I have until August twentieth to get that finished so yeah, good luck to me!

**Neil**: *(laughs)* Yes! Well, and in that, in that binder, do you have a…unofficial percentage of Teaching, Service, Research in there for Tenure?

**Natalie**: Yeah, so when I came on, WKU is, we're a teaching institution. Our new leadership and president I think is trying to steer us towards research but I feel like that'd kinda be a whole, you know, that's a whole process of heading in that direction, but when I first came on, I had a colleague tell me that, you know, we're a teaching institution but the administration likes you to kinda err on the side of a third, a third, a third, so that's you know, playing the game, that's what I strive to do, so that's about what mine looks like, because a third, a third, a third. Yeah!

**Neil**: Those are good numbers, those are good numbers.

**Natalie**: So it's like on paper we're teaching but you need to make sure everything is equal. I'm like…OK!

**Neil**: That's good advice to get.

**Natalie**: For sure, yeah. I mean, I'd rather have it be that way and be, you know, more of something than not have enough in one area when the time comes.

**Neil**: Yes. well, and I don't know about you but I feel that it's not equal every year.

**Natalie**: No!

**Neil**: So, here at Drake, Teaching is higher than Scholarship, which is higher than Service, and they all should interact with one another, but there are some years where Research and Scholarship is really high and maybe higher than Teaching, and then there's other years when Teaching eclipses research and then Service seems to be kinda around.

**Natalie**: Yeah, I get that; like I've had…I've had the Tenure Faculty, after they evaluate my stuff, I've had them tell me, well you know, you could actually do a little, do a little less, you know, and I'm like, no because the moment I do that, I'm paring away that it won't be enough so I'm just gonna go full-steam ahead unless I get Tenure and be extra and just do that! I don't want to risk it.

**Neil**: So, for Scholarship, what does…what counts for that at WKU?

**Natalie**: Yeah, so with Scholarship, obviously Art Historians they're mostly like papers, research, publishing, that sort of thing. We actually have a super-supportive Dean who respects all different, because I'm Potter College of Arts and Letters, which is, you know, all sorts of different types of scholarly activity and we have pretty clearly defined outlines that we get to in our Department. Obviously exhibitions for me and my Design colleagues, you know, published design work or client work or, you know, jury, any kind of juried design work or art work: those sort of things count as Scholarship and you know, presentations and lectures, you know, presenting at conferences, that sort of stuff as well. Mine kind of tends to be a little bit of a hybrid. I still very much I call…I call myself like a Designer and Maker because I feel like Maker catches that like, whatever is not computerised. And so for a while I was doing like, you now digital collages and those are in exhibitions and shows but I also still actively do client work because I want to be able to talk about professional experience and ongoing clients with my students, you know, the whole practice what you preach thing, you know, it's not like…it's not like I'm, you know, a full-time designer but I do try to keep pretty steady gigs, that way I'm still in touch with the business aspect of things. So yeah, about fifty-fifty is what mind looks like. I've done a lot of research about, a few years ago I found out I was a Millennial, and I was shocked. I guess I didn't really think about it and I got really mad at like the bad perception that Millennials seemed to have…

*(30:02)*

**Neil**: Oh no!

**Natalie**: Yeah, so, and I felt like, and this is when I was teaching at Delta State, like I found out that my students were technically Young Millennials and I'm like, I don't understand like why I don't relate to them, so then I kind of dove into research of that, so some of my scholarly activity is research into primarily like Millennials in Generation Z and how the creative classroom is actually the perfect place for them and that for a while was kind of just separate from the making and the visual work, it was more just like researching and written works and recently I've actually put the Millennial side of things into my new letterpress work, which is my experience as an Old Millennial, so things have kind of gotten tied together a little bit more, it's a little bit more clarified!

**Neil**: So, what did your research uncover? Because I'm sure some of our listeners are in that…age range or they're teaching in that age range. But what did your research kinda uncover about the creative classroom and Millennials?

**Natalie**: Yeah, for sure. Well a lot of it kind of goes to thinking about older mindsets versus young mindsets, you know, a lot of older Faculty are just kind of like, you know, we're doing this and we're doing this because this is why we're doing it and the Millennials and younger generations, they…we want to know why, you know, because we've had access to, you know, YouTube and social media; we've always had a presence in the digital world and we've had a voice and you know, that comes from the fact that that's where the authority thing comes from where they think we have, the Millennials have authority issues; it's not that we have authority issues, it's just that since we've had access to these platforms from a younger age and you know, the younger Millennials, you know, they've known it from the time they were born; older Millennials kind of grew into it in, you know, like middle school, high school, but it's still something that we were used to and really I know this sounds silly, but explaining why you do things is something that Millennials really hold, hold you accountable to and I know that sounds really silly but for example, if in my classroom, if I have students do this, like, stupid doodle exercise I'm like, OK, this is why we're doing this and I can see them just kinda change their attitude about it, like it doesn't matter, you could ask them to do the dumbest thing in the world but if you explain to them why, they're like, OK, I'll do it! But that's one of the things is really just being transparent and letting them know. Another thing is asking…asking for feedback so that they feel like they have authorship in what they're doing and I actually brought that into my teaching practice. I have a Google…a Google Form set up and in the middle of the semester I kind of check in with them, how's it going, you know, like a mid-point sort of thing and then at the end, in addition to my, like, our University evaluations, I do my own course-specific evaluations and give them, let them kinda have ask questions and give them free rein for feedback and like, be transparent, be honest because this is for me, I value your feedback. And I know these things sound super-basic but a lot of, you know, a lot of I think…older Faculty that I encountered when I was in school were sometimes kind of like, OK, this is what we're doing. And there's just really not a ton of like, why. I mean, it made sense to do in the class but I never really, you know, some things it's like, OK we're doing this, but I'm not a hundred per cent sure why and just because of, you know, having that explanation and the validity of what you're doing, like I said, even if it's like, OK, we're gonna, you know, stand on our heads for five minutes, you know, if you tell them why, they're like, OK, you know, they're more open to it. There's just a couple of things. I mean, I could go…that's a whole nother conversation about Millennials, but those are a couple of the big things that I know seem super…super-basic but things that I've just made minor switches in my teaching practice, those helped tremendously.

**Neil**: That's really good advice and some good pointers.

**Natalie**: Yeah.

**Neil**: So, I know for me, in my classroom, I want students to do something and I don't tell them why they're doing it and it does relate to class and I want them to go through it to feel the anxiety, to feel the…frustration, to feel the success and also to feel the discovery of, oh my gosh, I didn't realize I could get here.

*(35:00)*

**Natalie**: Yeah.

**Neil**: And would you say that telling students up-front about all of that, do you think that would enhance that experience or do you feel like it would take away from those elements?

**Natalie**: It depends on the exact exercise because that's one thing too: Millennials, they're afraid of failure because we're that coddled, I mean, we really are, I'll admit that, you know, that coddled, you know, everybody gets a participation ribbon generation and even though that seemed like a good idea at the time, that's really made some people super-stressed out when it comes to failure, even if it's just like, you know, asking a wrong question, they might be…they might be reluctant to, you know, ask a question for fear of being wrong, so I think it depends on the outcome of the exercise. Like, if you want them to fail but you don't want them to know that, maybe not tell them but if it's just an experimental thing, you know, OK, this is why we're doing this. It might work, it might not. I think that's OK. I hope that's good advice!

**Neil**: It is, thank you!

**Natalie**: I mean, that's the way I would approach it.

**Neil**: I will probably use that in the Fall. And in other courses I do use that as well. I walk them, especially if there are students that are not Design Majors, that they're outside of Design and I have them do like a design process and I walk them through but, OK, you're going to feel really frustrated. That's normal. Throughout all of this, I kind of want you to fail and once you fail, learn from that failure and then figure out how to do it better the next time. So there are times when I have walked them through it but then there are other times when I'm like, I just want them to figure this out. But I will say the fear of failure, that is definitely something that has surfaced a lot in courses. I think in our lower level courses that seems to be softening up a little bit with the newer students coming into the University. Have you found that at yours as well or not really?

**Natalie**: It really depends. I feel like…I feel like students who have had access, like for example, in Bowling Green we're about an hour from Nashville and about two hours from Louisville and I feel like they want to have access to art classes like for, you know, the majority of their life or maybe even have had like Graphic Design classes and are familiar with the technology. I feel like those kids are kind of a little bit more fearless but the kids kinda like me that are coming from the middle of nowhere and haven't had that much experience in, you know, art and design, they're the ones that are kinda more reluctant.

**Neil**: So, how do you get them OK with failure?

**Natalie**: I just kinda have to…I don't really have any exercises for it. I do kinda want to…after going to conferences and learning some techniques about how to introduce that, I have to kind of coach them, I'm a little bit, I have the mom persona; I kind of mom them a little bit but I, you know, it comes from like a nurturing aspect I guess, you know, I just kind of tell them, I'm like look, you know, this is OK but this is not, you know, just kind of explain to them like, is this something you feel like would be competitive in a portfolio or I feel like it could be better if you did…I kind of come from like a coaching perspective, I guess, you know, like this needs, or a couple of students are really bad to, you know, they have like two things on the screen and they're like, what do you think of this and I'm like, well, there's not really enough visual information, I need more and they kind of look at me very frustrated and I'm like, look, I can't give you feedback off of like two things on the screen. So I think even before they get started they're kind of afraid to start because they don't know, you know, and I'm like, just work it out, just click buttons and see what happens and again, they look at me like I'm crazy but I'm like, I know that sounds bogus but really you're not gonna, until you do something, you're not gonna know what happens or how that, how that pans out, so more of a kind of a fear/not afraid to explore things is how I approach it, like you've gotta explore it before you work through all the solutions.

**Neil**: Yes. Oh, that is wonderful. I love it! So, are you currently working on any scholarly projects?

*(39:44)*

**Natalie**: Yes. I'm going to, I just booked an exhibition in Memphis this Fall at Christian Brothers University in their Quarter Gallery and my Millennials Letterpress series is kind of an ongoing thing so I'm going to, over the summer, what's left of the summer, I'm going to churn out some more prints in that collection but I actually have another project that I want to start that kind of ties back to culture and Southern heritage. I listened to a podcast called *The Well Read Podcast*, which if you're not familiar, one of the main guys is Trae Crowder; he's Facebook famous for his portraits as the Liberal Redneck, that's what he calls himself; he's a good old boy that grew up in Salina, Tennessee, which is just one of those small, rural Tennessee towns and their whole persona, him and the guys that he does the podcast with, they're comedians as well and they're hilarious but the whole persona is that, you know, you can hold onto your roots but you can also be more progressive and I feel like, you know, when I went to grad school that symptom that I kind of suppressed a little bit, like living, you know, I was in Indiana in the mid-West, never lived anywhere outside of Tennessee before and I didn't try to be someone I wasn't, but I definitely like, tried to suppress my accent, tried to, you know, dial that down a little bit, for you know, afraid of how people would perceive me but now, I've kind of grown out of that a little bit I'm like, you know, I really, I want to be proud of this, I want to be proud of my heritage so my theories that I've got coming up, I actually have quotes in my notepad on my iPhone like, Southern sayings and Southern-isms that, you know, people may not have heard of or…or something that was special to me, like things my grandmother used to say. I've got a little bunch of things written down, I'm actually in the process of making Letterpress prints of those and I don't really know what the series is gonna be called yet but that's another series that I'm about to start working on. I'm super-excited about that.

**Neil**: Well, I can't wait to see it when it gets done!

**Natalie**: Yeah, and I think too the way I'm going to present it in the gallery is have, you know, have the quotes and have the prints but then have, you know, the card beside it kind of be like a, look like a, you know, when you see like a definition spelled out, you know, and it's like I kind of want to have it like that, like have the word or the phrase and then have like what that actually means because you know, some people may not have heard those sayings before!

**Neil**: This is true. And I feel like you should take that on the road in the Northern States.

**Natalie**: Yes, oh I would love to do that, yeah. I'll have to pitch that.

**Neil**: Absolutely. Well, we're almost at the end of our episode so were there any parting thoughts that you would like to talk about?

**Natalie**: Um…trying to think.

**Neil**: We kinda went through a lot!

**Natalie**: Yeah, yeah, we covered a lot of things. Just if anybody's listening and you're, you know, you're Tenure Track, you know, we all go through the same processes, so don't be afraid to build your network; I mean, I've been able to build a great network through organisations like AIGA and UCDA, you know, that's where you and I met and that's where I've met a lot of folks that I consider friends and colleagues. Just really a strong importance on the network, you know, you have to have your tribe, as they say, your people and I think that's really important, whether it's just like a friend network or colleagues that have been or are going through the same things as you are. I actually have a group; it's not my group, I was invited, but the lonely wolves which is, you know, Shannon and Britten and some of those folks, other women that teach at different universities, we're all kind of in different phases of our academic career and once a month during the semester we get together and we have a Google Hangout and we just kind of vent and talk about what's going on and you know, having that resource is awesome because you know, it's a time to kind of socialise but also time to get advice from people which is awesome. So, build your network, have your people, yeah!

**Neil**: Good bits of information, definitely. Well, thank you Natalie, for spending time with us today and talking about your path to Tenure.

**Natalie**: Yeah, thank you so much, I'm excited to hear it.

This concludes Season Two, Episode Four of Tell It To Neil. If any of the facts or information included in this Episode are incorrect, please feel free to get in touch through our email, hello@tellittoneil.com

If you would like to get in touch with Natalie, please contact her through her website at www.ntyree.com

*(end of recording 44:50)*

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