'After Class'

The New Social (Justice) Network
a Conversation about Justice with Johanna Bond
Season 1, Episode 2

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Ruth Candler: Hi. My name is Ruth Candler, assistant director of Lifelong Learning at Washington and Lee University, and I'm your host for W&L After Class, the Lifelong Learning podcast. Every episode we'll have engaging conversations with W&L's expert faculty, bringing you again to the Colonnade even if you're hundreds of miles away, just like the conversations that happen every day after class here at W&L. Thanks for listening.

In today’s episode, we’ll be talking with Johanna Bond, the Sydney and Francis Louis Professor of Law. Johanna joined Washington and Lee in 2008. From 2016 to 2019, she served as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the law school.

Her research focuses on international human rights law and gender and the law including women’s rights in Africa; domestic violence in Nepal, Cambodia, Ghana, Poland, Bulgaria, and Macedonia; sexual harassment in Poland and Bulgaria; maternal mortality as a human rights issue in Uganda and Mexico, trafficking and women; and a variety of issues concerning the United Nations treaty mechanisms. Johanna has a book coming out with Oxford University Press Next year and titled, Global Intersectionality and Contemporary Human Rights.

Thanks so much for joining us, Joanna.

Johanna Bond: Thanks so much for having me.

Ruth Candler: Johanna, you are regarded by many of your students and colleagues at the W&L law school as one of the most pleasant people around, and we at Lifelong Learning feel the same way. You recently co-hosted an educational travel program to Costa Rica and on every single trip evaluation you and your husband, JD, were mentioned as being absolutely delightful. And yet, when I think about your areas of research and imagine this dark sector of human behavior, I have to ask, how do you manage to remain so positive and optimistic in the face of all that you've seen?

Johanna Bond: Well, first of all, thank you so much for that kind introduction! That's very kind of you to say. Ah, that's a great question. I think that I am optimistic by nature, and so, despite working in areas where it can be disheartening to say the least, I always feel like there is reason for hope.

I also work alongside some of the most impressive and inspiring women's human rights activists in the world. I have the great privilege of partnering with women's rights lawyers in places like Tanzania, Ghana, and other parts of sub Saharan Africa. Those are women that are doing so much for their communities and working so hard and sometimes with very few resources. So, I have a constant source of inspiration in those women and, and that keeps me going. So there, there are a lot of reasons to be hopeful, I think.
Ruth Candler: Well, let's begin by discussing your interest in social justice. It's a concept that is often in the news these days, and it's at the heart of your legal scholarship. But first, would you help us understand what social justice is and how you define it to your students?

Johanna Bond: Sure. It's, in my mind, a broad concept, one that encompasses a lot of different circumstances and a lot of different work that I and others do. I think, at its core, one of the animating principles for me is equality. And so when people are not treated equally, when they're discriminated against, that is an injustice, and one that I think the law can be useful in remedying. So for me, it's really about protecting the most vulnerable among us, whether that's people seeking asylum at our borders, or people who are subject to mass incarceration, or women who aren't able to enjoy their full rights around the world, both in the US and across the globe. So, for me, it's really a fundamental principle of equality. And, and I think that I communicate that to my students. But I will also say that, that I think my students come to this work with their own conception of what social justice is. Certainly, in the classes that I teach in which social justice is a focus, students self-select, they are drawn to those courses, in part because they care deeply about social justice issues.

Ruth Candler: So how did you become interested in social justice?

Johanna Bond: Wow, that's a great question. I feel like I was kind of hardwired for this work. I mean, some of my earliest memories as a kid involved what I perceived as social justice issues then. So, I'll give you an example. When I was in fourth grade, I organized a fundraiser to save baby harps seals. I did this by selling t-shirts; I still screened t-shirts that said, “I saved seals.” I raised I don’t know, I can’t remember how much it was, probably $200, not a huge amount of money.

Ruth Candler: But that's when you're in fourth grade!

Johanna Bond: Right? It's like it at the time. And I think in retrospect, I probably committed copyright infringement because I stole the design for the seal from a Czech children's book at the time. But anyway, I feel like I've always been concerned about changing the world. So ever since those early efforts I have been fairly engaged in trying to think about how we can make the world a better place and a more equitable place. And so that theme really has run throughout all of my work since fourth grade.

Ruth Candler: Oh, thanks for sharing that story with us. That's just beautiful. What led you to law school then?

Johanna Bond: Some of the same ideas. I really, even as a college student was concerned about issues of equality and, and I was fortunate enough to take a civil rights class as an undergraduate, and I went to a small liberal arts college, but I took a course that was not really a pre-law. It wasn't a pre-professional course, it was really a liberal arts course. But it exposed me to the law as a way to push a social justice social change agenda. And so by reading about these civil rights cases, I became convinced that that the law could be a really useful tool, and that was really my first exposure to, to law. I don't come from a family of lawyers, I just began to view the law as the best mechanism for creating social change. So that's really what drove me to law school.

Ruth Candler: You've mentioned the difficulty of staying true to your original vision of working in social justice, particularly during law school. Would you tell us a little more about that struggle and what made it challenging?
**Johanna Bond:** I think, in some ways, I was at an atypical law student in the sense that I had a very specific idea of why I wanted to go to law school and it didn’t involve getting a job at a big law firm. And so, I charted my own path through law school but I did see a lot of people get kind of enticed by the law firm lifestyle and, and there’s a lot to be said for that. The experience of being a second-year law student as a summer associate at a law firm in New York, for example, where you’re kind of wined and dined by the law firm partners that it’s a nice life in many ways, but it wasn’t what I was particularly interested in.

But I do think it’s easy to get kind of sucked into that lifestyle, and then even peers that that wanted to go into social justice work, I think after law school, found the themselves in situations with a New York apartment, for example, that that was a high rent apartment who were then later unable to make a move back into social justice. So, I think staying true to those ideals was important to me. And I found a couple of ways to do that. One was, I volunteered during my time in law school at a domestic violence organization. And I also found paid employment fortunately enough for me at an organization that was housed at my law school, and it was a separate nonprofit organization. That gave me the opportunity to do some work on women’s human rights. And that was, in some ways my first exposure to the application of women’s rights principles across the globe.

**Ruth Candler:** So, for those students then who are also passionate about social justice, how do you encourage for your students to pursue those interests?

**Johanna Bond:** Well, I encourage students to look for every opportunity during law school to explore work in that area. And there’s so many different types of social justice work, that for students who are interested, I think there are a lot of opportunities to get involved during law school. And for employers who work in the nonprofit sector, a lot of what they’re looking for in applicants after law school is a demonstrated commitment to that particular kind of social justice work, so the best thing you can do as a law student who’s interested in going into social justice work, I think is to create a track record to demonstrate your interest in social justice work throughout law school. So I try and help students look for those opportunities and take advantage of them while they’re in law school. So that you those paths are easier to pursue once they graduate.

**Ruth Candler:** Sounds like very sound advice. Let’s talk about your research in gender and the law and international human rights. I have to say that I’m especially intrigued by the International angle here. Would you tell us about your work in Africa and what led you there?

**Johanna Bond:** I mentioned that the organization that I worked with in law school, and that was an organization that was a network, women’s rights organization, and the network had a very strong presence in Sub Saharan Africa when I was working there as a law student. So, I established connections with some pretty amazing women’s rights lawyers, even when I was a law student. And so some of those lawyers were plaintiffs themselves in groundbreaking women’s rights litigation in their own countries. One of them was Unity Tao in Botswana, who brought pathbreaking women’s rights case concerning citizenship lot in Botswana. And so as a law student, I was able to sit down and talk to her about that experience. And there were many others like Unity Tao, who I was able to get to know and talk to in law school and so that I think that really cemented what was an emerging interest in women’s rights globally, and particularly in Africa.

And then that the second thing is really happenstance. But I, I got a job as a women’s rights fellow after law school through a program at Georgetown called the Women’s Limit Women’s Legal Rights
Fellowship Program. And that opportunity placed me in a clinic at Georgetown. So, it was it was part of Georgetown Law School, but that clinic was also doing a lot of work with women's rights in Africa. And so I just continued to build a network of women's rights lawyers who were doing important work on the continent. And those connections continued even after I left Georgetown, so I really just built an incredible network of women's rights lawyers who are doing work in Africa. And I've been able to do some ongoing work with some of those folks. So, it's been an interest for a long time. And I feel very fortunate to have worked with some of the people that I've worked with over the years.

Ruth Candler: So, you talk about women's rights in Africa. Can you tell us specifically what some of the issues that you found and we're working on?

Johanna Bond: There are unfortunately, no shortage of issues to work on, and that's true all over the world. That's true here in the United States, too. But one of the interesting aspects of my work in Africa has been navigating plural legal systems. So, in many of these countries in Africa, there are multiple legal systems operating simultaneously. You have the statutory legal system, the religious legal system, in some cases, and very often a separate system of customary law, which operates at the local level, often, sometimes in informal settings. But, but for many, many women throughout Sub Saharan Africa, customary law is the form of law that really dictates their rights under Family Law, personal law issues related to marriage and property. And so these are some of the most fundamental issues that women face in the legal system, and they're determined more often than not in these customary legal systems.

So, so some of my work has been devoted to looking at the clash between customary law and statutory law. Sometimes not surprisingly, those legal systems are in conflict. And it can become quite complicated to determine, which is the applicable law and what women's rights are under the applicable law. So, the very fact of multiple legal systems operating simultaneously is a complication. But an interesting one that I've explored in my scholarship because customary law is the form of law that most often impacts women in their personal lives. Much of my much of my work has been focused on women's rights under customary law.

But gender-based violence is a huge issue and one that I've worked on in a number of country's there. And also women's economic empowerment women's ability to buy and own property in in certain countries often has a huge impact on their socioeconomic status. So, that's that's also a huge issue. And socioeconomic status is one of those cross-cutting issues that that impacts so many other rights as well.

Ruth Candler: You're an American woman working on women's rights in Africa. Are people skeptical of you as an outsider?

Johanna Bond: Yeah, that's a great question. And yes, is the answer. I mean, I think rightly so. One of the things that I've seen over the years is, is, unfortunately, a number of people who practice human rights law do so with a kind of missionary zeal that doesn't always necessarily respect the cultural traditions and the very people that are most impacted by discriminatory laws and practices. So, I think that the way that you do human rights work is very important. For me that that means working in close partnership with women's rights lawyers on the ground who are most affected and most knowledgeable about local custom and local context. I really push back against the idea that that human rights is a Western concept that that is imposed on other countries and in some cases, I've seen people practice human rights law that way, and it does not lead to positive outcomes for people in those countries. It creates a lot of resentment about the West imposing its own ideals on people who would
not otherwise be interested. And so, for me that the most effective way to do this work is through local partnerships that are really based on mutual respect and, and commitment to positive outcomes for women.

**Ruth Candler:** So, what are some of the similarities between the struggle for women's rights in the US and some of the African countries you've worked in?

**Johanna Bond:** Well, I think there is a fundamental similarity in terms of how patriarchal attitudes manifested in women's daily lives, and that is true across the board. I mentioned gender-based violence earlier. That's, that's an area in which I've done a lot of work. That is universal. It's exists in every country that actually has ever been examined. And so that aspect of patriarchal existence is just common throughout the world. And so there are similarities like that in women's rights work, that that I think all stem from basic gender subordination, that really, unfortunately, is a common feature across countries. And so, there really are similarities between the work that women's rights activists are doing here in the US and in other parts of the world, including in Sub Saharan Africa, around gender-based violence. But that's just one example. I think there are a lot of other similarities, too, but really, all of them stemming from core notions of patriarchy.

**Ruth Candler:** Well, now I'd like to shift the gears slightly and ask you about how all of this research has informed your scholarship. Your writing can be divided into a few different buckets. But it seems to me that the two biggest ones are women's rights in Africa and women's rights within the work of the United Nations. Can you tell us briefly about those categories of scholarship?

**Johanna Bond:** Ah, yes. I mean, I think that's right. My work has at least these two broad themes. And some of my work with respect to African women's rights really does try and grapple with this notion of customary law and how it has been used to discriminate against women in some cases and there are women, African women scholars who write about customary law and who's on whose work I rely. But I do think that part of that is reconciling what are positive aspects of culture and what are some aspects of culture that are particularly harmful to women. And, and so some of that work is looking at the legal frameworks and in some countries, for example, if the Constitution itself prohibits gender discrimination. In fact, in all the countries in Sub Saharan Africa, there's a constitutional non-discrimination provision. So, there's good law on the books protecting women's rights, but in some cases in a small number of countries, five or so, there are provisions in the constitution that specifically exclude customary law from constitutional protection. So, even though there is a non-discrimination provision in the Constitution, there's another clause in the Constitution that's specifically excludes customary law. So for women, that can be devastating because as I mentioned earlier, customary law is the very form of law that most dramatically impacts their day to day lives. It determines rights within marriage determines rights within divorce rights to inherit property. So many aspects of day to day life really are subject to customary law. So to have that specifically excluded from constitutional protection is a problem.

So, those are some of the things that that I've written about, and I think that again, this goes back to something I mentioned earlier, but there are some, some Western scholars who, who reject culture and customary rights wholesale, and that creates a lot of resentment understandably, because there are wonderful positive aspects of customary law and culture all across the world and so, I think it's a matter of working very closely with women who are most affected in these legal systems to determine what are
those aspects of customary culture that are truly harmful. And then and then changing those, while also maintaining the positive aspects of customary culture that that can be really, they can be sources of empowerment for women. So, it's a nuanced approach to doing this kind of work.

**Ruth Candler:** You've talked about early opportunities to work on human rights at the UN when you are in law school. Does your un related scholarship grow out of your work with a un when you were a law student or a young lawyer?

**Johanna Bond:** Ah, yes, that's the second bucket. I forgot about the second bucket. It does, in fact. I was lucky and I mentioned this earlier too. I found really meaningful employment while I was in law school through an organization called the International Women’s Rights Action Watch. And it was an organization that, at the time was really the only organization in the world that was working directly with these UN treaty bodies. Those are the bodies that that oversee the major human rights treaties in the world, and their job is to enforce the provisions of those treaties. And, and so I had a very early up-close glimpse at how the UN works. And I worked with an organization that was really trying to help the UN by filling in gaps by communicating to these treaty bodies, local information that was coming directly from our network, about how the laws were or were not being implemented on the ground. And so our job was to get that very specific local information to these UN treaty bodies who, without that information, we’re relying solely on the information from government representatives about how well they were doing and implementing the treaty. And so, not surprisingly, many of those government representatives came to New York and reported that they were doing a great job of implementing these treaties.

In some cases, that was true. And our job was to applaud them for those very positive developments, but also to give them a clearer picture of what was actually happening on the ground from the perspective of activists who were working in these countries. So, it was a fantastic introduction to the work that the UN does, and I was able to go with that organization to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. And so as a as a law student to have that kind of experience working with NGOs from around the world. And then also working with the team that was crafting the Platform for Action, which was the outcome document representing the consensus of all of the countries represented there that really became the blueprint for women's rights around the world. That was also a fantastic experience. So I feel very lucky to have had those early formative experiences when I was a law student, but it has absolutely shaped my approach to scholarship in later years.

**Ruth Candler:** So, I know from our conversations that you identify strongly as a teacher, scholar and an activist, setting aside teaching, which I'll ask you about in a minute. Do you see yourself primarily as a scholar or as an activist?

**Johanna Bond:** Ohh, that is a tough one, Ruth. I have to say, both. I really do. I see myself as a scholar and an activist, but much of my scholarship is informed by the work that I do on the ground in close collaboration with women's rights lawyers in places like Tanzania. And so, I don't have a clear separation between my activist work and my scholarly work and, and I think that’s important for scholarship to stay relevant, that it should grow out of the experience of people, people's lives. And, and so I think that, that I really approach my work as a blend of both of those, both as an activist and a scholar. And I hope that the scholarship also informs the activist work that I do so it's definitely a two-way street.
Ruth Candler: We're going to move away from talking about your research and into teaching at W&L, but before we do, are there any books or documentaries or films or journals that you could recommend to our readers?

Johanna Bond: Absolutely. I think in terms of [movies], well, these are both works of fiction but they're interesting glimpses into women's empowerment and the kind of work that I do. One is a film called *Moolaade*, which is made by a Senegalese filmmaker. And it's about female genital cutting, and the experience of one woman working in her rural village to combat the practice. And she begins by protecting her daughter. But, that story sort of evolves to include other children in the village and the resistance that she encounters and some of the support she garner's among women within the village too. But, but it's really more than anything a story of women's empowerment. She's an incredible figure in this film. And, and so I love the film. I think it's fantastic and nuanced.

The other book that I'd recommend is another work of fiction and not directly related to my research, but it's a fantastic read. And that is *Americana*. And that's a book a novel about a Nigerian woman who moves to the US and she's really attempting to navigate this new place and this new culture, and I think her struggle to create space for herself as a Nigerian American is a fascinating look at cultural difference. And I would recommend that one too. I love it. It's also just beautifully written. Absolutely loved it.

Ruth Candler: I can't wait to read it. I've known you for quite a while, so I wasn't surprised to hear that you originally intended to be an activist, and I wasn't surprised to hear about the seal story. But what I was surprised to hear was it you fell into the teaching profession? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Johanna Bond: Sure. It's funny; I sometimes talk to students and students will ask me, “Well, how did you get to where you are?” I feel like my professional path was somewhat circuitous, but I very much wanted to practice women's rights law. When I graduated from law school, and I applied to a program called the Women's Law and Public Policy Fellowship Program. That is a DC based fellowship program that really places women's rights lawyers into NGOs are nonprofit organizations in DC that are working on a range of women's rights issues.

So, I envisioned myself as an activist when I applied to that program, but it just so happened that my placement was at Georgetown’s International Women’s Human Rights Clinic, because at that point, I had had a lot of experience working in women's human rights. And so from their perspective, it seems like a logical placement for me. But when I first heard about it, I thought, “Well, wait a minute, this involves teaching Oh, okay; that’s not something I'd considered, but if it allows me to do some work on women's rights, I'm all for it. I'm all in.”

And, and it turned out that I loved it. I loved the teaching parts of it too. And, and because it was a human rights clinic, it meant that I could maintain at least one foot in the activist world because we were working with students on real human rights problems and teaching at the same time that we were engaged in activist work so, so again, it was this this wonderful way to stay blended in both activism and teaching and scholarship. So, it was a fantastic entree into teaching, but it was not one that I had particularly planned for. And I discovered that I love teaching. So I haven't looked back since.

Ruth Candler: So, this might be this like asking which child is your favorite? But do you have a favorite class to teach?
**Johanna Bond:** Oh, I do. It's a clear favorite in my work class called the International Human Rights Practicum. And it is very similar to some of the early clinical work that I did because it's based on this idea that I work with a small group of students and we partner with a local Human Rights Organization. In the most recent years, I've collaborated with UN women's rights organization in Tanzania, and the students are engaged in real human rights work with that organization under my supervision. So we work together with the organization generally to do a fact-finding project. And the focus of the project just depends on what the immediate needs of our local partner are. But, but if they need research on, for example, child marriage, if they're taking on that issue, and they need some more documentation of what's actually happening, they'll bring us in and we work with them closely.

In the beginning part of the semester I teach the students all there is to know about that particular human rights issue and all of the relevant domestic law and all the relevant international human rights law and we also work on legal interview and we practice legal interviewing and so that they're ready to hit the ground running. And then we actually travel! I take them to work shoulder to shoulder with these women’s rights lawyers in Tanzania, for example. And it's dramatically different to teach human rights law this way, as opposed to reading about it in a book, which I've also done and which can be interesting as well. But it is a completely different experience when you’re able to immerse students in the actual work and, and they’re engaged in in conducting interview after interview of all the stakeholders in the legal system, in an effort to determine how the law is actually operating in practice, as opposed to what the law says on the books. And it's a fascinating exercise every single time and I love it, the students love it. And, and we’re actually engaged in in real work that our partners appreciate And so it's I think it's rewarding all the way around. And that's my favorite class to teach.

**Ruth Candler:** It sounds like a pretty niche focus. Do you get students who aren't going to practice human rights law in this class?

**Johanna Bond:** Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Students take the class for a variety of reasons. But I always tell students that I firmly believe this that, that what we’re teaching them in a class like this is legal problem-solving. And that's a skill that they're going to use no matter what area of law they go into. And so, at its core, it's about using the skills that they've developed throughout law school: legal analysis, legal writing, oral communication, creativity and problem-solving. And all of a cross cultural communication is essential in doing this kind of work. So, these are these are skills that they're going to need when they practice law no matter what field, and they really are transferable skills. But they're also they're also very useful skills in life to beyond the practice of law. So these are very helpful, but when they when they go into an effect finding interview with me in this context, in the context of this class, it's not dissimilar from going into a deposition, for example, in more traditional legal practice, where you may have one opportunity to ask this person really important, salient legal questions that could determine the outcome of your case. And so, so getting it right and going in with the right amount of preparation and the right understanding of the questions, that issue is essential.

And so again, they're transferable skills and I think students who go on to do law firm work, for example, carry those skills with them. But I there's one other thing that I think they carry with them and I think that is a commitment to, to doing good work in whatever way shape or form. So, it may not be that they ever practice anything close to international human rights work. But I also believe that some of the students are going to go on to law firm practice and do pro bono work. And so I hope that that in
addition to giving them the skills they need for legal practice, I hope that that this also inspires them to do *pro bono* work no matter where they end up.

**Ruth Candler:** And working side-by-side with those folks in Africa probably makes them more empathetic lawyers.

**Johanna Bond:** Absolutely. I’m so glad you mentioned empathy. It’s one of the things that I actually talk explicitly about in my class and, and it is one of the most critical skills that you can have as a lawyer, so it’s something we talk about. It’s something that I think is absolutely necessary to foster in students and in practicing lawyers. It’s something that I think comes out of my background in liberal arts and my commitment to liberal arts thinking, I think, you know, all of the skills that I’ve just talked about with respect to this class, creativity and problem solving, and empathy and cross-cultural communication, those are all liberal arts skills. So, so these are these are things that I value and that I think are necessary ingredients for success no matter what profession you’re talking about.

**Ruth Candler:** I agree wholeheartedly. What drew you to Washington and Lee, and what have you enjoyed the most about teaching here?

**Johanna Bond:** It’s hard to distill that into one or two things because there are so many things that I love about being here. I think one of the things that drew me initially to Washington and Lee was the sense of community here. And I know everybody talks about it, it almost sounds cliché, because it is so much a part of this place, because it’s absolutely true. But there is a strong sense of community. And I felt that when I visited here, it was palpable to me that that the students felt that sense of community that my faculty colleagues feel that sense of community. And, and I think that is extraordinary. I don’t think you find that everywhere. And partly that’s a product of our small size, partly it’s a product of the culture here. But I do think it is something that that sets this institution apart, and that is absolutely part of what drew me here.

**Ruth Candler:** So, for the benefit of our undergraduate alumni who didn’t make it over to the law school much, what is life like in Lewis Hall?

**Johanna Bond:** It is defined in many ways by that same sense of community. I think in law school, there is often a sense of competition among students. And I’m talking about law schools across the country, in general, there is a lot of competition, there's competition for jobs there. There is a lot riding on academic performance. And so students tend to be competitive, they compare themselves to their colleagues, they want to do better. And, and what's interesting about who is there, there really isn't that seems sense of competition among students. I think students really celebrate each other's successes here in a way that is uncommon, and they support each other there. To go back to this notion of community. I’m sorry, it sounds like a broken record, but really, there really is a sense of community in the law school as well. But that is unusual for law school environments. Although I think that's consistent with the sense of community on the undergrad side. It also takes on new meaning in the law school context, because it is so atypical for law school to foster that, that sense of community among students.

**Ruth Candler:** So your husband, JD King, is also a law professor at W&L. What's it like to be married to another law professor? You guys must have some spectacular arguments.
Johanna Bond: In fact, we do. I’m wondering how much of that is related to us both being lawyers, but probably some of it I’m sure. No, we once got into it, an argument, a fairly significant argument, over a book that neither one of us had read. You have to you have to have two lawyers to be invested in a position a completely uninformed position about a book. But we both, I think over the years, mellowed a little bit. Kids will do that to you, I think. But actually, it’s funny in looking at our kids and thinking about our parenting, I think that that may be the biggest area in which having two lawyers in the family leaves a mark. And so our kids have always been looking for loopholes and all that, which is a very lawyerly skill.

Ruth Candler: That’s so funny. Do you feel like any of them will follow in your footsteps?

Johanna Bond: Well, I think there’s a good chance Yes, absolutely. My oldest in particular has already articulated an interest in law and, and he gets it honestly. I mean, I think he he’s a prime example of looking for a loophole in our rules, but he’s also the child that at age three, was walking to work with my husband, who’s a criminal defense lawyer. And they, at the subway in DC encountered a police officer who was going to be testifying in one of JTS cases for the prosecution and JD was the defense lawyer involved. And so they weren’t talking about the case, obviously, but they were chatting. And my son who was three at the time, this is our oldest said to the police officer, “Well, what do you do?” (This is a child who was never really afraid of talking to adults) And the police officer said, “Well, my job is to catch the bad guys.” And my son thought about it for a minute, and he said, “Well, just remember, everybody makes mistakes.”

Okay, only out of the mouths of a child of a defense lawyer, right.

[laughs]

That’s good. They’re always absorbing this, and so there’s a fair amount of shop talk at home, for sure.

Ruth Candler: So, I really enjoyed seeing the photos from your sabbatical last year in Costa Rica. It looked like it was a family affair with JD and your kids there as well. For those of us who are not in academia, can you explain how sabbatical serve to advance the professional interest of a university professor?

Johanna Bond: Oh, absolutely. My sabbaticals have been critical in terms of giving me the time and space to advance my scholarly agenda. This this most recent scholarship, I’m sorry, this most recent sabbatical in Costa Rica is really the reason that I was able to write the book that’s coming out next year. And so for me, part of it is disconnecting and we were in a place where I was completely unplugged. I wasn’t connected. To my kids school or obligations outside of work, I wasn’t connected to committee meetings that were happening that I felt pulled into. I mean, there really are advantages to being someplace else where you can really immerse yourself in the scholarship. And so that’s what I that’s what I found so valuable about Costa Rica and JD too. He was working on writing an article and just being completely separate from other obligations allows you to completely immerse yourself in the work at hand and for him that was working on an article that will come out next year and for me, it was major making major progress on this book. And so it was just an extraordinary opportunity to do that, and our kids have been really wonderful participants in all of this throughout the years. The last sabbatical that we took was a five and a half years ago and that was on a Fulbright. JD got a Fulbright to do some research in Chile for six months, and then I got a Fulbright for the following six months to do
some research in Tanzania. And so our kids in that year spent six months living in Chile and attending school and making friends and, and they had an extraordinary experience culturally and otherwise in Chile. And then we came home for about a week did a whole bunch of laundry repack her bag, and head to Tanzania for six months, and so I was able to do some immersive research in Tanzania. And the kids had a completely different cultural experience there and, and so, as a family, it was unbelievably rewarding to be able to expose our kids to those very different places and to make friends and make connections in those places and to get some really valuable time for research. It was just extraordinary. It's invaluable.

Ruth Candler: It sounds like a fabulous educational experience all the way around.

Johanna Bond: It was it really was, and our kids remember those experiences so fondly. I really feel like it's a gift we’re able to give them for sure.

Ruth Candler: To wrap up, many of our listeners will know you as an educator, but I’m sure they'd like to hear more about what your interests are outside of the classroom. What do you do and what do you enjoy when you’re not on campus?

Johanna Bond: That’s a great question. I spend a lot of time with my kids and as a family. We do a lot of hiking, we do a lot of biking, where we’re active and we’re fortunate enough to live in a place where there are endless possibilities for outdoor pursuits. So, we spent a lot of time outdoors. I'm a soccer player. I discovered my love of the sport in my 40s. But it did lead to a hip injury.

[Laughs]

We also spent a lot of time reading and playing games and doing puzzles together, and we collectively really value family time. So, we spent a lot of time engaged in those kinds of activities, too. And, you know, with our current circumstances, under this pandemic, there's been no shortage of time for, like, eating and puzzles and hiking. So we've done a lot.

Ruth Candler: So you mentioned reading, what are you reading right now?

Johanna Bond: Ah, it's a little out of character for me, but I’m reading two books that are nonfiction books. One is written by a poet, although it’s not a book of poetry. It’s a book of essays, but it was written by a poet named Ross Gay. And the book is called The Book of Delights. And it's an extraordinary book. It's a series of essays that he wrote that that are each one of them relishing some small delight in his life that would otherwise go unnoticed. And he’s actually trying to make up, make it a practice to observe and appreciate these small delights in his life. And he writes about them in a way that is just beautiful. I mean, he is a poet. So even in this, this other genre, he’s, he’s fantastic in his writing. And so I've really enjoyed that.

And, and then the other book is a book of poems by a friend and colleague named Leah Green, who's written this this truly wonderful book called The More Extravagant Feast. Her book won The Walt Whitman Award last year in 2019 for poetry so it's a collection that is truly the most beautiful poetry I've ever read in my life. And, and I’m so glad that she’s getting recognition for the book because I think it is one of those books that that is transformative and I ran into her the other day and told her I'm allowing myself only one poem per day, because it's a relatively short collection and I just want it to last. I'm trying to read them sparingly, but I highly recommend that one too.
Ruth Candler: Both of those sound perfect for this time we’re experiencing right now.

Johanna Bond: Absolutely, indeed.

Ruth Candler: There’s little happy places where you can grab them, that’s for sure. Do you have a favorite place to eat in Lexington and what’s your go to order?

Johanna Bond: One of the things I love about our little small town is that we have so many great restaurants. But I do have a favorite, and it’s The Red Hen. And they have a menu that changes periodically, so I love that too. I feel like every time I go in, I’m surprised. They’ve fortunately recently been doing curbside pickup and takeout, so I’ve been taking advantage of that and other cocktails as well. And they get some pretty fabulous ones. My current favorite is a lavender lemon Martini that is just to die for. So exquisite.

Ruth Candler: That sounds delicious. Yes. For our alumni who have recently graduated, what do you wish you had known when you had just started out?

Johanna Bond: That is a fantastic question. I think that what I would love to say to a young undergrad or young law student just starting out is have confidence in your own abilities. I feel like it took me years to build up that that sense of confidence. And I don’t think I appreciated at an early stage that I had the skills necessary to do what I wanted to do. And, and so if I could just instill in these young graduates this sense that that they have what they need to go out and make the world a better place if that’s what they choose to pursue.

I think that would be what I’d love to impart to students and, and I mentioned being a graduate of a liberal arts college. I think that our students that who are so lucky to be graduating from a wonderful liberal arts institution and I’m a firm believer in liberal arts education, I think that it is a the type of education that really prepares students and graduates to, to succeed in whatever work they do. Because it’s the focus is on core problem solving skills. And, and so, graduates really do have what they need, they may not have the precise professional expertise, but they have the ability to develop that expertise and to develop it in a in a fairly short period of time. So, so I would instill to the extent possible of confidence in those graduates if I could.

Ruth Candler: Johanna, it has been an absolute pleasure talking with you today.

Johanna Bond: Likewise, Ruth. Thanks a lot.

Ruth Candler: Thanks. As always to you for listening. We hope you discovered something new. To read more about today’s podcast and check out other ways to continue your lifelong learning with W&L, you can head to our website, wlu.edu/lifelong. You’ll also find W&L’s faculty reading list, “Sheltering in Place with a Few Good Books,” and information on how to join our new W&L book club. We hope you’ll join us again back here soon. Thanks again, and until then, let’s remain together not unmindful of the future.