

Interview with Elke Flores

Anna Swartwout: Before we start, can you give us a brief bio of what you did while you were at school—your major, minors, hometown?

Elke: Sure. I'm a native of Brooklyn, New York. I started at Slippery Rock in 1989. I came here undeclared my freshman year but decided on being an English Writing major, and I ended up with a minor in German as well. While at Slippery Rock I was a resident advisor so I participated in RA activities and leadership courses. I was a member—I *am* a member still, actually—of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, which is one of the first historically black sororities that was able to have a charter here at the university. I was a member of the Black Action Society while I was here as well, and also participated in a lot of activities with the English department, and I did participate in plays. I was in a play *Purlie Victorious*. I can't remember the other things. I was a part of the gospel choir and so...the Slippery Rock University Gospel Choir. That's all that I, that comes to mind.

A: That's awesome. What did Homecoming Queen mean to you then, and what does it mean to you now?

E: So then, it, what it really meant to me was a signal of the, what I would say is the community of residence hall students. I was put forth as a candidate from the Slippery Rock University Residence Hall Association which is really all of the students that live on campus. So I spent my four years at the university as a resident at North Hall. I started there as a Freshman, I lived there all four years, and I was a Resident Advisor there for three years. So to me it was just the power, I think, of those of us who lived on campus, lived in the buildings, and we where here and this was our community. So it meant a lot to be among my other cohorts who, you know, were sorority women and different, other organizations, but it was a real honor to be put up by the Residence Hall Association.

A: That's awesome.

E: So what did it mean to me...that's what it meant to me then. What does it mean to me today? I don't think as a student I really absorbed that I was now a part of a great Slippery Rock tradition and history. And so coming back now, realizing, and getting to meet queens that came before me and after me was pretty incredible.

A: Can you tell us a little bit about your campaign? Did you guys campaign?

E: Yes. Our campaign was very low-key. It was just papering all the residence halls with some fliers to let them know that I was running, what my qualifications were. I think I got a chance to speak at a few residence hall meetings so you could go over and kind of talk to people there. Of course I belonged to a sorority and so my sorority sisters, while we had a candidate from my sorority, they were also very supportive of me as well. You know, in all my classes I would get up and let people know I was running for Homecoming Queen. That was kind of weird but pretty cool. People were receptive.

A: Did you run with somebody?

E: No. I just ran with, just as part of the RA, as the Residence Hall Association. But interestingly enough, the Homecoming King that year, he and I of course we came in together as Freshman so we knew each other from Freshman year and had sort of been in Freshman Orientation together and just really, throughout being on campus as we grew up over those four years, so it was really kind of cool when Jonas won and then I won, and I'm like "Oh my gosh," because we had known each other and we weren't strangers, so that was kind of cool to have that experience together.

A: I don't know how prevalent social media was on campus at that time...It wasn't, was it?

E: No.

A: No?

E: No. Hallelujah! I'm so happy we did not have social media. I don't even really think...at that time, it was just the beginning of email so social media? No.

A: I didn't think so.

E: We were still doing research *in the library*.

A: Was there any stigma around it? Did you get any criticisms or anything for running?

E: No, no. So I think that was kind of the beauty of it as well. It was a little weird in that I belonged to a sorority so I didn't go that traditional path. Not weird, but that I didn't go that traditional path, but it was actually a pretty great community at that time so I didn't feel any stigma but it may also be because of who I ran on behalf of—students that were living on campus.

A: What was the hardest part about running?

E: I think just kind of getting out of your own way and going...not feeding into the stereotypes of what is a traditional...or what Homecoming Queens are portrayed as in movies, I guess, which is really all the experience I had of homecoming. Homecoming in my high school wasn't a huge thing. I don't even remember if we had a Homecoming Queen. Also just being a woman of color on a predominantly white campus. I was like, "I don't know what my chances are." So there was a little bit of that in my own mind. But then also, not that I didn't think anybody would embrace me but at the same time I did realize that I was not only...I was a woman of color, a minority on campus running for a position that is voted on by everyone, so it was an awesome feeling to be embraced by the university community.

A: Once you were elected, how did your college experience change?

E: Well it was my senior year so it was a busy, busy year for me. It was definitely a great honor,

but of course, after Homecoming you kind of get back to normal life, if you will. And so it didn't impact me hugely after the fall semester, I would say. You know there's a lot of buzz that happens leading up to and then after, but then it was sort of like we're grinding, being a senior it was all about finishing out the year for me.

A: Finishing strong.

E: Finishing strong.

A: What did your family think? Were they there?

E: No, so my family was all, and they still are based in New York City, in Brooklyn. And so it was really about calling my grandmother, calling my mom, letting them know. "You're running for what?" And I'm like, "Well, I get to be in this parade!" And so, you know, kind of explaining that. But what I did do...back then we didn't have social media so it was taking film, developing the pictures, and getting copies to my family so that they could see what I had taken part in. So it was really calling and writing and sending pictures back home so my family could know what I was doing.

A: And they responded positively?

E: Yes, absolutely. And I just remembered one other thing. It was a busy year because I was also applying for law school that semester. I hadn't thought about that, and I'm like wait a minute, it was crazy, because it's the fall semester so I was applying for law schools, waiting for application results to come back in.

A: Do you think that your life changed at all in any small or big way from becoming Homecoming Queen?

E: I think that one of the things it did for me is just to have more confidence and faith in myself to go out and do bigger things and dare to do big things. And also, I already had a great love for this university, but it really just solidified for me that I am a part of Slippery Rock

A: Have you come back for Homecomings before?

E: I have come back...well, once I graduated, the first three years of school I probably came up once or twice because I still had friends that were still in school. And then I moved to Philadelphia, started my law practice, so I did not come back for many, many years then. And then I think I've been back once in the last ten years. And, well, I live in Seattle, so it's a long drive.

A: Would you be inclined to come back more if there was a ceremony or something to honor Homecoming Queens and queens in general?

E: I think yeah...I think absolutely. I probably can't come back every year because I live so far away but it was great to come up this year and be encouraged to come back, so I think doing

something like recognition of certain classes or decades of Homecoming Queens would certainly be something that I'd love to do. And today was amazing, to meet so many former queens and to meet the current Homecoming Queen and just realize you're part of this bigger thing than yourself.

A: Well, thank you. That's all I have.