

**University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives**

**Krannert Center 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Oral History Project**

**Interviewee: Rebecca McBride**

**Interviewer: Deborah Miller**

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**Length: 00:08:55**

**Deborah Miller: This is Deborah Miller and I am senior director of development at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, and I am here with Rebecca McBride. Rebecca is the former senior associate director at Krannert Center. And you retired how long ago now?**

Rebecca McBride: A little over two years.

**DM: Two years ago. So I know you worked at Krannert Center for twenty —**

RM: Four.

**DM: Four years. So can you tell me what were some of your earliest memories about Krannert Center, either as an audience member or as a new staff member?**

RM: Yeah, I'm from Champaign. I grew up here, so I vaguely remember when it was built. I was ten years old? Something like that. And my father owned a drug store right down the street and we used to go over and watch it being built. So that's one of my vague earliest memories. But I think when I got hired here was such an eye-opening experience, and I think, you know, the first memory I have is just the incredible beauty of the physical complex. I can still remember being in the lobby for the interview and thinking, "Oh my gosh, working here would be so special."

And then after I was hired, I think I was just awed by the physical complex and how level two and seeing the entirety of the facility and its beauty. I can still remember sitting in the Great Hall for the very very first time by myself. And of course, some real early memories are those amazing performances that I saw during my first year of being hired, including David Parsons doing one of his amazing signature pieces in dance and CSO in the Great Hall. So, it's sort of a blending of this "I can't believe I work here" memory and that's what I overwhelmingly thought, is that I was the most fortunate person in the world to be able to work here.

**DM: That's great. Now when you talk about the physical facility, you also worked a lot with the production teams and so worked, when you talk about level two, can you talk about some of your experiences in some of the spaces on level two?**

RM: You know when I came here, I was director of marketing and then I sort of moved up, and I had so much to learn when I came here. So much to learn because I don't have an arts

background per say. My background is in business. And so the whole level two thing, which is the scene shop, the costume shop, all that. That was all a whole new world to me and took years and years and years for me to learn about that process. And I think probably the thing that resonates with me the most are the memories of that was, well, first of all, being amazed at what is built down there and created. But also, our work on new work, where we were producing new work for some of the most amazing artists in the world and learning how to do that and to manage that process with the amazing artists that are hired here to realize somebody's dream. And so, I think that's what comes through so strong with me, is how special that was.

**DM: Yeah, that's wonderful. Now I know you share a lot of memories at Krannert Center with your friends and family so can you talk just about how some experiences and memories that you have with your friends and family here at the Center?**

RM: Yeah, you know, well first after my uncle David died, he was my father's identical twin, and his wife — how old was I? I was probably a very young adult. His wife just loved classical music and so I said, "You know, I'll get a series ticket with you to the Great Hall series." So that was sort of a tradition for my aunt and I, and we sat in the front row. I can still remember looking straight up and yet it was so [?]. You couldn't see the back of the orchestra [laughs]. But I can watch the conductor. It was so amazing. So that was one family thing that always stuck with me.

The other one is friends and family for usually opening night and of course some of the celebratory parties that we had. The 1969 party, the cruise party. You know that's, for my friends and family, the opening night is always just, you know, we would never miss it. It's always a coming together of a lot of friends and a lot of family. It's tradition.

**DM: And why do you think that's so special to you and your friends? Why do you think that atmosphere is so special?**

RM: You know, I think, you know, I spent my career here, really the primary goal of my career here was to try to help change the image of the performing arts within this community. And I think with the start of more accessible initiatives where opening night is just truly — in the 1969 party they were just showed Krannert Center as a living, breathing, celebratory communal experience. And that's why that was so important, is to show my friends and my family that Krannert Center was much more than some people think. And that there's a time for that quietness in the Great Hall but there's also a time for great partying and joy communally and everything that goes in between. And it's really just about being alive. And like I said I spent my career really trying to help with that with my colleagues and so those moments were important.

**DM: That's really wonderful because I do think that's really true. That's what it is about is that there is something for everyone here.**

RM: Yes.

**DM: And I'm glad you shared that with so many. What surprised you most about the Center?**

RM: I think probably the complexity of running or managing and operating a performing arts center of this scope. You know, when I first came here, I don't know what I thought. That there's like nine people that threw up those performances, you know? And I know a lot of people still feel that way and that's how I was too when I came here. And then I think the most surprising thing is what it takes to put those artists on the stage or to produce work or to teach students at the University of Illinois in the complexity and challenges of this field are just enormous. And the people that work here were — and one of the most surprising things was how unbelievably talented but also how generous and open they were. I came from a private company business-wise. It was the first time I had really worked in this kind of an atmosphere, and I was just blown away on both sides, the complexity and the beauty.

**DM: How would you say that having this center in your life has impacted your life?**

RM: I don't know if I can actually put into words how this place had affected, has affected me and continues to affect me. First, I think is very personal. It was a place where, through my experience both with the staff, the faculty, and the artists and the performances is personally, it made me feel empowered and that I was okay. That self-esteem. I can't — and I think that is what the arts brings to so many people. That maybe are struggling in certain ways in their lives and it's a place to be empowered and so that's on a very personal.

The other's personal too. I think seeing the artistry and the incredible diversity of artistry and experiences that I've had on stages has changed me fundamentally as how I see the world completely. And it's not something that happens overnight. It's like this, if I think about now versus when I walked in and what Rebecca McBride and how Rebecca McBride viewed the world or thought of the world is just a complete transformation, but it's very subtle and it takes time. It's like a sustained experience of all different art forms.

**DM: Well, thank you so much for your time today and for your beautiful words. I really appreciate it.**

RM: You're welcome. Thank you.