

My Berea Story Luke Hodson

My Berea story starts way back as a toddler. Back then, my mother tells me, I would take off my socks, roll them up into a ball and shoot them into the laundry basket like I was playing basketball. It was only natural I would do such a thing. I grew up in eastern Kentucky, Harlan and Knott County to be exact, and basketball was king there. So, early on I set a goal for myself that I wanted to get a basketball scholarship to a big university up the road whose school colors are blue and white. That “big university” never came knocking, but a small private college in Madison County did.

Going to college, basketball or not, was always the plan and as a high school senior, my classmates would have described me as very shy. Had someone asked me then if I would be standing before a large crowd telling my Berea story I would have just stood there barely uttering “no” out of shyness.

But our Berea has a way of leaving its mark on us, it prepares us and takes us out of our comfort zone. It supports us through our journey to become an even better version of ourselves.

I arrived on Berea’s campus in the fall of 1998 and that whole “get out of your comfort zone” hit me quickly. Remember, I was the shy guy who didn’t like to talk in front of people guy. So when I discovered I was placed in an Intro to Communication class my first semester I was ready to go back home. To say I was out of my comfort zone is an understatement because on the first day of class I learned it would be nothing but presentations, speeches and eliminating “um”, “uh”, and other filler words from my vocabulary.

Spoiler alert, I passed the class, and little did I know how it would help prepare me for my Berea story.

Fast forward to my sophomore year where I returned to campus with a full load of classes and the same labor position I had as a first-year student...working in the Alumni Office. We filed countless notes from alumni, among many other tasks, and, of course supported all the efforts that go into Homecoming Weekend. But the day my Labor Supervisor asked me to drive to the Lexington airport to pick up a Trustee of the College was the day I realized every job description has a line that says: “other duties as assigned.” This meant I would be stuck in a car for an hour and forced to have a conversation with someone, and not just any someone, someone really important to the College. Talk about being out of my comfort zone. But I had taken the Intro to Communication class the previous year and was now less of a shy guy who didn’t like to talk in front of people guy. In case you are wondering, the Trustee and I had a great conversation and safely made it to campus.

My senior year included me scoring my 1000th point here on this court, a great memory I still carry with me.

And as I turned the corner to the spring term, my excitement for graduation was off the charts until I realized I still needed to pass Business 475. This was the capstone business class at the time and it was only taught by one professor, the dreaded Dr. Spears. I waited until my very last semester to take the class in hopes that he would retire. Yes, he had that kind of reputation. But, that didn’t happen so there I was, completing case studies on Tuesdays, giving presentations in suits on Thursdays, week after week.

Dr. Spears famous line on Thursday's was "sit down" and you dreaded hearing those two words because you knew it meant an automatic F on your presentation. What made him say those two simple, but dreaded words you ask? When you used "um", "uh", or other filler words in your presentation.

Thanks to my four years at Berea, my first-year Intro to Communication class was a distant memory and I was no longer a shy guy who didn't like to talk in front of people guy. I was a transformed guy who passed BUS 475 and proudly walked across this stage to receive my Berea College degree.

And my Berea story doesn't end there. For the past 14 years I have served in the Office of Admissions alongside some of the hardest working folks I have ever known. First as an Admissions Counselor and now as the Associate Vice President of Admissions. I have done countless presentations and interviews about Berea and I can't help but reflect on how the Intro to Communication class helped prepare me for that and how numerous people have supported me along the way.

As I said earlier, the university up the road never called with the basketball scholarship and I am eternally grateful they didn't because I would have never had the chance to write my Berea story. God had a much greater plan for me and I happen to love our shade of blue and white better, anyway.

I am thankful for the opportunity I've had to write my Berea story and I look forward to adding more chapters to it as we all walk through our Berea together.

Thank you!