

Brittany Parbo

- 16:08:07:17 [Eric Darling]: A little higher, Mickey. And anytime. Thank you.
- 16:08:12:09 [Mickey Youmans]: Get my headphones on.
- 16:08:18:13 [Eric Darling]: You can ignore us completely and just speak with Tom.
- 16:08:21:22 [Brittany Farbo]: Okay.
- 16:08:22:23 [Mickey Youmans]: Okay. Ready to go.
- 16:08:24:13 [Eric Darling]: Ready when you are.
- 16:08:27:09 [Tom Kohler]: Good afternoon. Thanks for being with us.
- 16:08:29:07 [Brittany Farbo]: Thank you for having me.
- 16:08:30:17 [Tom Kohler]: Absolutely. We'll start just if you would, your full name and also the spelling please?
- 16:08:36:16 [Brittany Farbo]: So my full name is Brittany Celeste Farbo. That's my Christian given name. It's spelled B-R-I-T-T-A-N-Y C-E-L-E-S-T-E- F as in Frank, A-R-B as in boy O.
- 16:08:53:23 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you. And then your preferred pronouns?
- 16:08:57:15 [Brittany Farbo]: She, her.
- 16:08:59:09 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. And if you were not born in Savannah, would you mind talking to us about where you were born and kind of your journey to eventually wind up here with us in our little community?
- 16:09:09:02 [Brittany Farbo]: So, I was born in Safford, Arizona, which is in central Eastern Arizona. I was raised in Wilcox, which is in the southeast corner of, of the state. It's about 45 minutes from the Mexican border, an hour from Tucson and about an hour from the New Mexican border in the Sulphur Springs Valley, which is where the Chiricahua National Monument is. It's where Geronimo was captured. So that's where I, I grew up. My family's been in the southwest for like nine generations, 10 generations in some
- 16:09:41:04 places. And I came to Savannah in 2000, late, late 2016, exactly like December, 2016 from after living in Washington DC for a off and on for a few years before that, I had lived all over the world.
- 16:09:58:02 [Tom Kohler]: Why Savannah?

Brittany Parbo

- 16:09:59:19 [Brittany Farbo]: Well, that's kind of a, one of those great, I think, great stories. Not to toot my own horn. I have was associated for many, many years with the home church at Thurgood Marshall in Washington DC. St. Augustine's Episcopal church in Southwest, which was set up in the Washington DC Diocese is the first, not integrated, it was integrated, but it was deliberately so. It was the first interracial church in the
- 16:10:29:23 Episcopal diocese. It's also the home church of Thurgood Marshall, the qua, the Holman family, Kwasi, Kwame, Kinshsha Holman. Their father was Carl, who was in Atlanta, worked for the newspaper there during the civil rights movement. So a lot of those people went to this church, Neil Peirce of the Washington Post, who worked on the Marshall Plan. And they actually worked on canonizing Thurgood Marshall and putting him on the book of feasts along
- 16:11:01:17 with Pauli Murray. So they're in the process of doing this. I repatriate in 2015, yeah, 2015. And around that time there was the shooting in Charleston and Panhandle Slim started posting, you know, people started posting his work of the Mother Emanuel Church. Well, I reached out to him, he's like, oh, I'm kind of stumped about who, who should I paint next? I said, well, do you wanna
- 16:11:30:18 do the icon for Thurgood Marshall and his home church? I said, but there's one caveat you need to put Cecilia on the front. Now Cecilia Marshall was Thurgood Marshall's widow and also keeper of his legacy. She was from Hawaii originally, but her family are Panay. She was four foot 11. Thurgood Marshall was six foot four. Yeah. So there's that big disconnect. He passes away, she takes on his legacy and she actually worked with the, the NAACP.
- 16:12:03:13 She didn't realize that she was a person of color till she left Hawaii, went to New York and then they put her at the NAACP. She went to Columbia, the Columbia Secretary College back in the forties and ended up at the typing pool in New York. She worked on with a lot of other women typing Brown versus the Board, which was why the Episcopal church recognizes Thurgood Marshall as a saint. But sissy needed to be included.
- 16:12:32:21 Mrs. Marshall, 'cause she typed it.
- 16:12:41:06 [Brittany Farbo]: So, I commissioned this icon. Takes me a year to get to Savannah because you know, family, some family trauma, drama stuff. And you know, repatriation the election, I get back to Savannah, it's 2016, couple weeks before Trump's elected. And I thought, I, I don't do well in cold, cold climates again, being from Arizona. And I was like, oh, what would it cost to rent in Savannah? Bought a house off the internet six weeks later. And that's how I got here.
- 16:13:09:18 [Tom Kohler]: Wow, okay. Yeah,
- 16:13:11:09 [Brittany Farbo]: Yeah.

Brittany Parbo

- 16:13:12:04 [Tom Kohler]: So you bought a house and came?
- 16:13:13:15 [Brittany Farbo]: Yeah.
- 16:13:14:10 [Tom Kohler]: Wow. Okay.
- 16:13:16:00 [Brittany Farbo]: Off the internets.
- 16:13:17:14 [Tom Kohler]: Can we, can we finish the story about Thurgood Marshall and Panhandle?
- 16:13:21:09 [Brittany Farbo]: That was it. So I came back, came down here...
- 16:13:23:19 [Tom Kohler]: Right.
- 16:13:24:06 [Brittany Farbo]: To pick up the painting
- 16:13:25:06 [Tom Kohler]: And Oh, okay. And you got it?
- 16:13:26:18 [Brittany Farbo]: And I got it and I took it on the train back to DC.
- 16:13:29:13 [Tom Kohler]: Got it.
- 16:13:30:09 [Brittany Farbo]: And I did this in September. And in November we presented it to Cecilia Marshall in the church. And it now hangs in the gallery of the home church of Thurgood Marshall in Washington DC.
- 16:13:52:15 [Tom Kohler]: How... It sounds like faith has been guiding your life for a good while?
- 16:13:59:15 [Brittany Farbo]: It, I don't know if I would call it faith. I think it's, it's that tradition of American hopefulness. I won't necessarily call it optimism, but it's, it's okay, let's try to do something decent with people who are very different, but still are very not different. So that's been kind of the, the guiding principle I grew up where I'd say it's very conservative but also very ecumenical. We have a lot of LDS, it's 40% Roman Catholic. My neighbors were old order
- 16:14:32:02 Mennonites. My grandmother's a brethren. My grandfather's a Methodist. My mother's a Southern Baptist one grandmother's a Catholic. So I grew up in the West not having a lot of religious prejudice because it, it's not out there. It's not, it's, it is something that happens, but it's not the end all and be all like races. It's, do you go, the question is, do you go
- 16:14:57:23 somewhere on Friday, Saturday or Sunday? Not so, yeah.
- 16:15:03:22 [Tom Kohler]: And then you've tra... you've, sounds like you've traveled a lot?

Brittany Parbo

- 16:15:06:17 [Brittany Farbo]: I did. I have, I've lived, I lived overseas for six years prior to moving to Savannah from 2000, middle of 2009 to middle of 2015. So I, I started out in Norway and I spent seven or eight months in Norway studying, doing some like housekeeper work. And then I went to Afghanistan for 18 months and I worked at a women's shelter that was run by far right Evangelical Christians. And I noped outta that because I don't
- 16:15:40:14 believe in religion with coercion. And I ended up working at the Ministry of Agriculture with a group of secular and Sharia lawyers and policy makers. And I spent eight, let's see, 4 34 days, so I'd say year and four months in Afghanistan. And then from there I went to India for a few months. Then I went to Cambodia for four years. And I lived in Phnom Penh
- 16:16:06:12 for four years before coming back to the States.
- 16:16:09:06 [Tom Kohler]: What did you do there?
- 16:16:09:12 [Brittany Farbo]: In Cambodia? I worked as a journalist for a newspaper. I wrote, wrote food columns. I spent a lot of time doing liaison work with the American community there as far as like voter registration services in a very ad hoc way, helping people, you know, if somebody who was a expat died, I would help figure out how to get their body out of the morgue, go to the monks or the church or wherever and help get their funerals put together, liaisoned with the crematoriums that the monks ran
- 16:16:43:00 to get their ashes to the families. So I did that just as a, at a, at an ad hoc sort of way.
- 16:16:51:07 [Tom Kohler]: And then I wanna go back to the southwest again.
- 16:16:54:14 [Brittany Farbo]: Right?
- 16:16:56:21 [Tom Kohler]: There's this joke about how if you go through a small town in Wisconsin, there are four taverns, one stoplight down a tavern on each corner. If you go to a small town in South Georgia, one stoplight, there are four churches each corner. The town you grew up in, was it the taverns or the churches?
- 16:17:18:14 [Brittany Farbo]: I would say there's more churches than taverns, but we have brew-thrus. So you can get your beer and drive out into the, the boonies. We have a, we have a historic saloon culture that was very violent during the old West. And because of the LDS influence, where I'm from... Latter Day Saints, there's not a lot of alcohol. And there wasn't a coffee shop in my town until my junior year of high school. Should have
- 16:17:50:08 been 2001. So there is drinking, but it's not as pervasive as it is here in Savannah.
- 16:17:59:00 [Tom Kohler]: Did you grow up churchd as they say?

Brittany Parbo

- 16:18:00:09 [Brittany Farbo]: Very much. I grew up in the Methodist church, which is the very main line where I'm from. And my grandparents, my grandma was raised Brethren, which is Anabaptist from, and they're from North Dakota. And my grandpa is a fa... family is Norwegian and Welsh. And so we, the Methodist church is kind of that via media there. We had youth group, we had hand bells, summer camps. It was not... Very, very, very mainline though. There was not the whole talk, purity culture talk. I
- 16:18:35:14 didn't grow up with a, with a lot of the messages about men are better than women. It 'cause it was for where I grew up, which is very conservative. It was the most liberal of a conservative place.
- 16:18:51:02 [Tom Kohler]: And did you sort of stop going to church as soon as you could? Or did you have you, how did that one go?
- 16:18:59:09 [Brittany Farbo]: No, no, no. It's, I wouldn't say that I have a, a strong belief. I just understand the role of churches. I've always, I don't go to church now on Sundays, I work in churches, I work around religious organizations. I work with religious concepts as a trained theologian. But as a kid, we didn't have the resources in the community that other people have. So if you wanted to learn music or art or take, go
- 16:19:31:15 on a field trip or go do something, you went to the churches and everybody went to everybody else's church. So in the summertime you were at the Baptists and then you'd go to ca... catechism with the Catholics. 'cause that's how you could get the ride back out to the countryside. So there's the town and then there's 20 miles out to each one of the homesteads. So you sometimes needed to get a ride home and you would just end up with somebody who was getting saved and talking in tongues. Or you'd bend up
- 16:20:03:10 with the mar... women practicing the mariachi at the Catholic church. Or you grab a tamale, grab a burro, go over next door to the Methodist church, have a spaghetti dinner. And so there was not a lot of, at least with the friend group I had, we all just, people knew that the kids were safe. We circulated between... betwixt and between and it was actually a lot of fun.
- 16:20:28:05 [Tom Kohler]: Sounds like it.
- 16:20:28:21 [Brittany Farbo]: Yeah.
- 16:20:29:04 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah. Yeah. How, how do you, what does Savannah feel like to you? I mean, a lot of what you just described is almost like a, just an instinctive sort of sense of interfaith, I mean.
- 16:20:39:23 [Brittany Farbo]: Right.

Brittany Parbo

- 16:20:40:08 [Tom Kohler]: You know, just like, it's just woven in. How, how does Savannah feel to you with regard to this idea of interfaith?
- 16:20:47:18 [Brittany Farbo]: I think Savannah was, is, is, is founded on a tenuous interfaith mojo is what I kind of call it. It's okay... So we're not gonna let you in. Okay, we'll let you in. We're not gonna let you. Okay. I think it has a lot to do. I had read somewhere that Oglethorpe spent a lot of time in Tuscany during the time of the Inquisition. Like his family traded and it was the Inquisition. And we, when we talk about the history of the American colonies from English to Spanish, French, a lot of
- 16:21:22:08 people who were sent here, I wouldn't say immigrated, they were just loaded up on ships. Whether it was as chattel slavery or indentured servanthood. There was this mentality that you are a heretic or you are not even a person. So we're gonna put you on a ship and we're gonna throw you in the middle of the wilderness. And it had a lot to do with religion and religion dictating who got to be a heretic and who even got to be human. And Savannah's very rooted in that.
- 16:21:49:07 And the racial, what I've observed is Savannah still working on its racial issues, it's socioeconomic issues, but when it comes to religion, it's a pretty, pretty chill town between each other. I worked with a woman who grew up in other parts of the south who's a Greek Orthodox. And she said the Catholics and the Greek Orthodox, the priests would scream at each other. I haven't heard of really anything like that happening here. I've heard like there's some things, you know, I'm concerned about, but that's
- 16:22:21:22 one thing Savannah does very, very, very well and should be incredibly proud of.
- 16:22:27:15 [Tom Kohler]: Civility in some level?
- 16:22:30:01 [Brittany Farbo]: Yeah, yeah. Or just a pleasant indifference to what somebody does on Sunday morning or Friday night or, and it's like, and I think it goes back to we had the Salzburgers who were getting massacred. We had the Methodists who were getting massacred. Everybody who came here in the initial at one point, the, the Moravians getting massacred in Europe during the Reformation and the Counter Reformation and the Inquisition. And it's just like, that's, we're not doing that again. (laughs) We're, we're
- 16:23:00:08 not doing this again.
- 16:23:02:16 [Tom Kohler]: How did you decide to major in in theology?
- 16:23:08:04 [Brittany Farbo]: It's something I always wanted to study. I was always some something. I did study, my bachelor's is from a school in Indiana. I did it via distance, St. Mary of the Woods College - Catholic. It was first women's Catholic college in the United States and they had a really great program for that. And then after that I went to Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Indiana, which

Brittany Parbo

had a distance program where I could travel. And that is Brethren Quaker. And I studied theology as, as a master's. And then I studied Theopoetics and the Theological

- 16:23:42:04 Imagination as my focus, which is how do people think about and talk about God and belief and what is their imagination behind it and what is, so we have, you can have a dangerous theological imagination. You can have a very boring one. Even atheists have a theological imagination. What happens when I die?
- 16:24:04:13 [Brittany Farbo]: What the, these big questions we have, we have to kind of construct a lot. The theopoetic side is, there's a couple ways of going about it, but the root of it is poetics or poesis. And that is the creation of new language. And we're in an age where theological and religious language is going under, is undergoing a morph... morphologies going, undergoing a shift of meaning. And so that's what I, I look at how cultures, leaders, all of that think and talk about God. And that follow
- 16:24:40:04 falls into my background. I just graduated with my master's in national security from the Citadel. And so I work on the combination of national security issues on and religion.
- 16:24:56:18 [Tom Kohler]: I almost have no idea what that means. Help me.
- 16:24:58:21 [Brittany Farbo]: Okay. So let me give gimme one second. Have you noticed in the news there's been an increase in the discussion that things are demonic? So there's, there's a whole on social media... calling things demonic. Queer people are demonic. Black people who believe in racial equality are
- 16:25:31:09 demonic. It has Satan behind it. And it's been a shift. It, it, it goes back and forth. It's on a pendulum, this, this rhetoric. That's really powerful in the American imagination, theological imagination. This idea of Satan. During 2016 we had, and we've seen this come, come out where African American communities were targeted on social media. What were they targeted with? Well, these memes of White Jesus, which were rooted in, in coming out
- 16:26:02:12 of Russia and coming through evangelical information scapes to scare people. And so that is the digital manipulation of the theological imagination. And it's, its intention is to unseat secular democracies, which at its core as a secular democracy has the tenet of freedom of religion. And because of the legal protection and the social protection of that, of our respect for each other's deeply held belief, it's a really
- 16:26:32:08 good place for adversaries against plurality to hide. So that's what I study.
- 16:26:40:07 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you. Wow. What do you do for fun?

Brittany Parbo

- 16:26:48:09 [Brittany Farbo]: I go to Waters Cafe and I eat really good sandwiches. I go to the Wormhole and I drink really cold beer. I laugh a lot with my coworkers here. I laugh a lot with people I know in the city and I look out for them. And that's what I do for fun.
- 16:27:03:03 [Tom Kohler]: When you say you look, you look out for them. Tell me more about that.
- 16:27:07:03 [Brittany Farbo]: In just, just in general. What do you mean? Like what I look out... If I'm around, I just keep an eye out for people. It's not a, I'm gonna go do this programmed version, it's just, gimme a call, I'll tell you yes or no, if I can help you fix it or take care of it or not. And, and that a lot of my friends in the city are very, you know, that are my age, are very active socially. They never stop. And so I, I
- 16:27:38:16 think we've learned to have fun with each other while we are doing acts of service. And it's just become such a, and we sometimes we don't even see each other unless we show up to somebody else's service event. And that's what we, I mean, service can be fun,
- 16:27:55:06 [Tom Kohler]: You know, gimme a couple of examples of service as you describe it.
- 16:27:58:19 [Brittany Farbo]: I work with voter protection with the People's Agenda. And it's not any, I don't do anything real big right now 'cause I work two other jobs. But that's, that's one of the ways I, working at the National Museum of the Mighty Eight Air Force, that's another way I surf and have a great time. We discuss a lot of things about fascism and how religion and differences can be used to harm people. But then we also giggle about all kinds of things. Just ridiculous little. So that's, that's
- 16:28:29:06 what what I mean by service. It's not something I aim for, it's just something that's just part of my day. I see somebody who needs something, it's small.
- 16:28:39:05 [Tom Kohler]: So pro-social, proactive?
- 16:28:40:18 [Brittany Farbo]: Pro-social, proactive. But I also make a really concerted effort to not let my left hand know what my right hand is doing. Which you just sort of do it and then you don't keep a tally. You just, it's a very church thing to say, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. If you're gonna give money, this hand shouldn't know you just do it. Leave it alone.
- 16:29:11:00 [Tom Kohler]: Is there a congregation in Savannah that you would imagine you could affiliate with?
- 16:29:17:06 [Brittany Farbo]: At this point? After going to seminary? Probably not, but I am not beneath my, my academic background may say one thing, but the actual nuts

Brittany Parbo

and bolts of service are not beneath me. And if they come out of a church congregation or a community or it doesn't matter which one really I step up, I try and be kind to and have a good friendship

16:29:49:02 or re like relationship with any congregation I walk into.

16:29:56:12 [Tom Kohler]: Pro-social, proactive and yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Wow.

16:30:00:08 [Brittany Farbo]: Plural, pluralism.

16:30:02:02 [Tom Kohler]: Plural. Yeah. Yeah.

16:30:02:17 [Brittany Farbo]: Yeah.

16:30:04:05 [Tom Kohler]: I mean, you've traveled so much, I mean,

16:30:05:21 [Brittany Farbo]: Right.

16:30:06:11 [Tom Kohler]: Tell me, just tell me a couple of stories about being somewhere else and amazing things that were happening or things you walked into and that were happening that would again, sort of this idea of being just pro-social and proactive in the world.

16:30:20:01 [Brittany Farbo]: So my grandparents, who grew up in a town called Cando, North Dakota, I wish I were kidding. They're, they're 85 and 88 now, but they're very woo! 85 and 88. They came to Cambodia when I lived there, grandpa was turning 77, grandma was in her and they decided to backpack Cambodia. And when, I mean backpack, just this little day pack. They're hardy people again from Cando. We were walking through the streets

16:30:51:01 and it was around Chinese New Year and we were near the Chinese temple, temple Kuan Yin, and they were doing exorcisms in the street. And my grandparents were just, they disappear in this crowd of people. And when you have a woman representing Kuan Yin and she is exorcising this person, and he's, and they disappear and they come back out and grandma goes, look at our red bracelets. And the, we got, we got, you know, blessed by one of

16:31:21:11 the monks. They were so thrilled. They were so like beyond themselves. They thought it was just the neatest thing. And it was cool to see my grandparents who were very adventuresome, very open-minded, but very rural, have that experience and be totally like, I'm just going to see what this is and just go with it. Be completely in that moment. And the other thing

16:31:54:01 that from being over from traveling abroad is I have like 19 Afghan godchildren.

16:32:03:01 [Brittany Farbo]: Yeah, yeah. And my main a... because I helped evacuate several families, not just during the fall, but over the years. And, but my number one Afghan family live in upstate New York now, we got 'em through Cambodia and

Brittany Parbo

they're a mixed marriage. She is Shia, he is Sunni. And that's very, very rare in that part of the world, even though they're related endgame practice quite broadly there as it is practiced in Anabaptist communities and so on. And it's been really interesting seeing

16:32:37:13 them navigate, having that not be an issue in their life. That they're just here, they're just Muslim. The... the denominational flavor has nothing to do with it. And it's been interesting to watch their children who I've seen since they were, you know, babes in arms learn to practice their Islam, their, their religion of peace without having to worry about the Shia Sunni

16:33:10:05 thing or the, the all any of that. And just, they, they practice practice it in such a decent, it's like so cool to see this like decent American way that they fought so hard to practice and even in their own home. And so that, that's one of those things from travel that I've, that I, I've received being here. Another

16:33:33:22 thing that I, it's a little, little darker, is in Afghanistan, there is no freedom of religion. And, and it, it's down to causing a genocide against the Shia, the Hazaras who are, where the, the Buddhas were. A lot of the inference was, oh, we're getting rid of idols. It was actually were committing a genocide against a Shia minority within Afghanistan. And when

16:34:09:22 I worked in Afghanistan, I worked primarily with Hazaras. And what is interesting is seeing people who leave repressive theocratic regimes come into a pluralistic society. And there's, they're scared. They're so afraid

16:34:34:23 somebody's gonna, they're gonna do something wrong, then somebody's gonna come after them. And I, I, I've had to teach a lot of my friends, it's holy, one of the great holy things I think about this country is nobody really cares. They care if you get up and try again. They don't care. They don't care that much that you're not, your head's not covered or this, they care that you're encouraging somebody else to succeed and you yourself are trying to succeed. And that's just like what I've learned from being

16:35:04:05 overseas.

16:35:05:23 [Tom Kohler]: Very interesting. Yeah. Gentlemen, do you have specific questions that you want to ask?

16:35:12:12 [Eric Darling]: There's nothing specific. It's all very interesting. I like hearing your, your take on Savannah as somebody who's traveled the world and comes from a different place.

16:35:24:03 [Mickey Youmans]: Yeah.

16:35:25:11 [Brittany Farbo]: Well I love that we have that, the Avenue of the Heroes. It starts with a six foot eight Quaker and ends with a five foot four Catholic in heresy

Brittany Parbo

basically. And the Catholic, who Pulaski basically ended up here because Catherine the Great pulled a Putin on Poland at the time. And that's how he ended up here.

16:35:51:03 [Tom Kohler]: I'll bet it's never been explained that way before.

16:35:57:06 [Brittany Farbo]: Well, I mean, you have... If you look at Putin right now, and this ties back to Savannah, he, before he invaded Ukraine, he put out this document called On The Historical Unity of Russia and Ukraine. And he brings in Polish, Latvia, Lithuania that Commonwealth, which was one of the first democracies in Europe. And part of the reason that he started is 'cause they wanted to leave the Orthodox church and became Catholic. That's where he gets the Latinization, the rhetoric. And Pulaski tried to commit regicide and that's how he ended up here. (laughs)

16:36:31:18 Yeah.

16:36:35:08 [Tom Kohler]: Are we still...?

16:36:36:04 [Eric Darling]: We're still rolling.

16:36:36:21 [Tom Kohler]: Oh, gracious. No, I can't ask this question then.

16:36:39:23 [Eric Darling]: We, we can cut.

16:36:41:15 [Tom Kohler]: Let's cut. I, I got,

16:36:43:00 [Eric Darling]: Okay. Thank you very much.

16:36:44:18 [Tom Kohler]: Do you drink?

16:36:46:03 [Brittany Farbo]: Not really.

16:36:46:13 [Tom Kohler]: Oh.