

>> Maureen de la Paz, I consider you to be one of my dear friends, as well as a peer in the p2 college of pharmacy at Purdue. Thank you so much for being here today willing to share your story.

>> Yeah, of course.

>> So you're from Guam, tell us about your childhood growing up outside of the continental United States.

>> Well, actually I was born in Indianapolis I grew up here until maybe like fourth grade, and then I moved to Guam and I lived there for about 15 years. Growing up on Guam, it's a real tiny island I think our population is probably 150,000 people, our schools are usually composed of people who look like me.

So it was 30% Chamoru, which is the Guam indigenous people, and then the other 30% was mostly Asian, so that's, Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, etc. So it was really nice to grow up with students and teachers who kind of look like you, and you're just okay, it's my little family.

We don't have a lot on Guam, like business wise, we don't have a Starbucks, we don't have a Dunkin donuts, we don't have a lot of things. But I think it was more of a community, like a family culture, where we were all working together when it comes to typhoons, pandemics.

Overall, I really loved living on Guam, there's a beach an hour anywhere you go. And yeah, it was a really big culture shock moving back to Indiana, I feel everyone here is kind of more individualistic, or they focus on their own path and roles and stuff. But on Guam, it's just family, we all look out for each other, so that's something I'm still accommodating to or adjusting to now.

>> I really loved hearing you talk about how Guam is an island and the size of it, I live on the biggest island of Rhode island. And so now I really want to know what the size difference is between the two places because you were saying that's like 1500 people, right?

>> 150000.

>> Yes.

>> I'm so bad at numbers, no but okay, how big is Rhode island? Because I don't know how big.

>> There's maybe a million people that live in the state, there's the island part and then there's the land part and I'm on the island part, I'm one of the island parts.

So now I'm just curious how many people are on my island, because how big is Guam size wise, not people wise, size wise?

>> So size wise, I think the longest part of Guam, like top to bottom, would be like 30 miles. And then lengthwise, it's kind of weird because we have this skinny waist of an island, which is 3 miles only.

But then the biggest part of the island would be maybe eight to ten miles. Okay, so we're real tiny, we know everyone, it's kind of bad, but it's good. Yeah.

>> I feel my island is probably the size of Lafayette and west Lafayette combined, I

don't have any facts to back that up.

>> Okay.

>> But that's how I feel about it in my heart.

>> I think Guam is smaller than the city of Indianapolis.

>> That's crazy.

>> I like driving from Indianapolis to west Lafayette is longer than the length of Guam. I'm still getting used to living in such a big state I'm like, what, you can drive and there's no ocean that you're going to off into.

>> I know I remember because I drive here at the beginning of the fall and my first year, we were driving a long way through Pennsylvania. It was the first time I had driven outside of New England, I was thinking to myself, I was when does it end?

I was like, it's been days, it was 5 hours but I was like, it's been days and I'm still in Pennsylvania. And everything just gets bigger after here and it kind of scares me. I'm like, I live on a tiny island and now I'm looking at the continental United States.

>> You're so used to going from one point to another point in only 20 minutes or 30 minutes.

>> Yeah.

>> The fact that I have to wait in a car for two to three hours to get to Indy now, I was like that's going around Guam like three times.

>> Yeah and we're still in the same state, I can get from one end of Rhode island to the other end, it may be an hour.

>> Yeah.

>> Now, I know that being an athlete was also a big part of growing up for you, so why did you relate to track and field so much?

>> So it's kind of funny because in elementary school and in middle school, I was not athletic at all, you could not make me run a five k. But then I joined when I went into high school, all my friends are like let's try track and field and I was like okay.

And when I went in i absolutely hated it, well the distance part I hated the running distance part. And then I found out there were sprints, and I found out there were hurdles, and I found out I could jump over things, which is really fun for me. It was funny because I was the only girl who joined hurdles and high jump, because I think on Guam, everyone's small, we're five foot max.

So everyone was too scared to jump over the hurdles and high jumps. And the fact that I was the only one brave enough to do it really resonated with me. I think it also gave me this kind of strength because I was doing the things that everyone was afraid of doing, and I was doing the things that you get injured the most.

I mean, you're jumping over an actual thing, I've fallen on my face probably like a million times, but it was great, it was fun, the adrenaline. So yeah, track and field has a place in my heart that no other sport can replace, not even football.

>> Have you ever played football or are you just a spectator?

>> Even when I watch, I have no idea what's happening.

>> That's very fair, I relate to that too. All right, so can you elaborate on your competitive experience with the Guam national track and field team or other high level competitions you've been in?

>> So, shortly after I joined track and field in high school, I think maybe in my sophomore year.

They told me to apply for the Guam national track and field team, and I was fast enough to be able to get on the team, which was amazing. So they flew me out to my first competition, it's in Pompeii in Micronesia. It was the 2016 micronesian regional championships, and it was such a great experience for me.

Not only because I was representing Guam or my island, it was just the lottery between my team, as well as with other. Like, Micronesian, Polynesian teams it was so fun, and it's so bad because in Pohnpei, usually hurdles are made out of plastic. Theirs was made out of wood, so if you hit the hurdle, it's just a huge gash and I hit a lot of hurdles.

I think there I was also one of the only girls doing hurdles and high jump, and they actually awarded me the 2016 Junior Female Athlete Award. That was my first competition, and they gave me a little trophy, and I was like, what, no, I don't deserve this, please I take it back.

But it was such a positive experience that I was just like, I'm going to keep doing this so from 2016 to maybe 2019, I joined the Micronesian championships in Pohnpei. There's another championship in Shatian, and then I was able to compete in Australia for the Oceania championships. And running against girls who are, like, six foot, seven foot tall.

They're not even jumping over the hurdles, they're just, like, walking over them. Although I didn't Get the placings I want, I didn't get the medals that I wanted to. I actually did, like, a personal record because I was running against those really fast girls so I did my best personal record in the 400 meters hurdles and the 100 meters hurdles.

So, again, love the experience, I feel like my coach, back on, back at home, wants me to get back into it, and I'm like, please wait, let me finish pharmacy, and then maybe I'll come back.

>> Yeah, that's incredible, I have zero athletic skills, so just hearing you talk about, I'm so impressed, that is so cool.

I love that, I love that a lot.

>> Thank you, I tried my best I'm retired now. Retired, retired.

>> All right, so switching gears a little, another one of your passions is pharmacy, which is no surprise, obviously, because we're here today. Could you tell us how you got interested in pharmacy?

>> So, when we moved from Indiana to Guam, my mom was a pharmacy technician. We couldn't really afford a babysitter, so she would just pick up me and my brother

from school and then take us to the break room of the pharmacy. So, I grew up in the pharmacy, Yeah, I think maybe from fourth or fifth grade up until high school, I was just, like, in the pharmacy break room.

And in high school, I had to do an internship for a marketing class, and I was like, I could work in a pharmacy. I could just ask my mom, like, hey, can I follow you to work? And they brought me in, and they let me prepack medications, like, just count 30 of amlodipine the whole day, or label or look for expired medications.

And I don't know I really saw myself, like, the community that was there, like, the pharmacy technicians and the career overall. It was just like, I could do this, and it's like, I love talking to people, and I love helping them if they need something. Like I felt like, I could totally see myself doing this for the rest of my life.

So, yeah, I started working at my mom's pharmacy first, because obviously, I did the internship, and they're like, you're a good worker, okay. And then I started working volunteering at the Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center, which is like a psychiatric center for people who are struggling with substance use disorder or, like, mental health disorders and stuff.

And I really found a passion there because the patients there, for some reason, are so much nicer than retail pharmacies, because I think it's because they're going there because they know that they want to get help, they want to get better, and they're just so much more polite, and just.

I found a lot of the people who were picking up suboxone for substance use disorder when I was dispensing, they were, like, my age. They were, like, people who, not that I knew, but who I could see being friends with. And I was just like, Guam, and I guess America in general has such a big problem with drug abuse and addiction that I couldn't just turn away and not look at that.

So that's a really big passion of mine to help those who have mental health disorders as well as substance use disorders. And I've personally, in my family and with me, myself, I've struggled with mental health, too. And on Guam, it's still, like, taboo, it's just like, just get over it, it's just in your head.

And I want to be that person that brings that out and goes, hey, this is just as important as your physical health. Like mental health is just super important to your whole well being.

>> Yeah, do you see the same taboo in Guam that you see in America, like, are they comparable?

>> I've noticed here that they do actually pay more attention to mental health here than on Guam. Like, adults talking about mental health in classes. Like, the amount of times we've talked about mental health in classes is kind of mind boggling to me, because back on Guam, the only people who are talking about mental health are really, like, the youth.

The adults they're kind of like those dig deep and hide it inside type of people, so I'm glad there's progress here at least.

>> Yeah, so speaking of being here, how did you end up at Purdue pharmacy?

>> So, Purdue pharmacy, I mean, first of all, come on.

Come on This is a top ten pharmacy school like where one of the most affordable schools in America, most affordable pharmacy schools in America. Also, I grew up here, so I have family in Indianapolis and it's so funny because when I first came here, we took a road trip to my old house, like, someone else lives there now.

But I was looking at it, and I was like, my gosh I remember my brother running around the house or trying to jump out one of the first floor windows because he was just being, like, a naughty kid. But I don't know, it kind of comes in full circle, born in Indiana, moved to Guam, come back to Indiana.

I had to come back.

>> Yeah, yeah.

>> So Purdue was, like, one of those avenues that I could come back and see my family again. And also just the program here, it's good for learning how to talk to people as a pharmacist and that I feel like not a lot of other pharmacies have.

Like a lot of pharmacies are kind of just, like, they're trying to pump out as many pharmacists as possible because the amount of pharmacy schools popping up across America is crazy.

>> Right.

>> Yeah, but I feel like Purdue, they actually care about what kind. What kind of counseling, what kind of care we give as pharmacists.

We actually can bring compassion and empathy into our care, and I think that's really important for me. I value those. Yeah.

>> So your journey from Guam to Purdue is just so amazing. I moved here from Rhode Island. I know I had my own fair of challenges, and that was within the United States.

So I can only imagine how difficult it must have been for you. Could you walk us through how the office of student services helped you make this journey?

>> So this is a really interesting story. So when I first applied for Purdue pharmacy, I absolutely missed the virtual interview time.

Absolutely missed it, like, I was devastated. I was like, my gosh, I need to buy a \$3,000 round trip ticket to come here to do an in-person interview and then come back, and I was so devastated. I was literally, I called the OSS. So the person who answered was Mrs Jenifer Matash, amazing woman.

I think I emailed her first, actually, I emailed her, and I was like, hi, I'm so sorry I missed the virtual interview. I'm willing to fly there. Is there any way I can get an in-person interview? And she was like, wait, hold on. I think I can arrange something for you.

And it was like, the longest wait. It was like a few days before she got back to me. I was like, I'm never going to Purdue. I'm just gonna accept it. I'm going to Hawaii. And then she calls me. It's 4:00 am, again. She calls me, and she goes, Marie, I was able to get you a virtual interview with Mr. Steve Mizak and Dr. Patty Derbyshire.

And I was like, thank you so much. I'm going to cry. So I am so grateful to Mrs.

Matash, because literally, if it wasn't for her, I would not be here. I would not be sitting here. I would not be in this pharmacy. I don't even know if I'd even be in pharmacy school, actually.

I'd probably wait another year to try to apply here again. So I did the interview with Mr Steve Mizak and Dr. Patty Derbyshire, and it was so funny because they were just chilling and relaxing. It was like 5:00 pm here, and it was 3:00 am from my end.

And I was like, in my business, professional clothes in my room, just shaking the entire time, like, yeah, I really love pharmacy. They didn't say I did a good job, but they're just like, okay, what are you doing for the rest of the day? And I'm like, I'm going back to sleep.

It's 4:00 am, and they're like, how are you awake. But yeah, I think even with Mr. Steve Mizak, first of all, he is my interviewer, he is my advisor. He is just someone who's so approachable that I think in my first semester I was having a lot of problems with my mental health and depression and stuff.

And the fact that I moved 7000 miles from home and I came here with no friends, no connections, knew no one, it was really tough, really tough for me. So I went to him and vented about it, and he was just so amazing. He would ask me about, how was I feeling?

He would check up on me, I think a few weeks ago he texted me, and he was like, hey, are you doing okay, and I'm like, Mr Mizak. And he also, since he knew that I was struggling with depression, he was the one who connected me with CAPs, the psychological services here.

They set me up with a social worker that I was able to talk to for a few months, and she helped me find a therapist in the area that accepted my insurance. And yeah, I feel so much better now compared to when I like my first semester here.

So I'm really thankful for Mr Mizak and the Purdue CAPs system for being able to help me focus on my mental health and go to school.

>> Yeah, that's fantastic. So I know that you had said when you got here, you struggled trying to connect with everybody. Purdue pharmacy family is really something that we emphasize here.

Have you found yours, and how would you define it? Absolutely. I have definitely found my Purdue pharmacy family, or like it was so weird because as the outsider, I kind of have to push a little harder to find friends. I think the first friend I made was John Tan because we were both transfers, I think, orientation.

Orientation was such a big part of my pharmacy journey when they made that little one day where it's like all the transfer students meeting each other and having a day to go out and eat and travel the campus and stuff. We literally hang out all the time. That is my main friend group.

It is just transfer students and then other Purdue people that we've kind of just grabbed and thrown in. These are the type of people, even though we are from different places, different parts of the world, these are people that I know that they have my back. I can go to them if I need help with homework or if I just need someone to talk to about my life and my struggles, and they know that they can come to me if they need help, too.

And I think that's one of the biggest things that I value, being in Purdue pharmacy, too, because that schools that are just like, we're a big, happy family. And it's kind of corny, but, like, here, it's like, actually, I would see these people as my closest friends, my brothers and sisters.

I'm probably gonna be like, bullying John, like, five years after graduation. So I'm really grateful that the community here is so nice and just so friendly, and it kind of made me feel at home, even though I'm just so far away from my actual.

>> Yeah, yeah, I know that's something I can relate to, too.

I didn't know anyone when I first got to Purdue. I got here before you, so by the time you were here, I had time to meet people. But I remember those first couple years, like, trying to figure everything out in the middle of the pandemic, trying to meet people, but you can't see the bottom half of their face.

>> Yeah. So you're just guessing, or, like, when you wear the mask.

>> Yeah. When they took the mask off, I was like, that's what your face looks like. I was like, put it back on. I have a different picture in my head.

>> You have a beard.

>> That was my biggest thing. I was like, you have a mustache. It was an interesting time, but I love how you were able to connect with people and make those lasting friendships. That's amazing.

>> Thank you.

>> All right, so we've kind of touched upon it already how you love pharmacy, but what areas of pharmacy are you most interested in after graduation?

>> Definitely mental health and substance use disorder. It's just, personally, I've experienced issues with mental health. A lot of my friends have issues with mental health, or at least they've found barriers to where it comes to the point. The point where we can't even study, we're so burnt out or just so sad.

My soapbox is that I think everyone should go to therapy. You don't have to have a diagnosable disorder or whatever. You can go to a therapist to talk about your life, talk about your work life, talk about your relationship. Therapy is just like a place where you can kind of sort out your ideas and also address those negative thoughts that you have in your head.

Because sometimes when people say really mean things to you, it sticks in your head. And not a lot of people realize that those intrusive negative thoughts in their head is actually just from someone else that told it to them, and they're just holding on to that. So mental health, I think, is really important because it helps you address how you think about yourself and how to look at yourself in a more positive light than being so self critical.

So many people are so negative about themselves, and I think it's really important to address that and fix it gradually.

>> Yeah, yeah, I also agree. I think one of the most important things is looking inwards and trying to use that to better yourselves and better the community around you.

So now, I know we also kind of touched on this, too, but do you have any final pieces of advice for current or future students?

>> Any final advice. I think, for future students, there's such thing as a work life balance. There is such thing. You do not have to slave yourself over studying and studying and studying and studying.

And there's also a thing where you shouldn't be partying every single day. Finding your time management and finding your work-life balance is very important. And if you don't know how to do that yet, that's okay. Because when you get into pharmacy school, you're kinda forced to. You're kind of forced to learn how to balance those two things.

And it's really important because if you don't have one, you can't really do the other. If I don't have at least one social day in the week, the weekend or something, I will not be able to focus on school, cuz I'll just feel so burned out. And vice versa, if I'm just partying all the time, obviously I'm not gonna be able to focus on school.

So definitely, finding that balance and finding the best ways to organize yourself is the best piece of advice I can give to any student.

>> Yeah, all right. Well, I appreciate that. I have one more question for you, arguably the most important question of this entire interview.

>> Okay.

>> What is your favorite type of ice cream?

>> My, my gosh, I love ice cream. This is gonna be controversial. It is mint chocolate.

>> I love mint chocolate.

>> I love mint chocolate. Anyone who's just like, mint chocolate is gross. It's like eating toothpaste, is wrong, okay?

Is wrong. Is absolutely wrong. Mint chocolate, I will get every single time and no one can stop me. That is all.

>> I love that, I love that. One of my best friends hates mint ice cream, and so I used to make a point of getting it every time we were in a dining hall together, just to see that controversy on her face.

>> It is so good, I just, it's so good. They're just missing out, more for right.

>> So true.

>> Yeah.

>> So true. All right, well, Maureen, thank you so much for being here today and for sharing your story. I'm sure our audience really appreciates it.

>> Yeah, thank you so much for having me.