

“As Spiders Do” – UR Alumni Podcast

Creating Spaces of Support w/ Dorie Griggs, W'81

Episode 3

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[into music plays]

Maggie Johnson

Welcome to As Spiders Do, the University of Richmond podcast where we share stories about our amazing alumni. I'm your host Maggie Johnson from the class of 2018. Today I'm speaking with Dory Griggs, West Hampton class of 1981. Dory is a trailblazer, both during her time at UR and since. She's currently the chaplain for her local fire department. And in this episode, she shares some tips for protecting our personal peace during challenging times.

[into music fades]

Maggie Johnson

Without further ado, here's the show. I would love to hear how you ended up at UR.

Dorie Griggs

Well, it's kind of a fun story, given that my career interest was being in sports, PR and marketing. I had applied for schools mostly in the northeast because I'm from New Jersey. My mom went to a wedding and sat next to someone who played on the baseball team at University of Richmond and spoke so highly of the school. She came home from this wedding and insisted that I look into the University of Richmond. So it was the only school she allowed me to apply to that I hadn't seen first. Every other school I applied to, we visited first, and then I could apply. So on the recommendation of this baseball player.

Maggie Johnson

That's amazing. So you applied and did you get to see UR before you attended or was it your first day?

Dorie Griggs

Yes. I applied but then went for spring break in high school. It was the best time to visit the campus. The azaleas were out and it was just gorgeous. I had everything I didn't intend to, but that's the way it worked out in a lot of cases.

Maggie Johnson

And so what did you study at UR?

Dorie Griggs

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I went in thinking I was going to major in business. And I took accounting and economics and I did not get into the business school. But my sophomore year, I took an elective in speech communications. And I really enjoyed the public speaking and learning about it and so forth. So that's what I majored in. And took some theater classes too along with it. First semester, the wrestling coach needed some student help. So I helped him and ended up with I have a credit on my official college transcripts for men's varsity wrestling. And I also have several credits for men's varsity basketball on my official U of R college transcripts.

Maggie Johnson

That's amazing. Your day to day as a manager, what was that like?

Dorie Griggs

Well, managers do a lot of the behind the scenes work and work with the coaches and set up practices and so forth. So that, it depended on what time of year pre-season we measured vertical jumps, which everything is now automated. It seems like really the Dark Ages, the way we did it, the guys would hold a piece of chalk in their hand and then jump next to a wall and mark it and then we'd measure. It's all automated now. Also you're in charge of the equipment, the uniforms, the shoes, the basketballs, doing the laundry after. Real glamorous. But I was also the first woman to travel with a men's team to away games, which meant you'd carry extra shoes with you and your uniforms and so forth. And the guys on the team before the first trip that I was to go on had me convinced that the school wasn't going to pay for a single room for me, that I'd have to room with the trainer at the time was a married younger man about to go to med school. So they had me thinking that I would have to room with Sid Martin. I did of course have my own room. When we went on trips, I spent a lot of time on the road trips by myself because the guys kind of thought I was a spy for the coaches and you know, I was just this 18, 19 year old kid with the coaches. So I just brought reading or whatever. And when we weren't at a practice or a game or a free game meal. I was in my room. Is there any memorable moments from either practices or travel? What kind of sticks out as the most memorable part of that experience? Well, I'm sure there's some stories the guys wouldn't want me to tell. Some of them have apologized in our adult years for the pranks that they would play on me. John Richardson came from the Richmond Braves as our marketing director for the athletic club department and he had a great mind for really outrageous kind of promotions and get people in seats. Our star player was Michael Perry and he used to dunk over people. And so John Richardson arranged with Nabisco an Oreo cookie double stuffed night and there was a lady dressed as a big double stuffed Oreo cookie dunk the ball, she'd throw double stuffed cookies into the stands. I've since been to games more recently and see how more sophisticated the promotions and marketing is now.



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Maggie Johnson

Are you close with any of the basketball players from that time?

Dorie Griggs

Well, a few of them. We have reunions and last February we got together, it was the first time I'd been able to go for the alumni night in years. There were a couple of guys, especially there's one that I hadn't seen since we graduated in 1981 and he and I are just real good friends and it was so special to be able to spend some time catching up with him in person. But then seeing everybody else that was there, it was great fun. I love that. The basketball team, I traveled with them for a while, but my senior year I worked in sports information and then also helped with the football team in the summertime. So there are a lot of guys that were on the football team were like my kid brothers. We have a family portrait of a few of us that back then, Spider Club families would have players that they'd adopt and have over for Sunday dinner. This one family who are still very big Spider fans, that Charlie and Jackie Fagan used to have us in for Sunday lunch. And for Christmas one year, Olin Mills called the dorm phone. We had landlines in our dorm rooms and they were selling family portraits. So I answered the phone and said, yes. I'll book a family portrait. My name is Dorie Griggs. There'll be four of us. And I called the three other athletes who were all football players at the time. One of the, it was Tom Carney, Jim, we called him Jimmy Lyles. He goes by Jamie and then Mike London, who is now head coach at William and Mary. But they were all like my kid brothers. They're all a lot taller than me, but we have Olin Mills' family portrait of the four of us, and that's what we gave the Fagan family for Christmas that year.

Maggie Johnson

So sweet, I love that. So where did your interest in sports come? Was that just like something you grew up with, something you embraced in college?

Dorie Griggs

Well, I love playing basketball myself. I was never good enough to play competitively. I played intramurals. And in high school, I kept the book for the boys' basketball games, and I kept the book for baseball. And then my senior year, we had a really good boys track team in high school. So I traveled with the track team and kept the running score at the meets, and then I would call the newspapers with the scores. There were only two graduate programs in sports administration, one in Massachusetts and one in Ohio at the time. So the best advice I got was to do as much as you can when you're an undergrad, if you could afford to volunteer, because you'll build your resume that way. By the time I was a senior, I had real life experience in college athletics. And I ended up getting a job before I graduated with what was then called the CFB International Women's Tennis Tournament



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that was held at the Robin Center in the summers. So I ended up getting hired as the public relations person for the professional women's tournament. I ended up meeting a lot of tennis players. And then after that was hired by the university to be the assistant sports information director.

That's so cool. So how long did you work in the sports slash PR industry?

Dorie Griggs

Well, in one way or the other for most of my twenties, because I went from Richmond to the Richmond Braves. I worked in the front office for a season, the 1982 season, and we won the international league pennant that year.

Maggie Johnson

Cool. That's awesome.

Dorie Griggs

And then I ended up working for a hotel that wanted to get the visiting teams to stay at the hotel and ended up getting not only all the University of Richmond opponents, but we worked it out with the head football coach at the time who was Dahl-Shealy. I had both the home and away teams were staying in the same hotel.

Maggie Johnson

Wow. Did you have to run interference between the two?

Dorie Griggs

We had the away team in this one tower of the hotel, and then the home team, Richmond would stay on campus and have their meetings. Then when that was over, they'd bus over to the hotel and I'd meet them at the side of the hotel and let them in a side door where they walked up the stairs and immediately had bed checks by their managers to be in the room. And then in the morning they left first thing. The opposing team knew that the home team was going to be inside the hotel. None of the players knew that was, that was kind of neat. I also ended up getting all the visiting teams for VCU booked at our property, which we're out in the West End. And they had always stayed at a holiday inn near downtown, near the VCU campus. And I knew enough about athletics and how it worked that with our general manager, we ended up hosting a shootout contest at the halftime of the basketball game. So we were a sponsor. Then I called all the opposing teams and we had a decent rate and we had transportation that we provided back and forth. And I got all the teams, the visiting teams for VCU to stay at our property. Well, JD Barnett was the head coach at VCU at the time. And I got a call out of the blue from JD Barnett's secretary, asking me to come and meet with the head basketball coach at VCU. So I went down and I knew him

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because we were arch rivals and sat there. And he said, “I just wanted to meet who did this.” And he said the general manager of the hotel that they used to stay in all the time called him and said, you need to do something. You need to call and get these teams to stay with us again. And he said, I've been in this business a while. So before I did that, I went down to our marketing department and found out that you are a sponsor and I can't do anything about it. And I just wanted to meet the person who did this.

Maggie Johnson

That is amazing. I love that so much.

Dorie Griggs

So, yeah, you learn to be creative. That came from working the minor league baseball. You try things and see if it works. If it doesn't, then there's a bunch more games. You get people in seats. So I learned the strategy and I'd been around sports long enough that there was 22 at the time, 23.

Maggie Johnson

That's amazing. And so then now you work as a chaplain. What caused that transition for you to go from sports and PR to chaplaincy?

Dorie Griggs

Yeah. Well, they're all people related and I've always felt like the most fun I had with anything like at the Richmond raves. They gave me some nights that I could make these passes for there was a school for kids with cerebral palsy and we could give them tickets to come to a few nights. And we did some things with the school, brought some players there and that I always enjoyed that kind of thing, doing things for other people. And the long story how I got there, but I eventually moved to Atlanta and I worked for a tennis tournament here when I first got here in 85 worked in various marketing and PR kind of positions. And I started working as the director of marketing and development for a retreat center, Methodist church retreat center. I'm Presbyterian, but felt a call to go to seminary while I was at Richmond, but I had such a strong path in sports that my mother you know, encouraged me to stay with that and that the church needed active lay people. And it seemed to make sense, so I did that for a while. But working then with all these ministers at a church adult retreat center, I started feeling that tug again. And then I went to Columbia Theological Seminary to visit, and that's the Presbyterian one. And as soon as I got there, it just felt right. It was the place to go. So I started there in 95, but due to a lot of family things, it took seven years to get a three-year degree. And one of the things I developed while I was a student was an outreach to journalists that cover traumatic events, which put me on a trajectory. Then after I graduated from seminary, I produced an interfaith dialogue television show. And it was the initial push into Iraq at that time in the



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early 2000s. And it was an unprecedented time for journalists, there were more embedded journalists, not just American journalists, but journalists from around the world were embedded with our troops, with other troops. And I started a list of journalists embedded. And I had the opportunity to meet some of those journalists when they came back from Iraq or Afghanistan. And I brought them a copy of the list to show them that people were thinking of them. And I found out how much that meant to them.

Maggie Johnson

It kind of strikes me that we're facing a little bit of that right now with the two wars in the world. Do you have words of wisdom or advice as collectively we're seeing that happen? How would you suggest that we create that space for us to engage with it in the best, I guess, healthiest way for us? As far as the news in general? Yeah, I think, you know, obviously we have journalists and soldiers who are on the front lines, but with the social media space that we have now, it's like everyone's almost in depth through your experience talk to people about this. Where do you see similarities? Were there any words of wisdom that you can share?

Dorie Griggs

Well, what I learned since I was in seminary and I graduated in 2002, I started studying traumatic stress and related disorders. So for the past 20 some years, that's been the world I've been in. I've had the opportunity to attend a number of meetings at the Carter Center. They have a, Rosalind Carter has the mental health journalism program. And they hosted a series of meetings that I ended up blogging for one of their fellows for that program. And the meetings were on returning veterans and supporting them. But we're also working with journalists who put their lives on the line to make sure that the world is informed. And a lot of people in the political climate here in the past 20 years, there's been a lot of media bashing. The people that are covering breaking news, that are out there embedded with the soldiers are there when they're killed, they're shot at, they're targeted or they're a feet away from the person next to them and just miss them. I remind people that these are the people that we rely on. How are you learning about what's going on in the world? You turn on the television, you pick up a newspaper, you listen to the radio, but no one thinks about the person that's going into the war zone when everyone else is trying to get out and they have families that worry about them, and they're not all protected in fancy bunker someplace. Most of them are also in danger. What I've learned with the increase in images on all forms of media is there's a real problem and real risk of secondary traumatization from continuing to be bombarded with these difficult images and situations. So the first case of this that I had to turn off the TV and stop watching the news was 9-11. I'm from New Jersey. I knew the likelihood of knowing people who were in that building. And it turned out a childhood friend who was my best buddy when I was little was in the second tower and killed. Because I stopped watching TV, I didn't see a special. On



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60 Minutes, they did a whole segment on my friend Todd Ranky's widow and her in-laws all going into the city looking for Todd in hospitals and so forth, like so many people were doing. And the way I found out Todd was in the second tower was in January of 2002. I happened to reach out to the pastor of the church where he and I were baptized as babies. We were neighbors and we were just buddies. And I said something to the pastor in my email that I'm about to graduate from Columbia seminary and I was just getting nostalgic and look at your website from the church I was baptized in. PS, please say hello to the Ranky family for me, because I knew they were still in Summit, New Jersey. And that pastor called me, and that's how I found out about Todd. But to protect ourselves and the children in our households, it is best to moderate the intake of news and know what you can bear. And constantly glued to the television, seeing all of that, it can really cause all kinds of mental health issues for people. You walk that line of wanting to be informed. So I tend to read more than I watch. It's easier to self-censor and you don't have the images. I can read a book, but I can't watch a movie about the same book because the images stay with you longer.

Maggie Johnson

Thank you for sharing all of that. To flip it to a little bit of a happier note, what's been some of your favorite part about being a chaplain? What's been some of your favorite experiences?

Dorie Griggs

There's a lot. In different contexts, in the fire department, I've been with the city of Roswell fire department for almost seven years now. It'll be seven years in February. And I'm now part-time staff. Getting to know the firefighters and their families and being there for big occasions and that kind of thing, that's the fun part. My first hospital visit was to visit a newborn baby. Fortunately, that's been the only reason I've gone to a hospital for a firefighter or newborn baby visits. Those are the best. They're fun things you get to do in the community with the fire department in public events and so forth. That's the fun part. The difficult scenes, fire scenes and so forth with family. It's good to know that I bring something to the table to help someone because the incident commander, usually a battalion chief, has to focus on the event, the firefighters in and out and how things are progressing. And check with the incident commander first when I come onto the scene and then get permission to talk to the family and then I'm with the family and could help them do things like maybe contact their insurance, line up some place to stay that night. Most people don't realize even though the main fire was isolated to a room or something, the smoke is so toxic you can't live in your home for a while. Sometimes you have to take a home down to the studs because of the toxic smoke in a home. So being able to be there with the families while in one of the worst days of their life watching smoke pour out of their house is an honor and it's a privilege. I also get called to scenes where someone's died for



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a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's unexpected medical issue at home. It's a privilege to be with the people while they're with some of the worst things that can happen to a person. Lose a loved one and to be there and help them find the support that they need. But I do keep my fingers involved with sports here in Atlanta. Coming up, it'll be my 29th year in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl Press Box as a volunteer. When the Final Four's been here a few years, I've worked in the media room. There's a group of us that used to work in sports full time and now we just do it for fun and help.

Maggie Johnson

I love that you have a flip-flop, like you went from working in sports and volunteering in the church or faith community. And then now you work in more of the faith space and you volunteer with sports. I think that's really cool.

Dorie Griggs

Yeah, it's fun. It's different, but it's my life. I really come full circle, all of it. That's what I always tell my kids. And I've had the opportunity to speak to college classes and I've tried to pass on the wisdom that was shared with me early on. Like Howie Freeman was the marketing director for the New Jersey Nets when I was in college. And he's the one who told me to volunteer as much time as you can when you're in college in the field you want to be in and to talk to people that are doing what you think you want to do. And get their, their wisdom. So I've been able to pass that along when I speak to college kids in high school students too, when you're picking a major, you think you want to do something, but like my brother went to MIT early admissions in electrical engineering, he spent a summer internship out in Long Beach, California, and decided he hated the work. So he, he pivoted, he ended up with a PhD in electronic music because music was really his interest.

Maggie Johnson

I love how you combine the two, electronics and music. That's so cool. But it's important. That's why I think what Richmond does now with the students offering internships and the work-study type situations is so valuable because you have a chance that you might think it sounds like a great job, but then you see what the day-to-day is and you either love it or you don't. And then you know early enough that you can pivot and find something else.

Dorie Griggs

So yeah, I thought I wanted to be a lawyer. And so I did a law study of program for six weeks and was like, yeah, this is not for me. Yeah. And see, I thought I going to Richmond, I needed to be a business manager to do what I needed, but I had the opportunity to meet PR people with professional teams and they said, they'll teach you what they want you to know as far as how they operate and so forth. So having that public speaking background and that's. Most people's major fear is standing up and speaking in

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front of people and being able to learn how to tame the butterflies. You always have butterflies. Butterflies are a good thing. I hope you know you're taking something seriously. But to be able to stand up and be that person in office if there's a presentation to do that that raises your profile and you become a valuable part of the team if that's what you can do well.

Maggie Johnson

The decision you made at UR and really influenced your career. What are those connection points that you see between the two, between UR and your career?

Dorie Griggs

Well, in the positions that I was as a student on campus, I tended to be fairly visible as the only woman on the bench during a game. Alumni would come up and introduce themselves to me, sometimes major alumni. And yeah, I'm this late teen, but these men who own companies or big executives, I was doing something that they'll never have an opportunity to do. And John Richardson, who is that marketing person I mentioned earlier, pointed that out. He said, you'll do, you're in places that most of these people will never be in. And it's an opportunity that you shouldn't take it for granted. So I carried that with me in all the different things I did. I've done some really interesting things. And I that a lot of people don't get to do. The public speaking part, when I went to seminary, there's this trope that people impose on women in seminary that don't feel called to a congregation. They assume it's because you don't wanna preach. You don't wanna get up and speak in front of people. Yeah, no, that's not my problem. I just know that chaplaincy was more what I was called to do. In my preaching class, they had us meet with a voice coach one-on-one, you're in an empty space or kind of classroom and you're all at the front and she was in the back row and she asked us to each individual and it was just you and that person in the room to speak on whatever you wanted to for a little bit so she could see how you projected your voice. So I did whatever I said and she looked at me and goes, you've had training. So being a public speaking major came in real handy when you have to give sermons.

Maggie Johnson

I love that. That's excellent. How do you tame your own butterflies when you're getting up to speak or for anything that you have butterflies for?

Dorie Griggs

I used to get so anxious my freshman and sophomore year when it came to exams that I developed this thing where if I had a big paper due or an exam on a Friday, I made sure I

had something fun I was going to do later that night after the exam time was over. So at a certain point, I'd study as much as I could and then I'd get to a point where I can't study anymore, but I'll start focusing on this party or trip I was gonna take or something. That's an excellent trick. I think it's so important to kind of plan the fun things. So I wanna talk a little bit, you shared a comedy video, a standup routine that you did with me, and I loved it, but I would love to just hear a little bit about how you got into standup and what that's been like. Oh, well, that's another mental trick on dealing with anxiety and the different kind of butterflies. I'd always wanted to take this class in 2011, my son was about to graduate from the Citadel and commission into the military. That's a different kind of butterfly that I was talking about. And I thought, well, this would be a good time. So I'll take this comedy writing class to deal with the anxiety I was feeling over my son about to commission into the army. And he was armor officer, pretty much guaranteeing combat arms position in the army so he could get deployed. So I took the level one comedy writing. In 2012, I guess late 2012, he was about to deploy to Afghanistan. So I took the level two comedy writing class. That's how I got into those classes. And our graduation was at the punchline, which is a comedy club here in Atlanta. And then we had a talent show here in the city of Roswell. And I volunteered to do a standup set. Yeah, it's fun. And it comes in handy. Because of the work I do is so heavy, but knowing when to inject humor and help people see the lighter side of things can be a good bit in the work in chaplaincy, especially in a hospital setting where there's a lot of scary medical things you're dealing with.

Maggie Johnson

Really excellent. I have one last question for you, but before I ask that, I just want to ask if there was anything else you wanted to share, any other words of wisdom. You have so many just like amazing nuggets kind of built into as we've been talking.

Dorie Griggs

Well, the theme in my life has been change. There's been a lot of change, not just career wise. Being able to adapt and see change as an opportunity is a very good skill to cultivate. A lot of things happened, you know, I was put in a lot of interesting situations. There were no sexual harassment laws when I was in college. They weren't on the book yet. So learning to be professional, keep your head up and deflect, which unfortunately a lot of women have had to learn that. That's just when we had the Me Too movement a few years back, a lot of people had to reflect on, okay, I guess I've done that too. But it also helps in adapting to new situations and keeping positive.

Maggie Johnson

I love that kind of framing. Cause I think the other aspect of the Me Too was so many women being like, oh, I guess I have experienced some not okay things, but it's so normalized for women that we don't always realize that it's not okay. So I love that you kind



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of, that you tie those things together. How else have you cultivated adaptability in your own life? When you're facing a big change, how do you move through that?

Dorie Griggs

I try to learn as much as I can about the scary things. Like my son going into the army, I've watched things and read things I never would have thought. He was really into modern army combatives. So I learned what that was about. It's like Jiu-Jitsu in the army and going to the Citadel was really scary for me as a mom because you hear stories and so forth. So learning about that experience. And that's what I blogged about with that fellow at the Carter Center. And my entries for her military blog ended up getting more hits than the other contributors at one point, because never underestimate the research skills of an anxious mom who's helped to send their child to a military school. And they'd find the blog entries. They're still finding it. I'll still get messages once in a while from people who If you Google the citadel and parents or knob year or anything, a lot of my blog entries will come up. But that's how I dealt with my anxiety about sending a child to a military school was a lot of research and understanding. And that's what I encourage people to do, like with scary medical diagnosis, learn as much as you can about it and read about it and ask all your questions. And it takes the power of the unknown away from the scary stuff to feel like you understand it more and it's a little less scary that way.

Maggie Johnson

Thank you for sharing that. So my last question for you, and I ask everyone this, so it's my favorite question. To you, what does it mean to be a Richmond Spider?

Dorie Griggs

A Richmond Spider, let's see. I learned how to think on my own and be creative and stand on my own two feet, but it was an environment to make mistakes. One of my friends my freshman year pointed out, he said, go ahead, make all your mistakes now because everyone else is making their own mistakes. And years from now, they're not going to remember yours because they had their own. But it was an environment to, to explore and learn from. I did not get accepted to the business school, but I did get special permission to take some marketing classes from the Dean of the business school later. I think he was a basketball fan and knew as a manager of the basketball team that might have helped. Didn't do great in the marketing class, but I learned a lot. Just the academic freedom to explore what I was interested in and the professors getting on board with that was a huge asset.

[outro music begins]

Maggie Johnson

We hope you enjoyed hearing from our alumni and learned a little bit more about what it means to be a Richmond Spider. This episode was edited and produced by Charlotte Fematter, Assistant Director for Student and Young Graduate Engagement. Our episode of music is by FAS Sounds from Pixabay. You can subscribe to “As Spiders Do” wherever you get your podcasts, rate our show and leave us a review to let us know what you think. We're always looking for new stories to share, so let us know who else we should feature by emailing us @ alumniatRichmond.edu. That's all for this episode. Talk to you soon and remember, there are spiders everywhere and that's a really good thing.

[outro music fades]

