

Interview: Cheyanne and Ellen

C: We went in Ebaugh Pond and it was numbingly cold and everyone was there and it was disgusting. A bunch of people have asked me about the meaning of going into the pond but no one knows. We haven't been able to figure it out. I announced the pinning to my sorority and then a bunch of DG's were there.

E: Some of my friends were there. It was right after one of my softball games, so I came right from there.

C: It was gross, and cold, and there was algae, but it was actually really fun. It was one of those things you can cross off your Denison bucket list. How many people can say that you threw the person you love into a disgusting, smelly, freezing pond to show how much you love one another?

C: Our theme is "Mean Girls." We chose Mean Girls because it's all about breaking stereotypes and finding where you fit in a social scene or a place.

E: We thought it kind of represented, not Denison's culture, but I think this is like a small school and it could represent a small high school sometimes, and like [Cheyanne] said, it's all about breaking stereotypes.

C: It's about learning to figure yourself out and being okay with who you are so we just thought it would be a really fun theme and everyone knows Mean Girls. Our shirts say "It's probably because I have a big lesbian crush on you" on the back, so it was fitting.

E: Janice Ian in the movie said that.

C: So, we'll meet with our "teams" so I have a bunch of DGs and friends, and [Ellen] does too. We'll kind of stay separate tonight and then we'll run out and Delta Gamma will be on the steps and then Ellen's a member of LNO, she's the president of LNO, so LNO will be serenade DG and then DG will be singing their songs and then we'll run out and we kind of say our vows to each other.

E: Standing on the benches, in front of everyone.

C: Technically DG's rules specifically say that we can't give anyone our pin so I have a nice surprise. I can't say more now. (gave her a ring)

E: Last fall, well it's kind of a weird situation, my roommate (Allison Scarlott '15) since freshman year is [Cheyanne's] big but I'd never actually met Cheyanne--I had heard a lot about her, but other than that I think I'd seen like one picture, I'd never even talked to her. Then, last fall, we had Regina Martin's Literary Theory class and I had had another class right before that, non fiction with my roommate, and so those classes were in the same room so it was like crossing over and Allison introduced me to Cheyanne and so it was kind of awkward. Like Cheyanne and I are from two totally different worlds. Not that I don't love sorority life--I've come a long way from it-

-but we are two totally different people and we kind of met and then had that awkward “well, now we have to sit next to each other”

C: I was like, “great, I have to spend an entire semester sitting next to this girl who probably hates everything about me because I’m this bubbly and annoying girl and she’s cool and mysterious and comes in with her headphones on” and I’m like “great”.

E: At the time, Cheyanne’s hair was blonde and long and she was probably wearing a sundress or something and I’m like the polar opposite.

C: And then we kind of like stayed sitting next to each other. It became pretty clear pretty quickly that, you know when you look at someone and you’re like ‘oh, well we, you get it.’ We’d share these glances and it was so clear that we were thinking the same thing when the whole class was on a different page and then I would just try to embarrass Ellen all the time because she’d get so uncomfortable around me and I didn’t know why, so I’d be like ‘Oh my God, Ellen, want to be my best friend?’ and she’d be like ‘Why are you talking to me?’ and then we just started hanging out and studying and the rest is history.

C: I was more afraid to come out to DG than I was with probably anyone else. I was terrified.

E: We started actually dating--

C: October or November

E: And then we kind of kept it from people for a while. We went home, we told both of our families over Thanksgiving and then came back and started telling a few people

C: Like our closest friends. And then second semester, we really were like “okay, we’re going to go into second semester and tell our closest friends and our sorority, and our team, and make an effort to be more open about it, and then we made it Facebook official, not because we wanted to but because we wanted to be like ‘We’re not ashamed of it, this is what it is.’ We just wanted to address it and be like ‘here’s what it is’ because rumors can get spread. I was more afraid to come out to DG than anyone else because that’s a big group of girls and that can be a little intimidating and I didn’t know anyone in the Greek community who was in a sorority and had a girlfriend, or identified in that way, and--I might start crying--but Delta Gamma has been not only accepting but encouraging to me. I don’t think I would be at this point without them, they were the people that were like ‘Oh my God, she’s so cute, bring her to formal’ and ‘Oh my gosh, no, tell them.’ And they were the people that were more excited and I think I learned from that to be okay with myself and to be open about it so for me it was really important to have a pinning for us, like I wouldn’t care if no one came. I’m doing it because I want to and I want to do that before Ellen graduates and it’s important to us, but also because the Greek community has played a huge role. Delta Gamma has brought in Outlook to our chapter meetings to talk about how we can be more inclusive and use more inclusionary language and make our recruitment LGBT friendly so I mean, it’s

definitely been a long, terrifying road but at the end I've been continually to this day amazed by how supportive my sisters are of me being myself.

E: I mean, I know I was scared in the beginning. I don't come from--a lot of my family has gone to college, but nobody has been in Greek life or anything like that. That was one of the first things I told my parents, that Cheyanne was in a sorority and I think I was definitely nervous because I have friends here who are in sororities but I don't know that much about that culture and it's pretty easy to stereotype, so that's just where I was at and after she had told people, walking around campus and seeing all these DG's and wondering who knew and who didn't know and what they were thinking about me and just kind of, this or that, whether they approved or didn't approve, and I know especially, I was just really surprised by how many people that did approach me and say very positive things, like 'we're very supportive of [you] and Cheyanne.' I know that going to her formals or other sorority events, I was scared to death, just going into some environment where I wasn't sure how we were going to be accepted and every time I was blown away by how supportive Delta Gamma was. It made me feel a lot better.

C: We have all of these mutual DG friends. It's really nice to know that. We joke around, but it's like, DG is my thing but at the same time I really do feel like my little sorority family, like my big and little, are always like 'Oh, Ellen, you can eat dinner with us' and they're just so inclusive. I didn't know that like, had I known freshman year that this would be my journey, I don't know if I would've joined DG, I would've been really terrified, but I think that I wouldn't have been able to do it without them. Everyday I'm so thankful that they were there for me. It would've gone very different if I wasn't in DG.

C: I think Delta Gamma gave me a safe space to explore who I was. They almost knew what I needed before I knew what I needed, in a sense. This was not how I ever envisioned my next three years when I was a freshman, like if you told me that when I joined DG. They've been the people that have been the role models to me, and who were like 'this is the best, be open about it, be great, we all support you, if anyone says anything, we have your back.' They continually allowed me to try on different people. I feel like I could--can you help me?

E: Even with LNO and the softball team, I think it's really important. It says a lot when you're about to say 'hey, I'm in a relationship with a girl' there is no one else in the group that probably has that similar experience, you're scared that they're not going to look at you the same because they're girls and because it's something that's different and when they have your back on it, it's not even that, they're excited for you and want to meet Cheyanne, and want to know more about it.

C: There's a certain strength in it. The amount of DG's I saw at Pride, it was just like not only do they support me, but they're willing to be open about it, and be like 'yeah, we support it.'

E: There's a very harsh reality in that, you know, we--not that we're really sheltered in Granville--but Cheyanne and I would not be accepted in maybe other communities, and to know that we have a large part of the Denison student body

behind us makes me feel a lot more safe on campus. I can hold Cheyanne's hand walking across the academic quad and not be like 'I'm really nervous about what's about to happen.'

E: I definitely think, I know I've tried to make more of an effort with mentioning it. It's even more nerve wracking to mention a girlfriend in class when you use an example because I think there are these kind of things. Whatever lesson is going on, and if you're like, 'Oh yeah, my girlfriend's from New Jersey' and blah blah blah, you're kind of like 'Oh my gosh, I've never had a negative comeback' or anything like that. Teachers are very accepting.

C: I think Denison's community has been incredibly supportive. I have nothing to say, I'm really thankful that I go somewhere where I feel like I can be myself but also where I feel confident that if there was a problem, a lot of people would be sticking up for me. I genuinely feel that way. I have found so many mentors on Denison's campus: teachers, girls older than me, DG's that identify as queer. So many people have been willing to be like 'Yeah, let's have a conversation. Let me help you.' Like here's what I'm struggling with. I've gone to Outlook. I don't know, there's so many good resources and so many good people who are really accepting. And even the people that you'd think stereotypically wouldn't support it. I've had all these guys come up to me and they're like 'That's so great. You guys are so cute.' It feels go. It's reaffirming. Sometimes I forget.

E: Sometimes I take for granted how accepting Denison's community is. Sometimes I think if we went somewhere else it would be a totally different situation.

C: To contrast how I felt a year ago to now, I was terrified coming out. It's such a scary thing but now I forget what that feels like. I don't think twice about it.

E: I can definitely admit, and if anything Cheyanne has really opened my eyes, Delta Gamma is a really good example of what Greek life really can be because I can definitely say that when I was a freshman and all of your friends are rushing, it wasn't an ostracizing feeling, but because I chose not to be a part of that, you don't resent that, but you just don't know what that is--they think they're better than everyone, this is what they represent kind of thing, and it isn't at all. I think definitely, you know, because all of a sudden when Cheyanne and I did come out and talk about it, it was all of these Delta Gammas coming up to me and introducing themselves and I got to know a lot of them and I was just kind of blown away by who the people are that make up Greek life, and that underneath that, it just completely dissolved the stereotype. There are those people out there that do make Greek life look bad, but I don't find that in Delta Gamma and I don't really find it anywhere near our situation, at all.

C: We have a ton of fun at formals. I think it's really great that Ellen's really supportive of it. Like I said, we have so many mutual friends that are in Greek life. Other sororities have been incredibly supportive. We have so many friends that are in other chapters.

E: I live with Melissa [Weinsz] who's the president of Kappa Alpha Theta and I feel like we're pretty surrounded by Greek life.

C: I also want to give a shout out to Panhellenic because I don't really know that much about Panhel or have had a lot of one on one experience with them, but I know that if anything happened in the Greek community, if I went to Panhel, they would be really willing to listen to me and hear me out and help me and make sure that everything was okay.

C: Oh my gosh, I love the softball team. It's a small community so you know people but like we do come from totally different friend groups and it's been such an amazing opportunity to be able to get to know so many people I probably wouldn't have gotten to know. There are people that I consider to be my really good friends on campus that I met because of Ellen.

E: Some of Cheyanne's best friends are in LNO and it was just kind of like, in the beginning, I knew I was talking to Cheyanne and we had something going on, and I didn't know if they knew, and so that's kind of how it got spread through the group, it was from talking to one or two people. When I told LNO about the pinning, they were ecstatic. They just lit up, they've been meeting about it.

C: I think a really good example is that there's a bunch of alumni coming back for our pinning today, which is so flattering. One of Ellen's best friends, Page Romnet's coming back. She bought a plane ticket and is coming back. Three or four of my sisters who graduated are coming back. Kinsey, who is someone that [Ellen] is friends with is coming back. It's amazing. My college experience would've been so different without this. Not on just a personal level, but also how many people I've gotten to know, or who've approached me and been like 'I've never really told anyone, but I really want to talk to you about this.'

E: Because each of us are involved in so many different things--I think the softball team is very supportive. Emily and Julie who are the other two seniors, I told them last year and it just kind of sprinkled through and everyone wanted to meet Cheyanne. I brought her to athlete formal that spring and I remember being pretty nervous and knowing that my team was there and was overly supportive made a big difference.

C: I walk across campus and people that I don't know very well will say hi to me because they're on the softball team or because they're in LNO. I've met Ellen's boss a ton of times. It's so important I think to get out of your friend group. I've learned a lot about Denison just from dating someone.

E: I've met a lot of people I don't think I would ever cross paths with otherwise because of Cheyanne.

C: I love dating another English major. We just know so many of the same professors. This is probably the stupidest thing but--

E: Our first kiss was in Barney Davis

C: We have this whole thing, like we met in Barney Davis in the English building, that's where our first kiss was, we have so many people that care about us. Professors and other students in the English department but I feel like Ellen's one of the first people I met where I could have really good conversations with. We're on the same page and we talk about these things and debate literature and it's so nerdy but I think one of the strongest reasons why we are such a strong couple is really because we're both English majors. We always joke that we're just excited to combine our book collections after I graduate. We're always picking out books and being like 'I got this for our book collection' or 'I got this book, you have to read it.' We just have this love. Ellen's super, super passionate about writing and I'm super, super passionate about literature. We swap cute little Virginia Woolf's love letters. I send them to her all the time.

E: We send letters to each other when we're at home. She's from New Jersey and I'm from Ohio.

C: It's really cool for me because I can put parts of our relationship, I connect them to what I was reading at the time. It was kind of funny, no one knew that we were a thing and we'd have to go to this class that we met in and talk about queer theory and be like Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum and Ellen and I are just looking at the ground next to each other being like 'Don't make eye contact, don't make eye contact.'

E: The textbook for this Literary Theory class is what had all the readings in it. It was just different theorists in there.

C: It's this giant anthology and if you open my copy, I have all these notes and it's like hearts and doodles. Literary Theory was a life changing class for me but I think it's one of those things that I've been able to carry to every single experience or for other classes I've had at Denison, and I think it's kind of funny that that's where I met Ellen. It's such an overarching thing; both Ellen and Lit Theory have shaped my Denison experience a lot.

E: All these readings we were doing in this class is about changing your perspective or how to read literature in different ways and I think that set a tone about love and relationships and kind of who you're interacting with on campus and stuff. At the same time, when this class is opening your mind of how you're looking at the world and who you're choosing to be with is the same time that I'm meeting Cheyanne and how I'm questioning and like, 'woah, I have a connection with someone' and just because this is against convention.

C: I always joke, I would not be able to date someone who did not take Lit Theory. The class in general is just mind blowing. It was such a different class than I've ever taken at Denison.

E: I feel like it's a philosophy class kind of mixed with literature.

C: It was an experience that we had together. I think that is one of the foundational things in our relationship that makes it so strong.

E: When you're sitting there and you ask anyone about their coming out story, there's different things. There's a lot of questioning going on in your head, a lot of things you were raised with and what you were taught, and what the community around you is saying, and so you have to have in the text that you're reading for the class, we would both be separately in Huffman in the morning at different tables reading the same text probably after hanging out with each other the night before in Barney Davis and whether it was our first kiss or when I made Cheyanne tell me what kind of a crush she had on me, the next day, reading something that's saying something, if it's Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One Own" or a different thing saying something--

C: It gives you the words.

E: Or an understanding of what's going on when, if anyone who's been in love or had a crush, it doesn't make sense at the time.

C: So, when we first started dating, no one knew, no one--not my roommates. Clearly I did not want to hang out in Ellen's room because my big, I was not ready. So we would be like 'Oh, yeah, want to study?' so we would go to Barney Davis to do homework, but we got nothing done. We would sit and it would be like 'Oh my gosh, it's 3:30 in the morning and it felt like it had been five minutes. There's this odd love for Barney Davis. We were getting no sleep but we were just so happy. I can't go in Barney Davis and not feel happy and safe and mushy-gushy-lovey.

E: As an English major, when you're taking all these classes, it's definitely good to have someone to talk to about that. I know, in the writing world you can get stuck in your head sometimes and Cheyanne is someone I can bounce ideas off of, or when I see her, she'll tell me about who she interviewed today for work, or what she's reading in her literature classes, or what's going on. It's definitely a huge component.

C: All the things I'm in love with about life and that I love, Ellen shares that. I'm in love with her but it's really cool that you can have someone that shares your interests.

E: I don't know if it's the English department that kind of opened your eyes to that or a Denison liberal arts education but because we both have that kind of background.

C: I don't to be a mushy and loving cliché, but she finishes my sentences and it's not even that, I'll think things and be like 'Oh, no one would ever think of that. I'm not going to say it out loud' but then Ellen will turn around and answer my question. First of, all how are you thinking of that? I've never met someone in my entire life who has the same lens that I do about everything but still challenges me and is like 'Well let's work through this, let's question this, let's talk about it.'

E: I definitely think that when we first met, Cheyanne was this blonde from New Jersey, we are from two completely different worlds. She's near New York City and she's in a sorority, I'm from a country town in Ohio, I have sheep. I think because of the class and because of the English department and curriculum, that kind of brought us together more than we probably would have been.

Do you guys have anything that you want to add?

C: Did I say that I love you?

E: I know when we were talking about whether an article was going to be written or not, we definitely wanted it to be out there and talked about and to kind of give things back to the community that is accepting us and know that we don't take it for granted, and that we recognize and see everyone that supports us.

C: I think it's important to know that there are LGBT people everywhere with different interests. There are not stereotypes. There are stereotypes that surround it, but it's okay to be a sorority girl and like girls. That was so hard for me to understand. I couldn't find anyone like me. Yeah, there are these lesbian or bisexual girls that I know, but they aren't sorority girls, I have nothing in common with them, but then once I came out in DG, several DG's approached me and were like 'Oh, me too.' I think it's important that there's no right way to be something. There's no right way to be in a sorority, there's no right way to be gay, or whatever you want to call yourself. They can exist side by side, and not only can they exist side-by-side, it's a beautiful thing. I love that I'm in a sorority and I love that I have a girlfriend, and both of them are super important to me and have influenced my Denison career. I just want everyone to know that we're queer and we're here in Greek life.