Welcome to changing academic life. I'm Geraldine Fitzpatrick and this is a podcast series where academics and others share their stories, provide ideas, and provoke discussions about what we can do individually and collectively to change academic life for the better.

It's great that you could join us for this conversation with Katie Siek. Katie is an associate professor in Informatics at Indiana University in the US. As ever there's so much in this discussion. Katie shares her experience as being part of a dual career couple and had some really great advice for faculties on how to better handle this. She talks about the challenges having children and what she learned to do very differently from her first to her second child, especially in giving yourself permission to take proper time off. We talk about her passion for mentoring, especially women and first generation college students that's been recognized by special mentor award and how she's learning how to lobby upwards so that she can effect policy change. She talks about building a research group and here, listen out for the wall sit challenge. You may be inspired to do something similar. And we finished up with Katie telling a very personal story of dealing with what is essentially an invisible illness at work and she calls for us all to have much more open and honest discussions about these sorts of issues and also to be there for one another to support and be advocates for people who are in these situations and needing help. Enjoy it.

Katie, thanks for your time today and can you just give us a little bit of background to give people some context for where you're coming from?

Sure. So my name is Katie Siek. I'm an associate professor in the school of Informatics Computing and Engineering at Indiana University. I'm a first generation college student. I'm the first one in my family to go to college. When I was in graduate school, in the United States, I was really interested in scientific computing and the networking, computer networking and then my mom got sick with cancer and so I went back to graduate school and I said I want to do, do healthcare and computing. And my advisors at the time were really supportive, but they said we do supercomputing we're not really interested in that so they helped me find a new advisor. And since then I've been able to do computing and healthcare and looking at how we can empower everyday people, especially those who are under studied and under-served to improve their health here in the United States.
Geri: 00:02:57 So that's really interesting. The way that that personal experience with your mother focused some intention to do something that made a difference for people like her.

Katie: 00:03:08 Yes. Yeah, I came back, um, so in my graduate studies I had to take some time off. I took a summer off to go take care of her. Really, it was really fast. She went from, she went from, finding out she had cancer on Halloween, October 31st and then passed away in July. And so I took that summer off to help my family. And when I was in the hospital, I was just amazed because my mom was going in and out of care and also amazed that how many questions could not be answered for us. So that's what I've kind of been motivated. One of the triggers though for me is that my mom had cancer, but I don't work in cancer. I can't. It's too close. I can't do it.

Geri: 00:03:54 Yeah. That must have been tough breaking the studies as well.

Katie: 00:04:00 Breaking the studies or ...

Geri: 00:04:02 To take time off to care for her.

Katie: 00:04:04 Oh yes. Well, fortunately I, at that time I was doing scientific computing research. Um, so there aren't many user studies involved in scientific computing. So it wasn't until I came back that I said I wanted to change over, but I went from a completely different area. So I had all the... Fortunately Yvonne Rogers was here, in Indiana at the time. And so I met with Yvonne Rogers and she's - yes here's how we're going to do it. You're gonna meet some nurses, you're gonna, meet some doctors. You're going to figure out who you want to work with and then you're going, and then we're going to read through all this literature and you're trying to do user studies. And I was like, okay. So I kind of in my graduate studies I made a complete turn in the middle.

Geri: 00:04:50 Wow. You did. You did your undergraduate degree and your phd at Indiana and you're back there now?

Katie: 00:04:59 Yeah, I did my Undergrad at a small liberal arts college in St Petersburg Florida, called Eckerd College. Then I did my graduate work. I also had a little bit of a juggling graduate work. I spent two years at Notre Dame and then I spent four years in Indiana and then I went to, I went to University of Colorado as a professor for seven years. And then I came back to Indiana, the Dean at the time, Bobby Schnabel was really interested in growing Health Informatics at Indiana, which made me super
excited because there wasn't health informatics until um, my, myself and my advisor started working in it and now he wanted to expand it. So the other part is I'm a part of a dual career couple, so my husband is in programming languages and the Dean was also interested in expanding programming languages, so it gave us an offer that we couldn't, we couldn't refuse to come back and really work on our passions like each of got to have a group of passionate colleagues.

Geri: 00:05:59 That's, that's amazing. So can you talk a little bit more about being part of a dual career couple because when you're both in, in academia and both in the same faculties, this sounds like an incredibly rare and amazing opportunity to have had.

Katie: 00:06:14 Yes, it's, it's, it's, um, I like to call it, um, yeah, a dual career opportunity like you were mentioning is that uh, a two body problem is the two body opportunity because um, as much as people don't think of it that way or don't phrase it that way, it's really great to have your partner who committed and passionate about the areas and understands your struggles and such. So I really liked that part of it. The difficult part is I'm getting, uh, getting two positions in the same place where you're both happy. There's not many, there's not many universities out there that can say they do have a great health informatics and a great programming language groups. When we were in Colorado. I was hired as tenure track and my husband was hired as a research faculty position and that was an amazing struggle and it's hard to be supportive.

Katie: 00:07:12 Being a junior faculty is difficult in being a research faculty is difficult. So we got to see that perspective, you know, I always come home and be like, oh, I have so many grants and papers. If you're like, well at least at least you're tenure track, right? Like, oh, this goes to something. And then he'd come back and say, I'm really sorry I shouldn't have said that. It's really difficult. So we fortunately had really good mentors. So in that year I was tenure track. I got pregnant with my first child. I don't know if I'd recommend that, but, and um, my, my partner was, my husband was a research faculty, which meant he got an office and a title and then he had to go in and get money and, and volunteer to teach. And what our mentors told us was that you have to go out on the market, you have to go in the market immediately.

Katie: 00:08:10 Um, because at Colorado, some people had told us, oh, well, once Katie gets tenure, they'll consider you. Um, but our mentors like, okay, worst case there Katie doesn't get tenure. Then you've been a research faculty for seven years, who's
going to hire you. So we went on the market that year, uh, and I went, I interviewed seven or eight months pregnant at one point. One of my interviews are supposed to be on bed rest. I had to ask, I had to schedule my interviews. Everybody walked to me because, um, because my, I was so swollen and uh, we got two offers from two that we got. We got two offers from two different institutions. So we were both, like, we, we, um, we have positions there and we went into Colorado and we said we don't want to go but we have to opportunities for both of us to be tenure track. And so, uh, I was on bedrest again at that moment in time and I really did not want to move and they Colorado came back in and hired my husband into electrical engineering. So I was in computer science. My husband was electrical engineering.

Geri: 00:09:20 So that was a tenure track position that he got there.

Katie: 00:09:23 Tenure track position there. Yeah.

Geri: 00:09:24 But you had to go through all that to come back to say, look, do you want to keep us or not?

Katie: 00:09:30 Right. Yeah. I don't think that's right. The other thing is, and I've been dealing with this here helping fellow colleagues out is maybe people mean, maybe people say things and they mean it in a good way. So, um, one colleague, and I won't forget this, it was on, it was on Valentine's Day, February 14th. One colleague apparently walked into my husband's office and said, um, you just have to walk on water for the next five years, we'll consider a tenure track position for you. Never able to, to, um, to get over that. Like the idea of walking, like walking on water it's a pretty tall order. And then people would say to me once they hired my husband Colorado had a really great to dual career, dual career policy that really top of the line, now that I'm at Indiana, I'm like, wow, that was a good policy. Colorado at the time, the university paid half of a tenure track position and then each unit paid a quarter. So your spouse, the unit got your spouse for a quarter of a tenure line. But then colleagues would say to me, we're paying one and a quarter to tenure lines for you, like, are you worth it?

Geri: 00:10:47 So that puts pressure on you as well.

Katie: 00:10:50 That's would put pressure on me and some of these discussions shouldn't really get out to the [?]. And then certain conversations really shouldn't, shouldn't get out.
Katie: Um, when the Dean at Indiana came to visit us, he came to Boulder to, he raked our leaves for us, he raked the big pile of leaves for my five year old, playing, while he was telling us about all the big things that we're planning to do at Indiana. And we were like, great. And my husband, I remember my husband was saying, you know, they want both of us, like it's not like they want you and they really want both of us. And so, um, and so I was like, okay, like you can't when you're not treated properly. Like even if you're going after a dual career couple if you really want them then go after both of them.

Katie: Don't..., go after them with the, with the funding, don't, don't make one feel trailing. That was a, that was a big influence in coming, the idea that we would have a community of people to work with and they want both of us. I think there needs to be more training because last year my husband was talking to a to a colleague and the colleague said to him, you were, you were our diversity spousal hire? And my husband was like, no, no, that's not true. The dean came and saw both of us. And then he went to another colleague and they like, Oh yeah, yeah, bobby said he'd give you to us for free if I'm, you know, if we could get Katie back to, to help with health informatics, but his senior colleagues like, but we're so excited you're here. And my husband was back in, um, a position of like, yeah, of that. So yeah, it's, it's how I, I re, I love having a spouse who understands everything but um, this emotional part and people. I don't know why people are saying this is it to... I'm not sure why anybody would want to know. There's a special accommodation for you. And that's hard.

Geri: Yeah. Yeah. It's, it's always hard, isn't it? Because it's, yeah, that someone is paying across whatever the price is of trying to get tenure and build up a research group, research career. Having this layer on top just adds incredible emotional work.

Katie: Yes. I've been working here, Indiana, Indiana does not have the same support that Colorado did for a spousal hire. They don't have that, you know, the other unit pays a quarter, um, which I think is a great policy so they don't have that and I've been really passionate about like, hey, if we want them, let's get them both and make the offers at the same time. So we show that they want them don't make them work. You don't make them go out and get other offers because they may go or they'll never recover from that emotionally and the first time a good offer comes their way, they're going to leave and then we're going to be out a lot of resources.

Geri: Yup. Yup. And having to restart.
Katie: 00:14:10 Yeah. And so, but I think academia is in a transition and I hope it continues transitioning to.

Geri: 00:14:18 Yeah. That's, that's. I think that's tough that situation.

Katie: 00:14:22 Right. But I, I, I've been really passionate about standing up and talking to administrators and mentioning it wherever I can to say that, you know, go after both people and don't make them go through these things and certain things, certain decisions are made at the administrative level and should stay there and not trickle down.

Geri: 00:14:42 Because it probably doesn't detract from the fact that they genuinely did want him, that he did contribute in a positive way.

Katie: 00:14:49 Right. They had strategic plans. They have a, we have one of the largest programming language groups and health informatics groups in the country. So yeah, it doesn't, it doesn't hurt. Shouldn't be a barrier to make a decision. I'm not sure where the laws are around the world, but in the United States, you're, you're not supposed to ask certain questions. In the community, like, hi, it's small enough that you know who's dating who or who has a partner and they should not influence anybody.

Geri: 00:15:20 You mentioned having your first baby when you were sort of earlier days, but can you reflect on the having kids and going through all of this as well just to add complications and work and layers of pressure.

Katie: 00:15:37 I think having kids helped my research and then also helped balance me out so I was so fortunate to have Aspen, my first child in my first year.

Geri: 00:15:49 So it was just interesting that you said before, you're not sure that you would advise it and out and you're saying you're so fortunate. So

Katie: 00:15:56 Yeah. Well, reflecting-wise, I think I'm, I think it's fortunate she helped me learn a lot of things that I would have written in a CHI discussion section and a reviewer would have been like, everybody knows this, you know, like, I mean I went into my research when I was pregnant, I was starting up collaborations and I was working with low socioeconomic status families and I was talking to two mothers and single caregivers and grandmothers and they're like, my kids just won't eat vegetables. I'm like, why not just put them in front of them and your child will eat them? Uh, and then I had my first child in
which this is happening for you. She does, she's a great, she's a great eater. But yeah, she. So it helped my research for like, Oh, you're right, this is harder than I thought it was.

Katie: 00:16:45 Oh, it got me out of the algorithmic thinking. And the other thing is in terms of balance, you know, like our kids right now, like you two are always talking about work and so it's like, oh, right, maybe we should have some other discussion at the dinner table if they don't, you know, and they don't care you, you got a paper rejected, they want you to play like. So yeah. But in terms of um, yeah, and maybe not recommending it, it's in our first year interviewing while you're pregnant, like I'm clearly clearly very pregnant yet, you know, what you're getting on an interview with me. Um, so it's my first year instead of writing papers and grants I'm working on, well I did those too, but I was also working on applications to get a position elsewhere. Also trying to figure out teaching, going to try and find a doctor because now all of a sudden I have to get some healthcare and figure out what hospital and um, get a house. I mean, you don't have to get a house that just all of these little things.

Katie: 00:17:51 It was, it was, it was, um, you know, I think in a sense, I'm not sure which it is because I've seen initially I was like, wow, having a child kind of stalled me for like two years going into my tenure track, you know, I wasn't being as productive as it could have been, but it's also, I think the issue of I'm doing the dual career part that makes, that also slows you down. Like you could be writing a grant and you're writing a cover letter. I'd be writing a paper instead you're tweaking your teaching to show how you fit this, this area that they want to, they want to hire in. So yeah, it was difficult. And then showing that I could be a contributor to my, to my community by showing up to events. So traveling with a baby, paying for childcare to come with you so you can travel with a baby. So there's a lot of um, a lot of balancing there.

Geri: 00:18:52 Yeah. And I do remember you coming along to conferences, you know, with your baby and with childcare and just being in awe of how you'd manage that process.

Katie: 00:19:03 You don't, you know, it's, it's, um, it was, yeah, it's kind of neat in the moment. Yeah. I would come home and be like, well was that, that meaning. But every coffee break I was running to our hotel room to nurse my baby or running to a corner to, to and there's my child or see my child and not going to dinner at night to with my child and, and also give, you know, the people who are helping with childcare some much needed time to recover.
But I didn't realize until these last few years with the next, the next generation of women who are having children. Like, Oh, I saw you at the conferences. I saw you nursing your baby. I, I knew this was possible. And one person said, I think you lied. You made it look easy, but this is hard and like, yeah, I mean I don't, I don't remember anybody asking me how hard it was, but it's difficult, but it's worth it.

Geri: 00:19:57 Yeah. Is there anything you'd do differently now that you know, looking back on it with the wisdom of hindsight?

Katie: 00:20:04 Yes. So one thing I, I would really recommend is my, um, so whatever kind of time off you get, take it and really do it correctly. Don't think of it as a time of teaching and in internal service release, I do it correctly. Family leave, like if you need family leave, maybe it's adopting a child, maybe it's a sick, loved one will do it correctly. Otherwise, the stress just layers on. So for my first child I was not, I did not work there long enough. So I, I had not worked there for a year yet. So I did not. Um, I'm not qualify for any leave. I got um. I had to use my vacation and sick leave. And since I pushed it too much since I was interviewing, while pregnant, I was on bedrest for 10 days before I gave birth to my child, which meant I was only, I only had three days left of my leave.

Geri: 00:21:07 That's crazy.

Katie: 00:21:09 Yeah. And the other part, um, I would encourage all my colleagues to do is to not, not propagate the, the, you know, I know Amazon Warrior woman myths. So everybody in my school at the time I had my first child talked about the professor who checked herself out of the hospital and got into the lab that same night. And then I became part of that lore, because I was in, I was in the lab three days later because I had new Grad students starting a new grant starting up. I couldn't sit down. I was exhausted. I had still hadn't mastered nursing her yet.

Geri: 00:21:47 So Katie, this is your first baby and you were back in the lab at three days.

Katie: 00:21:52 Yeah. But this is not an okay thing because, um, yeah, don't do that. Because the other thing was since my husband just got a tenure track job, wanted to show he belongs to, he did not take leave. He wanted to prove the, you know, he was worth it. So he was just like, I got write grants, got to write grants, got to get papers, kind of show them I'm worth it. And I'm, I'm so thankful. Our first child was pretty easy. She was very sweet. Um, she, she, um, my husband and I kept her. We had a child, we had
hired someone to help care for her and we had her, um, we had, I had part of my office with baby stuff and I'd come out and meet with my students and he had part of his office and sometimes I could hear her screaming. This is, we didn't have childcare initially, like you can't really get childcare here for six weeks, but I could hear her hungry crying and I would just start with my body would just start reacting as I'm meeting with a student and keeping running down the hall with her. So we could do a handoff. We did half day end offs until she was six months old and we could get childcare help. That's the first one.

Geri: 00:23:04 So some of that is structural though, isn't it? You know, the fact that you only had three days sick leave left the structures and processes and policies in place made it difficult to make any other decision.

Katie: 00:23:20 Yes. Yes. And, and that was, you know, we didn't live near family. We don't, we still don't live near family. So yeah, that was part of it is the process and that's why I was [?] that I'm in the United States because I know it's different around the world.

Geri: 00:23:36 Thankfully.

Katie: 00:23:37 Yes. So that was my first child and that was so hard. And then with my second child, I was so thankful my husband's chair in electrical engineering who didn't have children but under, but totally was a human being. He said, hey, I remember you after the last year. You know, like when my child turned one, I was just a mess, you know, I, I was a real mess.

Geri: 00:24:02 You must've been shattered, totally shattered

Katie: 00:24:05 And exhausted. And he said, I remember seeing you, you know, after your first child and no, five years later I was pregnant with my second and he said, I hope you do it right. And don't be afraid to do it right. I will speak up for you and to how, um, a colleague, especially a male colleague in engineering saying, you know, do it right and I'll speak up for you. That made me feel so strong and so willing to try it. And then he had the same conversation with my husband. So my husband was like, oh, we're, we're, we're both going to take leave. And we did it so that I took leave for one, one semester he took leave for the second semester and by then she was six months old. So she was all okay with bottle feeding and being with Daddy. Um, there was, um, it was amazing. And also our children, you can see it in our children, right? Like my second child will go to go to my husband or myself and my first child will come to me. Yeah.
And that relationship too. But I really appreciated having someone say you were right.

Geri: 00:25:12 So even just seeing your body language there while you were talking about it, you visibly, it could almost sort of visibly see you relaxed and when you talked about the fact that you took time off.

Katie: 00:25:23 Yeah. Yeah. No it was and it was really great. You know, I, I have like, I mean it wasn't like I had my students would come visit me at my house and we'd talk about papers and their study to keep them going, but I was part of the CHI PC that year. Yeah. But, and I did do wish, but other than that, that was all I did.

Geri: 00:25:49 So again, just looking back and with the benefit of hindsight, would you have even, would you choose to do those things again? So that was doing program committee meeting and organizing sort of a small workshop and that?

Katie: 00:26:02 Yeah, I think so. I think I would still do it even though it's difficult. I would do it because it's still let people know I was, I was there participating and it gave me also that face to face that face to face, which I think the new Chi PC setup with going virtual gives you the ability to do it at home, but it also eliminates that face to face.

Geri: 00:26:29 Just for clarification, the CHI PC, CHI is a Conference, the Program Committee meeting this year is going virtual because it's a really big conference and this is our first trial. So yeah, so that trade off between losing the face to face and the visibility.

Katie: 00:26:49 Right. I think as a junior, as a junior faculty member, and I think this is also, as you mentioned, structural right, we rely on letters. We rely on people knowing about your work so it requires that face to face. So structurally there could be an old trickle down effect to say how much, how much is this worth it? How should we look at scholarships? So it trickles all the way down.

Geri: 00:27:18 We're still trying to do things that enable some contact and people connecting virtually, but it will definitely be different. So one of the arguments for that is that it increases diversity though, because it means that people who might have a young baby at home doesn't have to find a babysitter to come with them and they can still participate if they want to or people who don't have budgets to travel. I mean, how do you see...
Katie: 00:27:43 So I think it all depends on how your whole life works. If it's outside of normal work hours, my family has a hard time understanding that, that I'm not really there. I find it actually harder, um, to be physically home for a meeting like this because I'm still. So I, and some of it is, my issues. I have a hobby. I love to cook. So, um, there's, there's text messages from my spouse asking am I picking up the kids are you picking up the kids? Are You taking her to pee? Like there was this one meeting I was at for a federal funding agency where I said, Oh, my child's in the nutcracker ballet. I want to see her and opening night. So I'll, I'll call remotely and here they are texting me like, Hey, can you call in to talk to us about this grant? And I'm currently hairspraying a bun, hairspraying a bun and getting angel costumes and I'm like right this grant and it's, it's my risk.

Katie: 00:28:45 And finally I was like, okay, you're good. I have to go. Because my colleague, like my colleague, I don't really know this person. I'd have to give them the respect that their grant is due. So, um, so part of it would be like, I don't have to go, but at least when I do go I get to focus completely on this work and when it's over I just have one child to deal with. I'm not expected home. I'm not expected. Not expected to help. And also my children see me so they know, they know I'm there, I'm just ignoring them for the...

Geri: 00:29:23 Yeah. So that's different dynamics.

Katie: 00:29:27 Yeah. So I think, I think it will be interesting to see how it improves diversity and/or exhausts people. Yeah. They're new type of load. But I do see environmentally and financially how this has to happen.

Geri: 00:29:44 Do you have any strategies, you know, you said before about your daughter's saying, you know, you two stopped talking work at home. Do you have any sort of strategies for managing those sorts of transitions between work and home, especially when you're both working in the same area?

Katie: 00:29:59 Yeah, so I think what we do is we start talking. We let them start dinner conversations. We all have dinner together. We let them start about how their day is, what's the most exciting thing that happened today or what's something they're interested in. And a lot of times they're interested in things that they hear, especially in the United States right now, different political things that are here or I'll mention to them, oh on Tue., yesterday I mentioned to my girls, I'll work going to wear black today. I mean you don't have to wear black but we're but mommy's going to wear black. And they're like, well why are
you going to wear black? And I explained to them why we're going to wear black. And my six year old was like, oh, I need to make a poster too, you know, I'm going to protest this. And so, um, they're, they're becoming more and more interested in the world around them.

Katie: 00:30:46 My, my older daughter will read signs around our community and then my younger daughter has lots of questions. So, uh, the other thing we do too right now, I'm not sure we were, we were nervous to do it pre tenure, but post tenure, we're doing it. So my husband and I, um, we trade off, so one of them, one of us is responsible for bringing them to school and one of us is responsible for bringing them home. We shift our day. So some of us, one of us at some time will work from seven, seven to three and the other one of us will work from 9:30 to 5:30 a. So we spend more time with our girls.

Geri: 00:31:28 That's nice. What was the issue with doing it before tenure? That you didn't feel comfortable to do this because it sounds like you had thought about it but actively decided not to.

Katie: 00:31:42 So, you know, part of, um, selecting someone to be a lifelong colleague is to make sure that they're there and they, I guess we're kind of [?] but oh well they're lifelong colleague, they're a good colleague, they're going to show up, they're going to participate and we're still participating. It's in a different way. So maybe I should advocate this is a good, this is a good question. I should advocate for this more so because I'm still participating in and I'm still a great colleague. I just haven't shifted schedule so we're scared. We're concerned about doing it before because we weren't, you know, if, if colloquiums at four, you have to be there. I called Graham at four and if the, if the um, if the departmental meeting is at five, you have to be there at five. So our oldest was in childcare. We would drop her off at probably eight and pick her up at six. She had a long she'd a long childcare and whereas my second child we had her, like we had, we had her and then we decided thanks to that colleague we're going to do it right. So she was a baby when we were, just getting tenure, so she is a totally different perspective of, of how we [?].

Geri: 00:33:06 It's just interesting how those processes influence all these other decisions.

Katie: 00:33:10 Right. But I think this is a good reflection. It's telling. It's reminding me like, you know, you said when you were a junior faculty member, you wish you had someone to fight for that. So
yeah, that's my, that's my new thing I guess now Geraldine, You've heard it here.

Geri: 00:33:27 So you've said a few things that indicate that you really are prepared to go in and fight for things that you believe in and your daughter, your oldest daughter is clearly picked up on that with her going and making her poster and I, I see that you got a special mentor award as well last year or this year? This year or last year?

Katie: 00:33:47 Oh my God. It in the spring. So this particularly this year, but yeah. So. So yeah, I'm, I was supported for our women in computing group here in campus. It's more broadly interpreted. It's supposed to be for all women in technology. So not just computer science, even if you use technology, you're even excel or R or you're interested in computational thinking or design, they're all included. So I was um, received that award for my mentoring of students. I'm really passionate about undergrad research, really passionate about helping first generation college students like my, like myself, navigate through Undergrad, um, hopefully things considered graduate school or research careers. So yeah, I'm, I'm really, I invest a lot of time in those endeavors.

Geri: 00:34:42 Yeah. So that's a choice because it is time that's in addition to all of your day work, if you like your teaching and research.

Katie: 00:34:51 Yes, it's, it's definitely, yes, it's definitely, um, I'll definitely adding more time. Um, I spend a lot more time on it now in the summertime, so I have a 10 week eh research experience for undergraduate site. I teach in the summer. Um, I don't have to, but it's a really intensive six week course. I teach to first generation college students to get them interested in computing, interested in design. And I sprinkle in, you know, here's what we mean when we say this so far in college. This is what office hours are for. Um, and then with diversity work I kind of do it all the time. Um, and I find, you know, I mentioned like my husband and I have these shifted hours, so we're working eight hour days, but then after we put the kids to sleep, you know, we're working two or three or four more hours. So typically I'll do two or three hours after the kids go to bed and I'll add on one more half hour, one more hour for the diversity work I'm doing.

Geri: 00:35:53 So it's obviously important to you enough that you will do that.

Katie: 00:35:57 It is, it's incredibly important to me. My, um, yeah, I, it helps me breathe. So when I walk around in computing, uh, I did when I
was younger, I just assumed this is part of it and the only woman in my class and that's it. I'm the only, you know, even my mentor at the time said to me, said to me, Oh, you know, I am so glad you want to be a computer scientist. We haven't had one in five years. Um, and that was, and I went to Grad school at Notre Dame and I was one of the only thing I was the only single American, a graduate student at the time, um, and it's really lonely and the design, the ideas that come from it are not as applicable to everybody. And so I think computing, I think we need to do it.

Katie: **00:36:54** We need to do for Democracy, We need to do for our country and the world is so diverse. I get everybody's views in there. That's what I'm doing for it.

Geri: **00:37:02** So this is your passion work.

Katie: **00:37:04** This is my, this is the outside of my research where I get to do my passion work in health. Yeah. This is, this is my additional passion. We're pretty lucky. I get to do everything is a passion. Sometimes I talk to people and like, Oh, I love my research like me too I want to... We're going to all the time and help them yesterday. And they're like, oh, I didn't mean like that. I meant like I get cool results and get to tinker. And I'm like, oh right. So yes,

Geri: **00:37:34** Given all of your commitments and family and everything and adding all this extra work, how do you do that in a way that's efficient and effective in the limited time? What have you, what have you learned over the years from doing that?

Katie: **00:37:49** Em, learning over the years. So I think one of the things is collaboration. So collaboration is always important and finding those really good collaborators. Sometimes you have to give people a chance and then you have to have a plan to recover in case some people don't quite meet your quality markers. And my quality markers are are, are hot, people say too high, but I say high, I'm so you have to be planning the time. So part of it is starting to think about what you want to be part of. Right? So I'm really kind of narrowed down your focus. You can't do everything, you can't go speak at every diversity in computing and event. I tried to do that. It's exhausting. Like pick a couple of, of diversity in computing events, a couple um, service commitments. So now we're down, find collaborators, identify who's really fun to work with. And then, um, and then go from, go from there. I know some people say prioritizing. I have a hard time prioritizing everything is number one. Yes.
Geri: 00:38:56 It sounds like you are doing something though when you say that you can't do everything and you have to choose. Sounds like that there would be some strategic choice in deciding which events you do go to speak at, which is a form of prioritizing. Would you say?

Katie: 00:39:10 That is true? That is true. So part of my prioritizing, um, I, I read the research pretty much like, especially with diversity in computing, like who do I need to speak to and you know, research is showing speaking to students and young, young people is, is good and it's valuable but also getting to their parents and their counselors and their teachers because those are the people they're going to come home and say, I heard about computing and their parents are going to be like, this is my opinion on it's getting there. Um, and then for service, for the CHI community part of it, when you, I'm part of it for the CHI community is again, who can I work with, who can see what I can do, who can I, who can, who can I give a voice to that maybe doesn't have a voice in this. So that's what I'm looking for. And then the other part is instead of saying no, I'm always saying, oh, these people would be good for that. And then depending on, I know, contact those people to see if they really are interested in that and try to help them figure out where they can go and helping other people out too.

Geri: 00:40:22 So you advocate a lot in the, in those sorts of ways for both marginalized groups as well as for other people and being, bringing other people in and bringing them along.

Katie: 00:40:33 Yeah, yeah, I like to do that. Yeah.

Geri: 00:40:38 You also talked about lobbying upwards. So some of this you've talked about is more supporting students, bringing people in, but you also talked about lobbying for policy change and things and that that requires a different set of skills and strategies,

Katie: 00:40:57 Yeah, and I'm learning those. I'm not great at those yet. I'm, I'm a work in progress in those. Uh, I think part of it is just, um, there's a, I'm a big fan of David Sedaris and he has this book called Me Talk Pretty One Day. So the name of the book again, Me Talk Pretty One Day and sometimes when I'm speaking I feel like I'm not saying this beautifully, I'm not saying this like an academic, I'm just seeing this as here's the problem, here's the solution or here are possible solutions. Um, so I've been getting involved. I, I tried to talk to, we had a change in leadership. I didn't know how important a Dean was until we got new Dean. Uh, so, um, so what I found out is fortunately there are conferences I've attended such as Grace Hopper, where they
have these workshops to talk about how to make change in your university through policies.

Katie: 00:41:57 So I was trying to talk to administration in my own school and I didn't think I was getting anywhere. So then I went to this workshop and they gave me these actionable things, you know, like, oh, it was more service that was like, get involved with your faculty council, see if you can create policy at the university level that your, that your institution that your school has to abide by. So that's my, that's my current plan and it's going better than the other, but I'm still working on speaking diplomatically. I'm not the most diplomatic person. Uh, so I'm, I'm working on that. Like most recently a high administrator in our university. I was like, you are so passionate. And I was like, oh, thank you very much. And she said he can't have a way of saying concepts so efficiently. That was like a thank you to think about how to say it efficiently without offending a quarter of the group and say, okay, thank you very much for that feedback. So that's my goal. See things more efficiently without offending people.

Geri: 00:43:12 Do you have any strategies for how you're going to learn that?

Katie: 00:43:18 Yes. So, um, again, having my partner is, has been great. Um, my partner and has been, has helped me, um, we, we, I'll tell him what's really upsetting me and he'll say, well you can't go in and say that, and so now I'll try it another way and you keep the debate and everything, so I kind of bounce ideas off of him and he's like, this is, I wouldn't recommend saying that way. And then my colleague, she was my phd advisor, now she's my colleague Kate Connelly, uh, she, I, someone called her, my interpreter. She was like, well Katie was meaning this and I'll take notes. I take notes on how my husband or how Kay is saying things. Also like in meetings, I'll take notes on how people are saying and it's almost like breaking it down, like abstracting from it, you know, romantic level like Alan, but more like, like, okay, something you like and ask a question that just an issue instead of just going, this is broken.

Geri: 00:44:24 Yeah, so there are a whole lot of different techniques aren't there and some people are really good at doing it off the bat. And for you, it sounds like, you know, you're passionate about these issues and you want the outcome and just learning how to get there, get to actually achieve what you wanted, the difference you want to make.

Katie: 00:44:45 So I'm working, I'm, I'm working on it, I'm modeling, I'm looking at other people and taking notes on how they do it. So,
Geri: 00:44:54 And all additional work as well.

Katie: 00:44:58 Yes. And the, I think the nice thing though is once I learned something like this, I'll bring it up in a class or I'll show it to my grad students like that. It kinda does that reaffirming. So my first generation, the first generation college students I worked with, um, they were like, wow, yeah, just say that that is kept up or I would say that, you know, they got to change, this is how we have to do it.

Geri: 00:45:21 Sort of like how do you play the game,

Katie: 00:45:23 How do you play the game, yeah, how do you play the game

Geri: 00:45:28 And how do you work with people in ways. How do you work with what we know about how to influence people, sell ideas and get people to buy in because that's what you're needing, isn't it? Because if you said that it was about alienating a quarter of the people in the room, you know, you, how do you buy them into being as excited about your issues as you are or believing in the problems, importance of the problem?

Katie: 00:45:52 Yeah. I mostly turn to data, but sometimes I'll go and bring in that case study too, qualitative data touches the people more sometimes than quantitative data.

Geri: 00:46:02 Yes. Yeah. People, people connect with a story. Yeah.

Katie: 00:46:08 If I'm really at a loss, I'll, I'll message Judy Olson who will say oh Katie, that's not going to get you anywhere.

Geri: 00:46:17 So is Judy, a mentor then for you.

Katie: 00:46:24 Um, she not like a formal mentor, but I do sometimes I'll sometimes ping her and ask her for assistance or, not assistance, but ask her for her insights. So someone who, who's who, who's opinion I, I, um, I really appreciate. And she gives great feedback.

Geri: 00:46:41 Yeah. So I'll put a link to judy because she, one of the early podcasts was with her and she's just wonderful and it's just so that's just interesting sort of identifying people who you do respect, who you do feel comfortable with going and being real with and just saying, you know, tell me, giving me feedback.

Katie: 00:47:01 Yeah, there are quite a few women. So Jude, in terms of like a career, I'm like, she's going to say a career mentor, but she's
more like someone I can go to and she does respond. So I really appreciate that. I have a lot of um, career mentors who I also occasionally bounce these ideas or questions off of that mostly kind of career trajectory. And that kind of thing

Geri: 00:47:28 So you have a group that you've set up there, you know, you said you have a big Health Informatics group. Tell us about the wall sits.

Katie: 00:47:43 So, it came from, when I was an intern, I was an intern at Sandia National Lab in Livermore, California. And we were, we were creating, excuse me, we're creating a system to help to help soldiers, to help them understand the health of soldiers. And through that we were kind of like a 3:00. We usually want it to get something sugary and we won and we were just done with the day. And then we decided let's do wall sits. And we just started doing wall sits to kind of say if you think that coding bug is harder, if you think this is frustrating, we'll try to do wall sits and then your life perspective changes. Nothing like a little physical discomfort to renovate that.

Katie: 00:48:27 So then then we didn't do wall sits, we didn't do wall sits for a while. And then I came to Indiana and we're talking about exercise. I had a student who was really into exercise. We should do wall sits we used to do, what we use. It's called three at three. You do three minutes of wall sits at three PM.

Geri: 00:48:45 Three minutes wall sits.

Katie: 00:48:47 But you can, you can, you can ease in, you can, do, you know, you can do as much as you're, as you're willing to do. So yeah, at 3:00 we, we come outside of our office and we do wall sits.

Geri: 00:49:00 So communal wall sits

Katie: 00:49:03 Communal wall sits. People join us outside of our group. Our graduate students actually come from prepared. They'll come with like a clipboard with like a paper or a study and they know they have about a minute and a half to pitch it to me because after two minutes you really think very straight. But in that minute and a half and they'll see all the faculty are against the wall.

Katie: 00:49:23 So you get all of the faculty there for this three minutes. And if anything it's just this group big. My student, erm Ben Jelen. He took it a step further. He has been recording how long everybody does wall sits. So we have a google doc showing how
many minutes we've wall sat. And then now the broader community knows about this because we started to kind of sponsor. I'm not really sponsored. We have an award we bring. Um, so at CHI we've done it during, usually during workshops or um, a pervasive health we've done wall sitting contests and it was amazing how many people will join you for wall sits.

Geri: 00:50:05 So I remember joining in a wall sit there. Yes, it was tough.

Katie: 00:50:09 It's tough. you get to talk to people. You're just, you're just like, just talk to me. It's a good networking tool. Talking about anything, I need to get distracted.

Geri: 00:50:19 So three at three.

Katie: 00:50:22 Three at three.

Geri: 00:50:23 Throw out the challenge.

Katie: 00:50:23 That's right.

Geri: 00:50:25 So any, any, again, any sort of reflections, thinking about coming, coming to Indiana and starting again to set up a research group. What worked well, what would you do differently apart from wall sits?

Katie: 00:50:41 Apart from wall sits. I think what worked well was, was already having some collaborations with so with the people here, so I already was collaborating with them on grants and such, so and I or, or had written papers with them or I'd met with them enough at conferences that when I sat down with them it wasn't like, oh, let's get to know each other. Was like, let's hit the ground running and not everybody can do that, but I think it shows how important it is during the job search process to see if you can sit down and talk research comfortably with someone and think of just organically think of ways to collaborate that isn't going to require you to wiggle in and be like, oh, I can sort of do that. Sometimes we don't have had that luxury in [?] should do that, but I think that's the ideal.

Katie: 00:51:33 So I think hitting the ground running with ideas, with collaborations, with people excited was, um, was pretty helpful. Um, the, the other thing that I thought was helpful too was, was having collaborators here that we're willing to provide resources to use. So in HCI, especially in health, a huge setup is who are my clinical collaborators, what communities can I get involved with? And just having, having colleagues who are like,
oh, I know older adults, you know, here's who I connect with. Just having the ability to come in and not have to go door knocking again, like at Colorado, I went door and literally knock on door to door at the University of Colorado in Denver, um, and their medical center, finding collaborators, so just not having the door knock. So, so from showing faculty that you're recruiting that you have the resources to help them get those collaborations.

Katie: 00:52:33 Things um, and then the other thing I appreciated too, was that when we, when we came our program, our graduate program is fairly flexible, so we got to find our course program. Um, so what skills do our students need to be successful in research and afterwards. So we got to sit down and define that so then I can say, oh, it's not like you're going to take this course because you have to take this course because it's a requirement. It's like you're taking these courses and here's how you're going to get publications along the way. So that was great. Um, in terms of things I would change in the transition. Research, why is there, I'm not sure there's much I would change research-wise. I think everything that I would change is more kind of life instructional, you know, um, and community. And like, I think, I think the hardest part in the change was I knew my research community, I'm like, recreating, for instance, we don't have family here recreating that whole support structure for ourselves and our family.

Katie: 00:53:40 That was, that was harder than we thought and it still remains to be a struggle, a struggle here. So that part is, is difficult. Like I learned a whole lot about healthcare and equality and healthcare access. We don't have it here. Uh, so. So I learned a whole lot about. I just assumed it was everywhere. Like as a grad student you're pretty healthy. It's just you, you don't really visit the doctor. And then I went to Colorado in Boulder, which was a really well off area, not just academia but industry too, lots of health care options. And then came back to Indiana and I know, I was like, wait, wait, wait. There's only one dermatologist and she has a year long wait. So. So, um, everything mostly that would change has been structural. And it's kind of difficult to figure out how to fix that part.

Geri: 00:54:39 But it is part of that thing of when you are..., many academics move from city to city. And it is that reestablishing yourself socially and just practically in the community.

Katie: 00:54:52 Yeah. I think that's the hard part. And I often talked to my new colleagues. I think I've been pretty..., It's kind of hard when you're recruiting someone in. Great. I'm putting it out here now.
But yeah, when you're recruiting someone it's like, okay, when you come, you get to work with us. But the bad part is um, our healthcare is not very good. You probably have to go to Indy or they'll ask you to go on a waitlist list in Chicago, which is four hours away. Like, um. So yeah, it's, it's hard for recruitment and a lot of times people don't think it's that bad until they get here and they're like, wait.

Geri: 00:55:29 Yeah. But also, as you said, when you're healthy as well, you sort of go, oh yeah, that's okay. And suddenly when you need the access to those services that you realize and can appreciate it.

Katie: 00:55:40 Right? Yeah.

Geri: 00:55:41 So just talking about health and wellbeing, in the fact that you do research in healthcare, how do you look after your own health and wellbeing?

Katie: 00:55:50 Yeah, so I'm basically, um, I, I know myself pretty well now. I am a goal person and I have to have a certain amount of investment in it. So to keep my own self healthy. Um, what I started doing was running, um, so, and I don't run unless I've invested so I have to sign up with enough money for an event and then I'll be like, oh, I have to go running today because if I don't, I'm wasting that money. Um, so I just keep signing up for races and then through my exercise, fortunately I have as hard as healthcare is here, I have an excellent doctor. He doesn't take insurance, but he's excellent. He'll see me whenever I need it. And so he through this. I've been getting healthier because I'll talk to my doctor and I'll say this hurts. He's like, great, you have to go see this person and if I don't go see this person, I know it will hurt more and I will be able to run and then I'll lose that money.

Katie: 00:56:52 Everything is based off of this goal setting. Um, and then he was like, you know, if you want to run faster, which I do because, because my husband's like, wait, how long have you gonna run? Like, are you going to help with the kids this weekend? You also say that paper's due, right, like how are we going to balance this? So I want to run faster. So my doctor's like, if you want to run faster, you should go see the nutritionist and she'll help you with your diet. And I'm like, great, run faster nutritionist help. So that's how I keep myself healthy and it's through these goals and a goal that's hard enough that it requires me to reach out to the broader healthcare community.
Geri: 00:57:32 Yeah. And the cost of not doing it motivates you or not given that you've already sunk investment into it.

Katie: 00:57:38 That's right. Yeah.

Geri: 00:57:39 Which is interesting about knowing yourself to know that that's what you need,

Katie: 00:57:44 Right Yeah. I noticed when I first thought, oh well, you know, I don't need another race because I did that race and I did fine. So I'll just keep running. And next thing I knew, I was like, oh, I got a paper jam, can't run. Oh, got a grant. Oh, got this student, this event. And I was like, oh no, I gotta sign up for another race.

Geri: 00:58:03 But again, that's great just to know yourself and know that you need to put that in place.

Katie: 00:58:07 Yeah. Yeah. And I think the other nicer thing too that would be an interesting study of the students. My Phd Students I had mentored, um, before I had tenure, like before I had tenure I was like kids and I barely ran and I was just like kids and work and that it wasn't very balanced and if I can go back and I'd sign myself up for a few more races, um, but beforehand my students would say to me, I don't wanna go into academia. I see you. I don't want to do that. And now my students like, Oh yeah, I think I would consider academia. So like, oh, I think this is a good change. Like I'm, yeah, I'm being a better model here.

Geri: 00:58:53 Which is important, isn't it?

Katie: 00:58:55 It is. Especially if you want diversity in computing.

Geri: 00:58:58 Yeah. Yeah, it's one thing having your groups with your first generation academics, but you know, at first generation students, but then if they're seeing you and going, ah, yeah, no way.

Katie: 00:59:09 Yeah. Yep. So, so I think, I think, yeah, finding your balances is pretty important.

Geri: 00:59:18 So just, just in wrapping up, are there any things that we haven't talked about that you would really like to just talk about or mention while we're here?

Katie: 00:59:33 Good question. I think um, something I'd like to talk about a little bit, um, is um, dealing with, uh, dealing with illness while you're, while you're an academic and I'm not sure how much of
this I want to keep, but um, I, but I think that would be worthwhile.

Geri: 00:59:58 Is that in terms of looking after yourself, when you, when you've, when you find out that you're sick and giving yourself a break or are they sort of some general principles that you'd throw out there?

Katie: 01:00:08 So I think I'm understanding who to disclose and to what. So, so for example, um, there are certain things like there's certain things that are absolutely present and everybody sees you do. So when you're pregnant, they know that you're going, that you're going to have a child and your life is going to change. Something that happened to me here, I had a grand mal seizure during a fire. During a fire drill. My colleagues had to pull me out into a room for safety because they weren't sure if it was a real fire drill. So lots of people heard. Pretty much everybody heard I had a grand mal seizure and then I had to deal with epilepsy and I couldn't drive for six months and, em, and just recovering from that. I couldn't think very clearly. So I did. I was already. I was already on the CHI PC that year and it was. We were in one of the remote ones and I talked to Judy about it because I, I had issues with. It was, it's such a simple thing, but when we're in computing it's hard. I the issue between switching between screens, just switching between screens, I forget what task I was on in the remote pc. Meaning, you know, you have your pcs screen and you had the Slack and you have all these different screens you have to keep track of and I would have to have a piece of paper and I'd write it down, what screen am I on and what my task is and, and I'm trying to kind of like having a baby as the idea of or, or a loved one is sick, is having enough presence. So people like, Oh yeah, Katie is present and also reliable and gets things done and yet recovering and giving yourself that recovery time.

Katie: 01:01:50 It's difficult to balance and then fight. And then the other thing that included, I didn't realize it is the fight for, for my rights to say these are the things I need and to get all those roadblocks and then all the time. Um, so when I see a colleague like who's dealing with something, I'll reach out to them and usually they won't take it. I think it's because of the stigma, but it's the idea, like, what, what can I help you with? What can I advocate for? So for me, my husband helped me. He was like, Hey, I want all the buildings checked for strobe lights that aren't synced because that's what triggered my thing. And he took that part over for me, but they are when you see a colleague who, who has something and it's not, and it's that, you know, I have a paper, um, call me if you need anything or something.
Katie: 01:02:43 It's not that. It's like, what can I help you with? And I really am willing to help. Yeah. Yeah. With that and advocate for you. Oh. And then there's the invisible. So we don't really know. We're struggling with it. So you, Geraldine, were incredibly brave when you talked about it and your story. I'm so, my children are five years apart, not by choice. Right. And I have a health condition where not only do I miscarry but my body blood clot, like my body tries to kill myself. And at the same time, you, um, so there are times here where I was working on a grant and then I have to go run to the emergency room because I was still having..., I knew I was pregnant, I had started having pains and I knew, knew what was happening and I'd have to go and get, um, I would have to go in and get a blood thinner and deal with that.

Katie: 01:03:37 Um, so, and it's one of those things where I didn't tell anybody, like there were times where I was stuck to give a presentation. I'm giving a presentation in Wisconsin while I was miscarrying. I've given a presentation, um, to junior faculty about work life balance while I was miscarrying. I think that's the ultimate.

Geri: 01:04:01 That's the ultimate, what would you say? Irony, no,

Katie: 01:04:05 No. Yeah, I think it's ironic, right? Um, but those, those physical things, and I'm not even sure where to begin talking to. I'm like, I wish there was somebody like, like a Judy or like you or, or, um, maybe like me. Maybe someone something to aspire to as a colleague who can. It's an emotional toll, but can hear your, your, um, your invisible issues that you're dealing with and advocate for that help to like, oh Katie, maybe shouldn't have made, you know, when Katie calls in for that work life balance panel saying she can't do it, maybe that's okay because I called in and I was like, I don't know if I can do it today. And they're like, you promised. And I was like, great, I will be there.

Geri: 01:04:52 But you didn't feel. You didn't feel safe enough in that context to say, you know, I really can't be there for a good reason.

Katie: 01:05:01 Yeah. So I just wore my black pants and prayed I wasn't making a mess.

Geri: 01:05:09 Wow. Goodness me

Katie: 01:05:12 I think there's a balance, like how do you show you're a good colleague and you're there and then you have that time to recover.
Geri: Yeah. Yeah. It's balancing all of these identities and the identity management and what you need to be seen to be doing what you think you need to be seen to be doing. Or how you need to be in order to be respected and advance at work. But also just being, respecting yourself as well and what you need, as you said, and how we and how, how we could be supporting each other in different ways if we knew what people were going through and how do we create a psychologically safe environment that it's okay for people to say, this is what I'm dealing with at the moment in my personal life. And in my body that is necessarily impacting my ability to work.

Katie: And I think that's a balance, right? I think especially, you know, my colleagues who have mental health concerns that they have that balance of how do I, how am I supportive? I would love ideas on how we can be both people on both sides.

Geri: Yeah. And maybe it's not putting it in the departmental faculty newsletter type of disclosure, but how do we, maybe it's setting up maybe it's setting up trusted networks within our institutions or across institutions of small groups of people where people can just have a safe space to be real and authentic and to have people to bounce off ideas about how to navigate and negotiate these issues. Because I guess it's different as well. You know, you talked about the extra tensions that go through the tenure process put on you, where it, you made different decisions and what you've made post tenure about the same issues when that pressure is gone and so it's navigating all of those different trade offs.

Katie: Yeah. And also having people who support and who are willing to go out there and be like, okay, I'm going to do it this way, and to change..., changing the culture,

Geri: Changing the culture and making it okay that it's not a sign of weakness. It's just, it's being human that we all are

Katie: And advocating to administrators that if you allow someone to recover now they're going to be a stronger colleague, faculty member, contributor next year in two years or whatever they need

Geri: And I love that thing about, yeah, what can I do to help you and support you right now? And that's sort of the definition of compassion, which isn't just empathy, but it's empathy plus action, you know, it's seeing and noticing that people are going through stuff and then being prepared to support them and knowing that that will come around again if we have that sort
of, we can create that sort of culture where we create that sort of reciprocity and, and care.

Katie: 01:08:20 I love that. How can we do, how can we do that?

Geri: 01:08:24 Yeah, we can do it one to one on one. Each of us can make a decision to do something and it's also as you said, how do we change the culture, you know, we can do it bottom up, but can we, what can we do to instill that sort of culture of care more generally institutionally recognized and accepted

Katie: 01:08:45 And the community and research community wise, I think we're doing where we're progressing, especially in CHI compared to other colleagues and stuff, but. Right. Institutional and community oriented and share, sharing resources on how to go about this. We can share with others.

Geri: 01:09:06 Yeah. Yep. Well hopefully that's a good note to end on that might inspire people. Just to think about what we can all do to help make that happen, so thank you for your openness and honesty and just sharing your experiences. It's been great, Katie.

Katie: 01:09:26 Thank you, Geraldine, I appreciate it

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