

Interview with Amanda Caron

Marquette, MI

Sep. 21st 2018

Peter Anderson: It is September 21st 2018, student and oral historian Peter Anderson here with Vice President of the Marquette Aquamen Underwater Hockey and Rugby Club, Amanda Caron, with an interview for History 345 at Northern Michigan University and to start, Amanda will you state your name, spell it, and birthday please.

Amanda Caron: Amanda Caron, A-M-A-N-D-A, C-A-R-O-N. My birthday is 8/27/97.

PA: Okay, thank you. So, where are you from?

AC: I'm from Watersmeet, Michigan. It is about 2 hours southwest of here.

PA: How did your family end up in Watersmeet?

AC: My dad lived there and his parents and so my great-grandparents were the first ones there so, just a long history (LAUGHS).

PA: What brought you to Northern, here?

AC: Um, so, after graduating high school from Watersmeet I first went to Gogebic Community College, like an hour away from house and then I received a full ride scholarship to come here to Northern so as a sophomore I came to Northern.

PA: Okay, did you have any expectations before you came here?

AC: Um, I really wanted to get more involved to join some student organizations and to make friends. So I was like kind of nervous that Northern was going to be more difficult than the community college that I was used to I heard a lot of rumors that Northern was going to be more difficult but it turned out okay.

PA: I went to Gogebic too, went to the Houghton branch.

AC: No way!

PA: Yeah the Houghton branch up in the Keweenaw.

AC: Oh okay.

PA: So, um, how were the expectations once you got here? Were they met? Were the good expectations met? Were the bad expectations ones not met?

AC: Yeah, um, the classes they weren't too difficult. I mean they were like a slight step up but I was, you know, also progressing in my education so that's to be expected too. I did make friends, I'm not super great at making friends but I did make a little bit of friends and sometimes I wish I made more. Especially the first year coming in cause I felt really lonely as a sophomore transfer student. And of course I joined the underwater hockey rugby club.

PA: So, like you said, you joined the Marquette Aquamen Underwater Hockey Rugby Club, just give me an idea what you guys do.

AC: What do we do, so um, we meet every Tuesday for practice. We play underwater hockey first. Underwater hockey is a non-contact sport. We have a lot of safety equipment. We wear a snorkel, a mouthpiece, we have ear protection like a little hood. We wear flippers and for hockey we wear a glove to protect our hands and a hockey stick. The glove is to protect against the floor cause were driving the hockey puck on the bottom of the pool floor so that's why wear the glove. So, yeah um, underwater hockey, ideally its six people on each team, goals at each end of the pool and both of teams are snorkeling. Surfacing, diving, surfacing, diving, going after the puck, trying to push it at the goal.

PA: Um, rugby, how does that play out?

AC: Rugby, similar but different. Similar that we still wear fins and snorkels and the mask of course. Um, but we don't wear a glove and we don't have the hockey stick or anything like that. We have a rugby ball, it's essentially like a hockey, no a soccer ball is what it looks like. It's filled with salt water so it sinks in a chlorine pool. Um and so its, we basically have a basketball hoop on the bottom of the pool floor at each end. And then the same idea going back and forth, throwing the ball back and forth, throwing the ball to other players under the water. Again, surfacing, diving, surfacing, diving. Um, but rugby is really cool because it's the only 360 degree sport because you can pass it anywhere. It's like to players up above, side to side. Anywhere.

PA: So it is underwater of course, how deep is the pool?

AC: So um, the rugby we play on the deep side. We play at the high school pool, um their deep end is 12 feet deep. That's where the nets are is twelve feet. And for hockey we play lengthwise on the pool. There's a shallow end and the deep end. Deep end being 12 feet and the shallow end being like 4 ½ feet.

PA: Okay, um, just a quick background, when did it start?

AC: Um, I think the club started about ten years ago, I don't know the exact number. It's not a new club though.

PA: Currently, what are the goals of this organization?

AC: Um, the goals, we want to provide students with this like cool opportunity to play a sport that, you know, nobody has ever heard of underwater hockey rugby before. That's the notion I get from a lot of students here. So um, provide an opportunity, it gives a lot of people like confidence underwater, you know, like people are afraid of the water and we can kind of help them get over those insecurities. Um and ultimately learning a new skill, just this awesome, this, um, how do I want to say this? There's just this cool experiences, like it's just wild, you tell your family back home and they're just like "what?", they're just in awe.

PA: Okay so, do you, did you, do you um, do you have any current goals? Do you personally have any current goals with this organization? Or did you have any when you started?

AC: Um, I really wanted to make friends and I was definitely able to do that with this club. The people that I met in this club are my best friends here at Northern. Which I think is really cool. And, goals,

another goal of mine is to like progress my skills in this sport and make it to more tournaments that are hosted around the country.

PA: Okay um, talking about just like, you said competing around the country, um so that means winner/loser, what is the some of the, have you had any successes so far? Any big successes with the hs this organization or club itself had any?

AC: Um, so we always try to make it to a few tournaments um, there's tournaments downstate and in Canada. Um, last year I went to a rugby tournament in Canada. That was like super cool experience, my first time ever going to Canada. Um and they have a 15 foot deep pool so it was very challenging for us. Um, we were put on a potluck team, basically like orphans, we were with people we didn't know. Um, playing against teams that they all knew each other they all knew each other's strengths and weaknesses. So we were at a disadvantage and we didn't, we didn't win per say but like we still had a good time and we were still building skills and it's just a really great time.

PA: Um, so you say that you were on like a potluck team, do you guys look at that as something like a setback that you want to compete with your team or is have you ever, have you ever had a setback.

AC: Um, potluck tournaments aren't always a setback, um, like the, so every year, we host in Marquette at least one hockey tournament and we call it a potluck tournament. We get people from all over the place and we split them up into groups. Based on their, like are they a beginner intermediate advanced um and we will mix them all up. That way everybody's kind of at that disadvantage of a potluck, um, but they're all learning new skills from everybody. Um, other setbacks we have had, we usually try to do two tournaments every year. One in the fall semester and one in the spring semester. Last year we were unable to um host a spring semester one because our main coach he moved away to Florida so we weren't able to organize it so that was really unfortunate. Be we have hopes of continuing, we have one scheduled of this fall and then hopefully we'll do another one this spring.

PA: Okay um, you already talked about why you became involved in this organization but, why this one over other ones?

AC: Well another reason why I had first joined, um was, my boyfriend's cousin, also from Watersmeet, goes here at Northern and she was like one of my only friends that I knew from back home that was going here. And she was on this club and she really liked it and she convinced me to do it so that was how I first started doing it, otherwise I would never have, like what the hell is underwater hockey? I'm not gonna, you know, that just sounds too weird. But she was super into so she got me super into it. Um, what was, what are we, what are we talking about again?

PA: Why you got into this club over other clubs?

AC: Um, I tried a couple other clubs like fisheries and wildlife like that was interesting but I felt like, yeah I didn't like that one as much. And I'm a nursing student so I was in the pre-nursing club and I participate in it from time to time but this one is just like where the passion goes to like I feel like I'm.. I'm making a difference for myself maybe and I'm having a lot of fun with these people.

PA: Do you have any other, ah, connections to back home and this club or was that one the only one your boyfriends cousin?

AC: Yup she was, she was my main connection.

PA: Okay

AC: Um, I, back home I did do like a lot of snorkeling so it was like you snorkel in the pool but then you're like going after a goal so I thought that was pretty cool so like I had somewhat of an advantage to other like new players because a lot of people don't know how to snorkel even. So that's another thing that drew me to them.

PA: Okay um, why do you see this um organization being important, like we talked about why is it important to you, you know with like finding friends and coming to a new place, why is this organization important to others and you know like, as future goes on, where do you think this will be important?

AC: It is a passionate hobby of mine, I mean is one of the biggest reasons, the friendships there. Um it's an easy way for me to get exercise cause it's a sport and were going hard at it. Um, yeah, for me, it's for the friendship for the sense of belonging, of community and it's just really fun. Go ahead.

PA: So, you talked about, ah, competitions here and in Canada, how many events do you guys take part in every year?

AC: Um, for everybody it's different, you know, schedule wise can, there are a lot of tournaments. Like, there's at least a tournament going on that were invited to, once a month, um, just depending on people's schedules can they go. Um, I only went to the rugby tournament in the spring and hosted the fall hockey tournament in the fall. Um, but there other team members they, I know they went to (trying to say MSU) MSU, that's what it's called. They did a hockey tournament down there. And there's, there's always stuff going on. You know, maybe only one or two people from our team go or maybe ten of us go you know it just depends on where it's at, travel costs and stuff like that.

PA: Um how big is the underwater hockey and rugby community throughout like the nation or internationally how big is it that you know of?

AC: It's pretty big, um, you know, there are a lot of the beginner and intermediate levels but there's also advanced and national levels. Our previous coach that had moved to Florida, um, he was able to referee several of the national hockey tournaments. And he, I know he's traveled to Australia, he's traveled like all over, all over.

PA: Just for

AC: Just to referee, yeah, just to be the referee, he wasn't even playing. Which I think is really cool, he was invited to be the ref.

PA: So, you guys, you talked about the different levels, what level are you guys considered to be on?

AC: Were at the beginner, some of the players would be more intermediate. It's just where our skillset is just, we can only go so far, you know, were always getting new players. Um and, as we go visit more people and more tournaments we get experience, we build off of them really. We um, we build off of them.

PA: How often would you say you get new people per week?

AC: Um, it really varies. Usually the first couple weeks well get a half a dozen to a dozen people but a lot of people don't stick. It, it has its draw backs. I know people do kind of get bruised and bumped up. IT is

kind of scary sometimes you know going under water and coming back up and going underwater and you're kind of fighting for the puck or the rugby ball or whatever so people do get fearful in a way of that stuff. But if you keep coming back and you advance your skills. Like a lot of people have trouble with the snorkel, so they're constantly eating water. Nobody wants to do that. Um, so if you can keep coming, is the best thing. That's what keeps people around, to keep coming and building on those skills. Well get people all throughout the semester like, maybe one or two a month. Our best way of gaining players is like talking to friends like "hey you really need to go and try this sport". Um, yeah and we try to hang up posters. And so we get a couple, were not a big club. Our average practice is about twelve people. Which is a good number cause then we have the perfect six on six team, but we always want to see more people. 16 Min 12 Sec

PA: You had said that you did plenty of snorkeling back home in Watersmeet, was the adjustment period from lake(I assume) to pool, then to competing in the pool, adrenaline and what not, was that a tough adjustment or did that help immensely just cause you had that muscle memory essentially?

AC: Definitely lake snorkeling had helped me. I even had some fearful stuff, if I got to deep then im running out of air or I'm or if there's a log or something I want to go under it. Usually I would just go around it but now I know I can go under it. So that really helped me, underwater hockey kind of helped my lake snorkeling in a way too, making me feel more comfortable in any setting. I was definitely intimidate by this sport when I first started. Like I said you get a little beat up, not too bad, not at all bad, nobody ever gets hurt-hurt. But it's definitely intimidating but after you get the confidence your competitiveness comes out and then you're just like "okay this is what I need to do". If I get hit in the face and my mask comes off then no big deal, I will resurface and put it back on.

PA: We had talked about the differences between hockey and rugby, they're connected just by the players but are they connected any way else? Or do you cover both in the practices?

AC: Yeah so most of the time what we will do is, at the high school pool we will rent out the pool for two hours. We will spend the first hour playing hockey the second hour playing rugby. I really like it that way because some sports you get bored almost in a way. You're just going, going, going, so when we switch its like yes, rugby time, like a whole new sport and dynamic. In football there's the quarterback and all these different positions. We have that too, so we will rotate positions and the positions are different for hockey and rugby. Any other questions defining the two of them?

PA: No I was just wondering because I had assumed it was a smaller group you guys had going on. So I just wanted to know the connections between the two and of course you answered that with the positions and what not. Run me through like a, I know how practice is split up, but do you do drills, or do you play strategize? How does that work out?

AC: Oh, we definitely strategize, like we break up the teams, each time you're playing with different people. And we're kind of funny in a way because we know the strengths and weaknesses of everybody that's playing, we know people on the other team. Like "we need to do this to avoid that player because he's really good". Or stuff like that, for new players we definitely try to go easier on them just to help them gain confidence and gain their skill that we want them to keep coming back. To keep their confidence level high is very important.

PA: You seem to be very weathered with it, so to speak, like you seem to have it down fairly well, you are vice president, is there like captain? Assistant captain?

AC: In a way, so we have coach and co-coach, and then two co-captains and then president and vice president. As vice president I do more like "school stuff", like gathering emails and sending out emails. But the coaches we have they're both community members, and that's another cool thing about our club. We accept community members, we encourage like anybody off of the street can come and play our sport. I think that's really cool. The coach we have now, he's been playing now for about twelve years. He likes hockey but he really likes rugby more I think. And our old coach really didn't like rugby and liked hockey more. So it's kind of funny because they both had their strengths and weaknesses. The old coach though he still comes and visits once in a while so that's nice, he always has advice for us.

PA: Alright, we'll finish up here, what should we expect to see in the coming future? Do you guys have any big plans right now? Any things that have set you back right now? What's the current status of the Marquette Aquamen Hockey and Rugby Club?

AC: We did have a little bit of a setback recently, the high school pool that's our normal practice pool, it was drained over the summer and cleaned. They had a heat exchanger that needed to replace. They had ordered it and it wasn't coming in, wasn't coming in. It's still not in and still not fixed so the pools gonna be cold, but um they're gonna refill it for now and hopefully replace that later. So hopefully that doesn't cause any problems for us. So the past three weeks we have been practicing at the PEIF pool, that's more expensive unfortunately and being a small club, we don't have a lot of funds. So we are definitely happy to be going back to the high school. We also talked to the YMCA this semester and we're trying to get them, our hope is that we can have community members from the YMCA come to our pool, we'll show them how the sport works, like teach them the skills and maybe play a little game with them. And hopefully we're going to get more community members from the YMCA to join our club. Something else we have talked about is to provide swim lessons, like free swim lessons to anybody. Hopefully we will be doing that sometime this year, that's just a bigger goal for us. And then the tournaments, we always plan on doing those.

PA: Alright, anything else you'd like to add?

AC: One thing I did miss, that is something that's important to other people on our club. One of the community members that we have, he's got PTSD. He doesn't work, he is a stay at home dad and he doesn't do well in social environments but I think that this is really a way that has helped him overcome some of his obstacles with PTSD just being a close knit group and meeting every week and having a little social experience, you know? So I think that's really helped him.

PA: Well that's great!