Will Dwyer:
I think they're one of the things that make living on land so pleasant. If you didn't have trees around you, it'd be a little bleak. There's really nothing like just sitting under the shade of a tree on a hot day. So that was kind of the superficial reason I was attracted to them because of the way they looked, and then I learned eventually that they have amazing chemistry. Because plants can't move, they can't run away from their problems, so they have to deal with them biochemically. Whereas animals invested in organs and mobility, plants invested in chemical diversity. So they can do things to this day that our organic chemists, our human organic chemists cannot even dream of doing. They make these incredible molecules using the sun as their energy source.
That also initially really drew me to them. I was really interested in chemistry. I felt like it offered this really neat way of thinking about the world and compartmentalizing things. Eventually I kind of moved towards biology because I think the problems in biology, I liked their complexity. I liked that they never have a straight answer. There's always an exception to everything.
I'm Will Dwyer. I'm a member of the 2023 cohort and a first year PhD student in the biology department. J'imagine un monde où les générations du future peuvent s'inspirer du monde naturel. I imagine a world where future generations can look towards the natural world for joy and inspiration.

Taylor Goss:
Welcome to the Imagine A World podcast from Knight-Hennessy Scholars. We are here to give you a glimpse into the Knight-Hennessy Scholar community of graduate students spanning all seven Stanford schools, including business, education, engineering, humanities, law, medicine, and sustainability. In each episode, we talk with scholars about the world they imagine and what they're doing to bring it to life.

Sydney Hunt:
Today you'll be hearing from Will Dwyer, a first year PhD student in biology at the Stanford School of Humanities and Sciences. During our conversation, you'll hear Will's experience immigrating to United States from France, his love for plants, playing in an ultimate Frisbee league, expressing himself through writing, and so much more.

Willie Thompson:
Hey, what's up y'all? Welcome to another episode of the Imagine A World podcast. I am your co-host, Willie Thompson at the Business School and at the Ed school. I am joined as always by my amazing co-host and friend, Taylor Goss.

Taylor Goss:
Hey, Willie.

Willie Thompson:
What's up, man?

Taylor Goss:
I'm coming from the music department. Music, science and technology master's degree and a master's of arts in public policy.

Willie Thompson:
And as we learned last time, you're not real student, so-
Taylor Goss:
I'm not a real student. Currently, I'm doing recording projects and finishing a final project, but in effect, I don't attend classes, so I'm merely a ghost on this campus.

Willie Thompson:
Must be nice.

Taylor Goss:
We have a special guest joining us today.

Willie Thompson:
We do, and it's not just Will.

Taylor Goss:
It's not just Will.

Willie Thompson:
It's someone who's been on the pod before.

Taylor Goss:
Although they're special.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, they are special. Been on the pod before.

Taylor Goss:
Yes.

Willie Thompson:
Very special to us, special to the pod, special to Will. The one and only.

Sydney Hunt:
Sydney.

Taylor Goss:
Sydney.

Sydney Hunt:
I didn't know if I should say my name. Hey, everyone.

Taylor Goss:
Tell us a little about yourself, Sydney. Remind the viewers.

Willie Thompson:
It's the listeners.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah, hey everyone.

Taylor Goss:
The listeners.

Sydney Hunt:
This is Sydney. I'm back for episode two. Really excited for today. I'm in 2023 cohort and a first-year PhD student in electrical engineering.

Willie Thompson:
Fantastic.

Taylor Goss:
Multi-talented, multi-faceted.

Willie Thompson:
I know. Multi-hyphenate.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
So, we heard the "Imagine A World" statement and there's a lot to uncover there a lot to unpack there. But before we get into the statement, let's get to some pleasantries. Will, how are you doing?

Will Dwyer:
Hey, I'm doing great. It's sunny. The flowers are out. Can't complain. How are you?

Willie Thompson:
We're good.

Taylor Goss:
So few people ask us that. Thank you so much for acknowledging us.

Will Dwyer:
You're very welcome.

Taylor Goss:
I'm doing great, especially glad to be here with you, Will. Spending some time, quality time. Because we've exchanged pleasantries around Denning House, but I don't think we've ever really hung out. So I'm excited about this.
Will Dwyer:
Yeah. No, same. Excited to get to know you. A little nervous, I will say, but you guys make a good vibe in this room.

Willie Thompson:
Appreciate it. We try to do what we can.

So what folks might not know is when we initially talked to Will about being on the pod, we were considering adding another member from the team on the episode. We said, "Why don't we have Sydney on the pod?", and then Will said, "Oh, she's like my best friend." I was like, "Wow, look at that." Didn't even know. We're just doing this stuff sort of subconsciously. So yeah, we're excited to have a conversation.

Taylor Goss:
We are good at this, aren't we?

Willie Thompson:
Amen.

Sydney Hunt:
You are. Excellent, excellent.

Willie Thompson:
Best in the game. Best in the game. Watch out, Joe Rogan.

Taylor Goss:
But yeah, we have a best buds episode today.

Will Dwyer:
I know. Exactly.

Willie Thompson:
All right. That's a good way to put it.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Well, you said the flowers are out and real quick, I want to get to this. You said the flowers are out on campus. We know about your PhD. Do you have a favorite flower?

Will Dwyer:
A favorite flower? I will say I'm in my California endemic phase right now, so the poppies are out, really like those. And then the purple and yellow lupines are also really cool. They're these kind of composite flowers. They have these tall structures. They're usually purple or yellow. The cool part about them is that
if you dig them out, they have nodules on their roots. Those nodules are the house for bacteria and those bacteria fix nitrogen into the soil. So they're really helpful plants.

Willie Thompson:
Where can I find these poppies and what was the other one? What was it called?

Will Dwyer:
Lupine?

Willie Thompson:
Lupines, yeah.

Will Dwyer:
They're everywhere along the road right now.

Sydney Hunt:
Are those the ones around the lake that we walked around yesterday?

Will Dwyer:
No, that was wild radish or something.

Sydney Hunt:
Oh, radish.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. We IDd that together.

Taylor Goss:
Nice.

Willie Thompson:
So is it was a radish.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.
Well, thank you so much for that flower fact.

Will Dwyer:
You're very welcome.

Taylor Goss:
We might have to do a couple more flower facts later in the episode.

Willie Thompson:
Agreed. We'll have to check that out.

Taylor Goss:
Okay. Okay.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. There's more where that came from.

Taylor Goss:
Okay.

Willie Thompson:
Oh wow. I can't wait to do this. Okay. Before we talk about the world you imagine, Will, which we'll get into that, let's talk about the world you were born into and the world that you've experienced thus far. So, where are you from and what was your journey here to Stanford and the poppies?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. Let's see. So I had a bit of a sinuous path to the poppies in Stanford. I was born in Luxembourg and I lived there for approximately two seconds. And then my family moved to suburban Paris, which is where I spent the first 14 years of my life. So from my wee lad years to my awkward preteen years. And then after that we moved to the United States. So my dad is American, Japanese American, and my mom is Belgian. And the reason we moved to the US actually is because I distinctly remember this, around the age of 13, 14, I overheard my mom have a conversation with my dad about the fact that we were becoming too French and that was a problem.

Taylor Goss:
What do you think she noticed that was becoming French about y'all?

Will Dwyer:
It's hard to-

Taylor Goss:
Too French, excuse me.

Will Dwyer:
... to say without being stereotypical. But we didn't speak English for one. Probably complained a little too much too.

Taylor Goss:
We love our French friends.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. Yeah, we were becoming a little bit too Parisian for her liking. And she's Belgian originally. So...
Parisian. Yeah, that's... Okay, yeah.

Will Dwyer:
They have a particular way of speaking French too. You'll hear a lot of like, Ooh, at the end of the sentences.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, okay.

Will Dwyer:
And then a lot of complaining too, that's for sure.

Willie Thompson:
They have very high standard for French, apparently, from what I hear, the Parisians.

Will Dwyer:
Yes, they do. If you try speaking French to them, they'll just start speaking to you in their broken English 'cause they don't want to hear it.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, okay, okay.

Sydney Hunt:
Interesting.

Taylor Goss:
So I don't speak this, but I grew up in an area where Cajun French is really prevalent. So it's like this sort of dialect of French that's been generationally shifted far from standard French and especially Parisian French. So I'm sure that if any of the old folks around where I grew up who spoke Cajun French, started speaking to a Parisian, they might lose their minds, 'cause I've listened to the two standard French versus Cajun French and it seems almost completely dissimilar.

Will Dwyer:
Can you give us a little sample?

Willie Thompson:
Ooh.

Taylor Goss:
The problem is that I don't actually speak Cajun French and I don't want to do it injustice. There's only a couple of phrases, and this might be pretty standard French, but oh, my great aunt and uncle, I would go to their house and I remember sitting as a small child and she handed me a bowl of gumbo and I was like, "Oh, thank you so much." And she said, say, "Ça C'est bon."

Will Dwyer:
Oh my God.

Sydney Hunt:
What is that? What's the reaction?

Taylor Goss:
Oh, it's good.

Sydney Hunt:
Is it good or bad.

Will Dwyer:
I guess, I hear a little Quebeçois in there and I don't know where Cajun comes from, where geographically?

Taylor Goss:
It is French-Canadian in origin.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, yeah, I see that. And both my little brothers are currently in Montreal for school. So they're slowly turning their, I guess, native French into this Quebeçois, which is beautiful.

Taylor Goss:
Okay. Okay. See, I remember Ça c'est bon, and I remember couillon.

Will Dwyer:
Couillon

Taylor Goss:
Because a couillon is like, you idiot, essentially. With varying degrees of intensity depending on the context.

Will Dwyer:
And that literally translates to balls or testicles.

Willie Thompson:
That's hilarious. All right, so your mom realized y'all are becoming too Parisian. Because I want to make... Parisian not French 'cause Parisians are very particular. Too Parisian. And then what happens?

Will Dwyer:
And then when I was 14, my family moved from the suburbs of Paris to the suburbs of New York, which is where I went to high school for three years. It's also when I learned English. So if I say something completely wrong today, that's why. Just a preface. And then I went to college in upstate New York, and then I've been here for three years. During the pandemic, after graduation or my non-graduation from
college, I decided I wanted to experience some greener hills, greener pastures. So I moved West and I've been here ever since. Loving it.

Sydney Hunt:
I love it.

Will Dwyer:
That's the story.

Sydney Hunt:
But you didn't just go to college, you ran in college. I feel like he's selling himself short. Will is very athletic and he doesn't give himself enough credit. I did a little deep dive.

Taylor Goss:
Uh-Oh, research master.

Sydney Hunt:
On his running skills. And I won't give you the exact stats, but Will ran a pretty fast mile. That's all I'll say.

Willie Thompson:
A fast mile. Okay.

Taylor Goss:
I think Will should brag about it.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah. So wait, everyone close your laptops.

Sydney Hunt:
Oh sure.

Willie Thompson:
All right. Sydney, what's a fast mile to you?

Sydney Hunt:
Oh, below six or seven minutes. Eight. I mean, there's a different threshold, right? In high school when I was more in a peak prime, I would've said below six. Now it's below 10. Maybe.

Taylor Goss:
I haven't timed myself. It'd take me an hour. I don't know.

Willie Thompson:
I would agree with Sydney. Mine was probably below eight. I remember in high school we had a guy, will Ficklin is his name. He was-
Taylor Goss:
Shout out to Will Ficklin.

Willie Thompson:
Will Ficklin. He was a Wendy's All-American, some type thing for track and field.

Sydney Hunt:
Oh man.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, okay.

Willie Thompson:
But I remember being like they said, oh yeah, he runs, it was like a six something miles. I was like six minutes to run a mile. It might've been faster than six. But I remember being like, I can't believe a human body moves that fast. It's hard for me to think about it.

Sydney Hunt:
Right? Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
So Will, fast mile.

Will Dwyer:
4.25.

Willie Thompson:
Wow.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah. Insane.

Willie Thompson:
Wow.

Sydney Hunt:
Insane.

Will Dwyer:
Which is actually not considered that fast. I hate to say it.

Willie Thompson:
What?
Taylor Goss:
Well, to me it's very fast.

Sydney Hunt:
Very fast.

Will Dwyer:
I'll take it you guys. Thanks.

Willie Thompson:
Will The Flash Dwyer

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah. We should use that.

Will Dwyer:
That was years ago. My body can no longer pursue these things. But yeah, the mile was not at all my event. It's basically considered a sprint or a mid-distance race. And I was always kind a slow stamina kind of guy. So I ran 5K, 10K steeplechase. Do you guys know about the steeplechase?

Willie Thompson:
No.

Will Dwyer:
It used to be a horse race. It's the one with water on the track. It's about eight loops of the track, about two miles. And you have these thick barriers that look like hurdles, but they don't move, so you can't run into them. And one of them has water. It's an Olympic event, but they don't run it a lot in high school. I think the only high schools that run it are in California and New York. But yeah, that's what I ran.

Sydney Hunt:
And fun fact, Will and I, we found out in conversation that he actually, my high school in Cornwall, Upstate New York would run this event called Steeple Fest and turns out Will ran at that race when I was in high school there. And so in theory, we could have been at the same meet and we had no idea that we would cross paths. What? Six years later, five years later? And here we are. So, amazing.

Willie Thompson:
That's beautiful.

Taylor Goss:
Very cool.

Willie Thompson:
Full circle.

Sydney Hunt:
Very full circle moment.

Willie Thompson:
Did you also run steeple?

Sydney Hunt:
No. No.

Taylor Goss:
Okay.

Sydney Hunt:
No. Gosh.

Taylor Goss:
Did you observe steeple?

Sydney Hunt:
Observed, yes. I observed steeple. I did hurdle. I was a 400 hurdler, so only one lap. I wasn't going to do eight.

Will Dwyer:
It's much faster though.

Sydney Hunt:
But I think steeplechase, in my opinion, is the hardest track race. No, I see Will peeking at my notes of what we're talking about. But I always admired people who were able to run, first of all more than one lap of the track, better yet jumping consistently and then into water as well in all weather conditions. I always admire those people for sure.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, it's no longer who I am. Those days are behind me.

Sydney Hunt:
Who are you now?

Willie Thompson:
Are you sure?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, now I run three miles around Lake Lag and I'm dying.

Willie Thompson:
Okay, you still, you run three miles? I think I've run three miles twice in my life. And that was in high school.
Taylor Goss:
Yeah. I've maybe run three miles over the course of my life.

Willie Thompson:
Hilarious.

Taylor Goss:
There is one note that I know that Sydney dug up. There's a photo of your track photo.

Will Dwyer:
Oh my God.

Taylor Goss:
And you have a flower in your hair?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, I do.

Taylor Goss:
What's the flower and what's the significance of that?

Will Dwyer:
I actually don't know what that flower-

Sydney Hunt:
Do you want to see the flower?

Will Dwyer:
It's like a little purple one.

Sydney Hunt:
Do you remember that? Yeah.

Will Dwyer:
I remember putting it in my hair and I think it was an act of rebellion. I was originally, or I was already thinking of quitting the team at that point. Had a difficult relationship with my coach. I hope he's not listening to this pod. And the flower was a collective act among some of my teammates to just zhuzh up the picture or the roster photo. But yeah, this was pre-plant days for me, so I actually don't know what the flower is.

Taylor Goss:
Wow. So there's some foreshadowing there.

Willie Thompson:
Right.

Taylor Goss:
That's very cool.

Willie Thompson:
It is.

Taylor Goss:
Do you mind if we back up a little bit? How old were you again whenever you to America?

Will Dwyer:
I was 14.

Taylor Goss:
Okay. So how did you feel about the move? Was there trepidation there? And once you moved, what differences did you notice? How did you think about life in France versus the US?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, that's a good question. Short answer, I was mad when my parents told me we were moving.

Willie Thompson:
Big mad.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah.

Sydney Hunt:
Because?

Will Dwyer:
It just felt like my world was collapsing. You're 14. Those are rough times. And I was just starting to find my footing in my school. I was starting to make some cool friendships and I was really excited to have my little brother join me at the same middle school at that time. And then, yeah, my parents kind of announced to me that we were going to move and it was on pretty short notice. I think it was maybe a few months later. And so I was upset, cried about it a little. But it turned out to be, I think, one of the best things that's ever happened to me.

Not only because it just exposed me to a different part of the world, another way of living, but socially I think I meshed much better with the American school system than the French one. And I didn't know this until moving, but schooling in France and my life in France was actually pretty difficult. I was going to a Catholic school at the time, which didn't always agree with my own well, identities. And I had school from I think 8:00 AM to 6:00 P.M. 20 minutes for lunch-

Willie Thompson:
It's a full-time job.
Will Dwyer:
... I had school on Saturdays. It was really to this day,-

Willie Thompson:
It's a full-time job. It's a 9:00 to 5:00, yeah.

Will Dwyer:
... to this day, I don't think I've worked as hard in my life as I did when I was 14, 13. So the move was eventually not well received. And then quickly after that I realized that it was actually-

Willie Thompson:
And I want to maybe use that as a transition to how do you get to plants? How do we land on plants as an area of focus and study? And granted, I'm in the business school, we do things at the 30,000-foot level. I'm probably missing some nuance probably in my articulation of that. But how did you get to that as a field of study in something that you wanted to pursue in a terminal degree? Because terminal degrees, you're doing policy. I'm at the business school. It's like flirting. We flirting with academia. You and Sydney, y'all are like, we're committed.

Sydney Hunt:
We're in the weeds.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah. Yeah, you're in the weeds.

Sydney Hunt:
In the weeds.

Will Dwyer:
Let's go.

Willie Thompson:
That was good.

Sydney Hunt:
That was lame. I'm sorry.

Willie Thompson:
That was good.

Will Dwyer:
That's a good question. I think it requires a little context. In college, and I guess prior, I've just always been interested in science, so I knew I wanted to be a scientist. I kind of flirted with the idea of being a physician. I think that was partially just inherited from maybe societal or parental beliefs that that was a good career choice.
Taylor Goss:
Are either of your parents physicians?

Will Dwyer:
No, they're not. But I don't know. It's just always sort of been encouraged around me that medicine is a
great path forward, if you like science, if you want to help people, if you want to make some cash. Those
will-

Willie Thompson:
You wouldn't be unemployed as a doctor probably or a physician.

Will Dwyer:
Exactly. You're going to have a job.
But then right around the time I had to start taking the MCATs, I decided that that was not going to be my
life. And I had at that point collected a few research experiences under my belts and really liked them. I
loved spending time in the lab just digging away at one really specific, really niche question that probably
most people weren't going to care about, but it was a fun way to tackle little puzzles here and there. But at
that point I was working on biomedical problems. So, human health, I worked on metabolic disorders in a
hospital, so there were still really animal systems.

And then something happened right before my senior year of college where I was living in New York
City at the time, working on metabolic disorders. One in particular called Propionic acidemia, but that's a
different story. And I was spending a lot of time in Central Park just looking at trees, contemplating the
fact that I was living in a densely populated urban jungle. And that was kind of stressing me out. And
plants kind of took over my brain for a few different reasons. One, I just think they look otherworldly and
beautiful, just like aliens undercover.

Sydney Hunt:
I love it. I love it.

Will Dwyer:
And I think they're one of the things that make living on land so pleasant. If you didn't have trees around
you, it'd be a little bleak. There's really nothing like, just sitting under the shade of a tree on a hot day. So
that was the superficial reason I was attracted to them because of the way they looked. And then I learned
eventually that they have amazing chemistry. Because plants can't move, they can't run away from their
problems, so they have to deal with them biochemically. Whereas animals invested in organs and
mobility, plants invested in chemical diversity. So they can do things to this day that our organic
chemists, our human organic chemists cannot even dream of doing.
They make these incredible molecules using the sun as their energy source. So that also initially really
drew me to them. I was really interested in chemistry. I felt like it offered this really neat way of thinking
about the world and compartmentalizing things. Eventually I moved towards biology because I think the
problems in biology, I liked their complexity. I liked that they never have a straight answer. There's
always an exception to everything. And then philosophically, I also have a million reasons that I love
plants. I'll just give you one 'cause I don't want to bore you too much.

Willie Thompson:
You're not boring us at all, by the way. I mean,-
Sydney Hunt:
No, this is interesting.

Willie Thompson:
I don't know if I'm going to do a PhD in biology, but the way you talk about this stuff is very-

Taylor Goss:
It makes me think about it.

Willie Thompson:
... it's engrossing. Yeah. It makes you think about it, yeah. It's very thought-provoking.

Will Dwyer:
That makes me happy to hear. So, plants are the entry point for energy on earth. All of our energy comes from the sun, other than hydrothermal vents, if you want to consider those. And they're also important. But on land at least, all of our energy comes from the sun. And that energy is inaccessible to us animals and to most bacteria. But there's one kind of organism on earth, the green ones, plants that have learned to eat the sun and make that energy accessible to everything else. So plants are literally the energetic basis of ecosystems on earth. And every single bond in your body, every single chemical bond is held together by energy that was delivered by the sun and made accessible by plants. So they're pretty cool beings.

Willie Thompson:
Honestly, man, let's just turn the podcast into a plant podcast.

Sydney Hunt:
No, we should.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, we just have Will as a recurring guest. Dr. Dwyer. You'll be a doctor at the end of this.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, in like six years.

Sydney Hunt:
We got time to make it a thing. Plant chats with Dr. Dwyer.

Willie Thompson:
Honestly.

Taylor Goss:
Spin-off podcast.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, there it is. A segment. Do you want a recurring segment on the podcast.
Sydney Hunt:  
Yes.

Will Dwyer: 
I would love a space where I can talk about plants.

Willie Thompson: 
All right, yeah. Let's do it.

Sydney Hunt:  
Oh my gosh. Please. I want to talk about the plant work that you did when you moved to California. You talked a lot about being in Central Park and loving the plants there, which are very beautiful. But you spent a good amount of time post-college here at Stanford doing some research before you did your PhD. And was there any turning point during that that made you want to consider a certain path or another?

Will Dwyer:  
Yeah, so I came to California right after college, which at this point was a little over three years ago. And I was working on Stanford campus in this institute called the Carnegie, which I think most of you probably haven't heard of. It's this distinct, it's like an independent institute that's technically based in Washington DC. But they have a few departments here, so they're affiliated with Stanford, but kind of their own entity at the same time. And they have a department of plant biology. I joined that department and worked in the lab of Suri, who turned out to be just a fantastic mentor. And at that point I would say I was pretty set on studying plants and I was using the tech job as a way to confirm that I wanted to pursue this for six plus years in grad school.

Sydney Hunt:  
That's a long time, yeah.

Will Dwyer:  
Yeah, I'm not sure about it. And there I was studying plant metabolism. So metabolism, I think we have this kind of intuitive understanding that it's this thing that keeps our bodies alive. But concretely metabolism is the set of a few thousand-ish reactions that keep your body alive and provide energy and break down nutrients, et cetera. Plants have pretty incredible metabolism because it's kind of biochemistry and they can generate all of their food by themselves. They don't need to consume anything else, which means they have this incredibly diverse metabolism. And I was studying the ways that their metabolism responds to the environment. So I wouldn't say I took any sharp turns in my interest during my tech job, but it definitely confirms that I was interested in plant systems to begin with. And then specifically the ways that plant systems interface with the environment, which is what I'm planning on studying for my PhD.

Sydney Hunt:  
Also, a little fun fact that I learned today. So before this podcast, Will and I had lunch every day, as we always do.

Willie Thompson:  
That's dope.
Sydney Hunt:
But he told me this really cool thing about how you can look at, I'm going to butcher this 'cause I'm not a plant person. But long story short, I'm going to have Will explain it. But there's a really, really cool microscope that Stanford has multiple of that are very rare in the world that allow you to see certain things about whatever you're looking at. And I would love if you would explain that to the world because I found it fascinating.

Willie Thompson:
Just this one quick follow up on that. Can anyone use these microscopes or are they only --

Will Dwyer:
No, there's a long line. Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, okay.

Will Dwyer:
So this might get a little technical real fast, so please cut me off. But Sydney's talking about electron microscopes, which they're not rare per se. They've existed for about a century or they were theorized about a century ago, and there's a bunch in the world, but Stanford happens to have, I think, eight because we have SLAC here, which is the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, something like that.

Willie Thompson:
I was thinking about the messaging app.

Taylor Goss:
I know I thought it was the messaging thing.

Willie Thompson:
I was like, yeah, I've heard of Slack. Yeah, that's good. Okay.

Taylor Goss:
Oh yes, I'm familiar.

Willie Thompson:
Not too technical yet.

Will Dwyer:
Basically we have a government-funded lab that's right next to campus. It's called SLAC. A few people from KH actually work there. They mostly do kind of physics, particle physics experiments. But then one of the things that they do have is a bunch of electron microscopes. And these things go for like a million plus a microscope. So they're not casual to just have lying around. And basically, what they do is instead of using light to observe matter or observe structures the way that optical microscopes work, they use electron beams which have a much, much smaller wavelength. So their resolution has the ability to kind of discern an object from its background.
So it's like, normally you've heard of magnification for a microscope, but in reality, resolution is a more helpful metric because if you have really good magnification, but then you can't discern the object from the background, then you have poor resolution and that sucks. So anyway, these microscopes have incredible resolution. It's something on the order of sub-nanometer, which to put it in kind of human perspective, that's like being able to watch a tennis match from the moon and seeing the ball move.

Taylor Goss:
Wow, wow.

Sydney Hunt:
Isn't that insane?

Willie Thompson:
That's crazy. And follow it, that was not too technical-

Will Dwyer:
I know.

Willie Thompson:
... because even when you said, you're talking about that... wait it's a nano what?

Will Dwyer:
A nanometer.

Willie Thompson:
A nanometer. I was going back to my chemistry when we were doing the units, going from... So yeah, no, it wasn't technical at all. It's very easy to follow. Yeah. I would say just a couple clarifying questions about this. These million dollar microscopes. Size, are they big, small?

Will Dwyer:
There's two kinds. The scanning electron microscope is pretty small. The transmission ones, which is the ones I'm hoping to get my hands on, are pretty huge.

Willie Thompson:
Okay.

Will Dwyer:
We're talking taller than you and maybe two or three people wide.

Willie Thompson:
Whoa.

Will Dwyer:
So they're big. Yeah.
Willie Thompson:
That's huge.

Will Dwyer:
'Cause they need to have a big vacuum. They need to be really cold. They have these insane magnetic fields to focus the electron beam, so they have a lot going on.

Willie Thompson:
So, you've already talked about currently what you're doing and these million dollar microscopes, which I find is crazy. And I'll probably never see them given how long it takes to use them apparently. But I'll just use Google for now.

Will Dwyer:
That works too.

Willie Thompson:
Or Dolly, I might just get Dolly drop me off one.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah, true.

Willie Thompson:
So your Imagine A World statement, you're basically talking about an idea of future generations and their relationship to the planet and what they derive from it. In your mind, what's the current generation getting from the earth and what are we getting from the natural world that's keeping us some joy and inspiration?

Will Dwyer:
Don't get me wrong, there are lots of people nowadays who appreciate the natural world for many reasons. But if I were to sum up a relationship to nature these days, I would say it's extractive. I would say we use up natural resources faster than they can replenish. And I would say that rate is increasing, which is not a great trend to be on. And then beyond that, I think there's this disregard for the other ways that nature can provide for us, whether it's just fulfillment or enjoyment or leisure, play, basically. These things are overlooked often for the more economical reasons to appreciate nature, which those are also important. But our relationship to the natural world has been mostly extractive.

And in my statement, I think what I'm trying to get at... well, there's two parts. I would like future generations to have access to nature, which requires for patches of wilderness to still be present. So it's one, the access to wilderness, which I hope will remain a possibility. And then two, also encouraging people to engage in relationships with nature that are more than just extractive. Encouraging people to just go get lost in the woods for a while, for lack of a better phrase. Can we find ways to rekindle connections with nature that are more than just economical, but also loving, reciprocal, fulfilling?

Sydney Hunt:
And I feel like you touched upon that in - Shameless Plug for Will's story online on the KH website - So, we have this thing where scholars can basically write little excerpts about whatever they're feeling. And this piece was actually inspired by an incredible talk from Will. So, if you don't know, the first year Knight-Hennessy Scholars all take a class together called Storytelling with Dan and Lisa from Stanford,
who are amazing. And in the winter and the spring quarter, the scholars rotate and get to give a talk on a different topic. And Will's talk was about the tallest tree in the world and his journey to finding it. And I'm mentioning it because just talked about getting lost in the woods. And so, I was like, oh, this sounds familiar. And so, basically his talk was so amazing, everyone wanted him to put it into a story, and he did. And I wanted to know if you would talk about that. You're welcome to read an excerpt from it and leave people on a cliffhanger, whatever your heart is desiring. But I think this journey was an incredible one.

Will Dwyer:
Oh, thank you, Sydney. Yeah, I'm happy to talk a little bit about that. So Hyperion is the tallest Redwood on earth, the tallest tree on earth, tallest being on earth. It's somewhere around 300 feet tall, so like 30 story building. And I have to give a disclaimer here that it's now extremely illegal to go look for it. So it's not on any sort of trail. It's kind of like miles away from markings.

Taylor Goss:
What?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. It's in the Redwood National Park, and I think there's a six months jail sentence now for trying to find it.

Taylor Goss:
For trying to find it?

Will Dwyer:
Yes.

Willie Thompson:
So can you only stumble on Hyperion?

Will Dwyer:
I don't think... It's not that casual. It's really lost in the middle of nowhere. You'd have to be there intentionally if you're caught around it.

Taylor Goss:
So it's pretty obvious if you're looking for it.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, it's pretty obvious. And to be fair, a lot of people have been going to Hyperion recently, myself included, and that has some impact on the environment, creates these social trails. And then people have been littering as well, there's been garbage around the tree. So rightfully so.

Taylor Goss:
Just to be clear, this podcast cannot be used as evidence in a courtroom.
So, I was going to say disclaimer, I went before it was illegal. And Stacey from marketing actually made sure that that was specified in the story.

Willie Thompson:
Shout out to Stacey for always keeping us in balance.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. We don't want any trouble here.

Will Dwyer:
So yeah, Hyperion is this amazing tree that's a few thousand years old. And I went looking for it a couple years ago with my friends, this was in November of 2021, I think. I took a bunch of my friends to go backpacking. We spent three days in Redwood National Park and the adjacent areas. And then on one of the days we just went off trail, looked for Hyperion, found it. It's amazing. But I will say it's actually... from the base, it doesn't look any taller than any of the mega trees around it. So any of them could really be record holders and you wouldn't know.

And that was, I think sort of the point of the story or one of the points was that Hyperion is this beautiful record holding creature and it's completely unassuming. You would never know. There's no plaque. It's not screaming, "Hey, I'm the tallest being on Earth." It's just sitting there around a bunch of other trees that look identical to it. So yeah, there's nothing I guess completely special about Hyperion. But yeah, it was an amazing journey and I'm so glad I had a space to write about it and first talk about it. Sydney was in the room. I was fixating on her, so... nervous about-

Taylor Goss:
As an anchor point.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
For those looking for it it's, Coast Redwoods will never die, so feel free to check that out on the Knight-Hennessy Scholars website.

Will Dwyer:
Thanks for the plug.

Willie Thompson:
Always.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
So you’ve written about this experience. I know that you're also interested in books and writing and fiction. In fact, I believe you ran the KHommunity Reads. By the way, Khommunity with a K-H in it, as we so often do.

Willie Thompson:
What are KHommunity Reads, Taylor?

Taylor Goss:
KHommunity Reads are a tradition by which we assign a book for people to voluntarily read and gather to discuss. And you ran the KHommunity Reads program last quarter. What drew you to the book that you chose?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, so the book was-

Taylor Goss:
That the Khommunity chose, I should say.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. So yeah, this was a pitch I made to a subset of Knight-Hennessy Scholars. And we kind of all unanimously agreed to vote on it, which I had the support of the masses, which is why I got picked. But Kay Barrett and I... So Kay is a second year.

Taylor Goss:
Yes. She was on our first episode.

Willie Thompson:
Yes. She was on our first episode.

Taylor Goss:
... first episode.

Will Dwyer:
Yes.

Willie Thompson:
With Lydia Burleson. That's right.

Will Dwyer:
And she was, I mean, so helpful because I am not a literature scholar, and it was just so great to have her around. She knew who to invite. And we got actually, one of her advisors, Ramón, to come and talk for twenty-ish minutes about the tradition behind the book and then lead a little Talking Circle community sort of debrief around the book.
But yeah, the book itself is The Dispossessed by Ursula K. Le Guin. It's a work of speculative fiction, which broadly means it's like imaginary fiction. And I really liked the book. I thought it was in line with
the theme of last quarter, which was Living a Fulfilling Life. Because the book examines the journey of
the main character Shevek as he goes from... So he lived on a moon, an anarchist moon, and he returns to
the home world, which is this capitalistic kind of Earth-like world that's brimming with natural resources,
but has these kind of warring nations. And so he goes from the anarchist bleak moon, back to the home
world. And there's a lot of themes around what is a fulfilling life, what does life mean to Shevek in a
way? And so, we had a bunch of conversations around the idea of utopia and whether utopia can exist
because actually the prefix in utopia can either be E-U, which means the good place or U, which means
no place.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.

Will Dwyer:
So the utopia is a good place that doesn't exist, basically.

Sydney Hunt:
Oh, snap. Oh, snap. Can you answer that question for yourself? What is a fulfilling life? What does that
mean for you?

Will Dwyer:
For me, a fulfilling life means going backpacking every month and then spending some time off the grid.
That's how I stay sane. And just studying what I love. I would say I'm in general driven by passion, and
that seems to be a recurrent theme around Knight-Hennessy. But I really have very little bandwidth for
things that don't make my heart beat. So the PhD is a great route for me so far 'cause I just get to spend so
much time studying these little questions that I care about that I have to convince other people to care
about as well. But that's a tough one. I mean, living a fulfilling life is like asking what's the meaning of
life? And I don't have the answer.

Taylor Goss:
In a roundabout way, I think what you're talking about with the reason that this book was created, the
reason that we had a conversation around it was to talk about the way that we frame our relationship with
the earth. And there's a paper that you wrote, Renaming Indigenous Crops and Addressing Colonial Bias
and Scientific Language, which is about the relationship of scientists to, I guess you would call it,
taxonomy or naming in relationship to indigenous communities. But it's also a question of framing. So I
wanted to ask you about this paper and why you thought it was important to write about and what has
happened with that work since?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, absolutely. So the impetus behind that paper was kind of born out of a realization that scientists are
not trained in language typically, but language obviously influences the way we think and affects material
outcomes. The way you frame something influences how it's perpetrated through generations, what it will
mean to people in the future. And there's this particular phrase in my field in plant biology called orphan
crop. Orphan crop refers to a category of crops that are not the kind of crops you would find in your
supermarket in the United States, but they're consumed by millions of people in regions of the world like,
South Asia, South America, Africa. So for example, teff grass, probably never heard of it, is the number
one crop in Ethiopia. Literally tens of millions of people consume teff grass. And you can start seeing it in
the more hipstery supermarkets here, 'cause it's like a cereal that's gluten-free, that has pretty high protein.
And quinoa actually used to be one of those grains that nobody knew about, and now it's everywhere. It's been a little co-opted.

Willie Thompson:
Interesting.

Will Dwyer:
And so, orphan crop is this really strange word that implies that these crops are somehow helpless. There's a bunch of synonyms that are used like, underutilized crops or forgotten crops. I was working with these crops just as a quick tangent, developing metabolic resources online for people to be able to study them because in addition to being called orphan crops, they're also called understudied crops, and that they often are. And I was realizing that the word was really landing on me super wrong, and I talked about it with my PI at the time, Suri, and we had lots of conversations about what could be a helpful new framework for thinking about these crops. Can we name them something else so that we don't convey the sense that they're helpless, that they somehow need saving? And we landed on understudied indigenous crops.

So I wrote a quick opinion paper for a journal on pushing this name forward, and then had a bunch of talks around Stanford and Carnegie trying to convince people. Some people really disagreed with the idea. And I think part of that is because the word indigenous itself means really different things to different people. For example, in Canada, the word indigenous is almost considered negative. They use First Nations to refer to indigenous people up there. But in the US, indigenous has a pretty accepted, I would say, usage. So yeah, that was the impetus behind the paper.

And it's true, I do really like to write. So I spend a lot of time thinking about language and the way that I can best phrase things, especially to convince people that the earth is cool and they should care about it. But in this case, it was to convince scientists that maybe this word orphan crop, this phrase has an origin that we should examine carefully and try to rethink.

Sydney Hunt:
On the topic of writing, I also want to plug The Good Scientists. What is that? What does that mean to you? 'Cause I know you spend a lot of time on it and I feel like it's an expansion of your opinion on responsibility scientists have outside of research.

Will Dwyer:
So The Good Scientists is a nonprofit that I work for, and it's based mostly in the Netherlands. That's where most of our volunteers are. It was founded by my amazing colleague, Elena. And together we started a newsletter that we call Undoing the Ivory Tower, and we publish monthly. So there I take on the role of editor more than writer. I wrote a few articles in the beginning. But basically it's a platform for scientists and people outside of science to have dialogue. So that can mean so many things. I love to write or get people to write about community participatory projects, projects that involve both scientists and non-scientists, but it's also a space for people outside of science to make demands of science to say, here's what we wish science did, or a place for scientists to reflect on how they wish their work was more accessible to everyday people.

So we've published, for example, some essays around the use of language, around public and private partnerships in the energy sector. Recently I interviewed a phenomenal geneticist named Dr. Krystal Tsosie on this concept known as Indigenous Data Sovereignty, which is basically the not so revolutionary idea that indigenous people should own their own genomic data.

Willie Thompson:
That's a crazy idea.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. A hot take, really.

Willie Thompson:
Sarcasm.

Will Dwyer:
So I work on this newsletter every month, and I'm actually really, really excited for this month's issue, which is not out yet, but will be by the end of the month. So before I give the punchline there, let me just backtrack and say, it is really hard to find people who want to write. Even people who have these amazing stories to tell, they do amazing work. I ask them to write about it and they're like, "Can't, too busy."

Willie Thompson:
Why?

Will Dwyer:
I don't know. People don't want to write. It's not a very popular activity. Maybe I'll use this as a pitch to say if you're listening and you want to write, hit me up. But it has been actually really difficult to find people who are willing and able and have the time to write a short piece for us. So I spent three months convincing my friend Raksha from the Oceans department, which is one of the departments here at Stanford, and she's writing this amazing piece that I will not spoil, but it's on Eco-spirituality and the fact that scientists should maybe try to reconnect with spirituality in a way, because we're always taught that science and religion are these diametrically opposed interrogations of the world, that they should not be able to coexist. And she wrote this beautiful argument in favor of maybe we should see what happens when we merge the two. So I'm so excited to publish it

Taylor Goss:
Well, I want to read that now. Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
We'll put a link in the show notes when the episode drops. To your point, Will, about writing, my wife writes, and even now she's starting to... Naomi, she's starting to embrace this identity as a writer because it's almost as if once you sort say you're the thing, then people say, oh, well. And so there's all this social connotation to it. But whenever I talk to her about writing, I think... she's a gifted writer, so I think that's also the thing that she's really gifted at writing, and I think she's helped me realize the difficulty with good writing. Not just writing because anyone can just write something, but good writing, it just requires you to be able to slow down and really take what's in your brain and put it out to the world in a way. And it's really hard to do that in the world that we live in.

It's hard to say, even if I want to write short piece, do I have the space to actually... to know what I'm trying to say, articulate it, reframe it, or frame it in a way that resonates with people, and that is accurately reflecting the experience, the perspective that I have. It's like something that, especially the running joke is our biggest argument was about ChatGPT for a while. It takes away from that process. It's supposed to be like a mundane, slow thing to do. And in a world where you're really not incentivized to do that, it makes it much harder to do it in an evocative way. And I could feed all the Toni Morrison Works or David Butler, but it's like, I don't know if you get the same thing. Right? 'Cause it's connected to an
experience that we all share and have. Anyway, so when you said that, I think that really resonated, at least with the conversation I'm having at my own house about the burden of writing, right?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, the burden it's also such an intimate process. Then you're releasing this really personal reflection or story into the world, and a lot of people are going to hate it. It's a scary thing.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Terrifying.

Taylor Goss:
And more props to you for doing that and for facilitating that for other people.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, exactly.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. And we've talked a lot about your work and your research, and we've touched a little bit on the fact that you go out backpacking and exploring. Let's talk a little bit more about your life outside Academia.

Willie Thompson:
[inaudible 00:44:51].

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. We are at Stanford, you're living your life as an Knight-Hennessy scholar right now. How do you maintain work-life balance? How do you think about that? What else are you up to around here?

Willie Thompson:
When's the next off-site trip happening?

Will Dwyer:
The next trip is May 16th to 19th. I'm going to Sequoia with some friends. I'm actually reuniting with some East Coast friends and taking them out to the Sierras for a backpack. But the way I stay sane is I just leave campus every single weekend.

Sydney Hunt:
That's so impressive.

Will Dwyer:
Honestly, I go to San Francisco usually on Fridays. I come back on Sundays. I play Ultimate Frisbee on Sundays in a big queer league in SF.
Taylor Goss:
You have a leadership role in that, correct?

Will Dwyer:
Yes.

Sydney Hunt:
Yes. Captain.

Will Dwyer:
Newly minted Captain.

Willie Thompson:
Congratulations. Captain Dwyer.

Taylor Goss:
Captain Dwyer.

Sydney Hunt:
Captain Dwyer. He's extremely good. I had the pleasure of seeing him play earlier on in the year, and Will's phenomenal.

Will Dwyer:
It's more of a social chair role than it is a captain. I get to organize social hangouts and all that stuff, but it's been really fun. Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
You don't need that qualifier. Just call yourself Captain, it's fine.

Willie Thompson:
Captain of fun that works too. Yeah. There was actually an Ultimate Frisbee tournament happening. Was it last weekend, I think, or something.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, there was. Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Man. Have either of you ever played or tried to play Ultimate Frisbee?

Taylor Goss:
I have.

Sydney Hunt:
I've tried. I was extremely unsuccessful.
Taylor Goss:
That was a pandemic activity for me.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah.

Will Dwyer:
Let's go.

Willie Thompson:
It's one of those things where it looks so much easier than it actually is.

Sydney Hunt:
I know, right?

Willie Thompson:
The skill of throwing the Frisbee and everything. Wait, so where'd you learn how to-

Will Dwyer:
The flick?

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, Yeah.

Will Dwyer:
The forehand?

Willie Thompson:
How'd you get into Ultimate Frisbee as a sport since you've given up running sub five-minute miles?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. Frisbee was a new thing for me. I had never really played until a couple of years ago. So SF has these queer leagues that are really popular and they have basically every sport imaginable. But for some reason, the Frisbee one is kind of the biggest one. There's 300 of us playing Frisbee every Sunday, and then we all go to a bar afterwards. So I joined because it just looked socially appealing, like a fun way of meeting new people. And then I completely fell in love with the sport. It's such a fun projectile to throw. The way it flies is just so...

Taylor Goss:
It's graceful.

Will Dwyer:
It's beautiful. Yeah. I feel like an airbender.

Willie Thompson:
Well, Brianna brought up Avatar in our last episode so...

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah. And you also do it in a beautiful setting. You all play in Golden Gate Park.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah.

Sydney Hunt:
It's really nice to play there.

Taylor Goss:
That's great.

Will Dwyer:
The park is so nice. It's full of daisies and there's geese around us. It's really nice.

Willie Thompson:
I fell like it's one of the more accessible sports to play. I mean, granted, if you can't throw a Frisbee that far, you just need at least two people who can throw a Frisbee. And all they got to do is run.

Will Dwyer:
And Frisbee people tend to be chill too. I think that's the kind of person that I just get along with.

Taylor Goss:
That's great.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. So yeah, that's what I do on the weekends. And then once a month I try to go a little further off into the trails. So this year I went to Crater Lake in Oregon, and then I did a little road trip up in Utah, Arizona. Went to Big Sur for the sixth time, came back covered in ticks.

Taylor Goss:
Wow. On these trips, do you often bring your camera with you?

Will Dwyer:
Yes, I do. I bring a film camera usually and try to snap some shots. But recently I've been having some technical difficulties. I think there's something wrong with my shutter or something. But yeah, I love taking some pics on trail and getting my friends in there.

Sydney Hunt:
Special types of photos though. Not like iPhone, whatever.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, like film pics.
IPhone pics are great too.

Sydney Hunt:
They are great. But I don't know. I've seen, Will showed me his portfolio of his photos, film photos, and I had never seen a film photo portfolio before this. And they are much better, in my opinion, than iPhone photos.

Will Dwyer:
Thank you, Sidney.

Sydney Hunt:
It's a very different type of style. And he got a new roll recently, so I'm looking forward to seeing what those end up turning out to be.

Will Dwyer:
You stay gassing me up.

Sydney Hunt:
Always. I'm your hype woman. You know it. You know it.

Taylor Goss:
Well, as our time here comes to a close, we like to finish our conversation with a little bit of discussion about the Knight-Hennessy community and your experience with the application, and maybe share a couple facts. How has your experience in the Knight-Hennessy community been since you arrived at Stanford? How has it contributed to the Stanford experience?

Will Dwyer:
It's been completely amazing, life-changing. Obviously Sydney is sitting right next to me. A big part of why it's been really great. Yeah, so beyond lunch and Sydney, I could talk about all day.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, lunch and Sydney.

Taylor Goss:
The two best things about Knight-Hennessy-

Sydney Hunt:
Oh, you're so sweet.

Will Dwyer:
There's a lot. I mean, I think graduate school and maybe especially PhDs can feel like silos in a way. You're kind of stuck in your little world and you're having fun, but you're not really meeting that many people outside of that world, and especially people who maybe disagree with you on stuff. And KH has been really amazing for that. I mean, I come to lunch and I'll have conversations about the Mexican Supreme Court or something I know literally nothing about. And it ends up enriching my days in ways that I just never see coming. For some reason, I get along really well with the law people here, so I've
been learning about this thing that I just do not understand, which is convoluted to me. But yeah, I've had some really amazing conversations. The community is so loving and caring. This year, there's been some difficulties in the community, and I've still seen it kind of take care of itself. It's really nice to be part of an organism like that.

Willie Thompson:
I was about to say, I was thinking about planting when you said taking care of itself. Picking up what you were planting. I guess I wouldn't pick it up 'cause it's in the ground.

Taylor Goss:
Sniffing what you were planting.

Willie Thompson:
There we go.

Sydney Hunt:
There we go.

Taylor Goss:
Wafting.

Willie Thompson:
That's amazing to hear. And definitely resonates with I think, at least I'll speak for myself, my experience too about the power of an interdisciplinary community.

Sydney Hunt:
Absolutely. It's how you meet your bestie.

Willie Thompson:
How did y'all meet by the way?

Sydney Hunt:
What's our meet cute?

Will Dwyer:
Meet cute, yeah. On the deck. Right?

Sydney Hunt:
On the deck during Denning lunch, funny enough. Yeah. I feel like you should share more.

Will Dwyer:
We met pretty late, actually.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah.
Will Dwyer:
We didn't really meet during immersion weekend or even during first-

Sydney Hunt:
First-year retreat.

Will Dwyer:
... day one, yeah.

But yeah, we were sitting on the deck with a little group of people and then people started trickling out one by one. And then it was just me and Sydney left on the deck, had a little chat, and the rest is history.

Sydney Hunt:
And I feel like if I don't see Will in a day, I have withdrawals. Yesterday he texted me and he was like, "Your location is turned off on your phone. Are you okay? Where are you?" And I was like, "Oh my gosh, I need to know where you are and you need to know how-"

Will Dwyer:
I need to know where Sydney is at all times.

Sydney Hunt:
And it's amazing because not only do you get to see each other in Denning and on campus, but we live in the same building as well. Will is very kind and has cooked and he has extra and he is like, "You want food?" And I'm like, "Yeah." So yeah, we had-

Will Dwyer:
I fixed Sydney's shower recently.

Sydney Hunt:
Yes. He fixed my shower.

Taylor Goss:
You fixed her shower?

Will Dwyer:
I did.

Taylor Goss:
You're a handyman too?

Sydney Hunt:
He's a handyman.

Will Dwyer:
Not at all, usually.
Sydney Hunt:
No, for sure. It's honestly kind of this weird little fun, codependent relationship. But I love it. And Will adds so much joy to my life. I'm super grateful for him. I really don't know what the turning point was, and me wanting this person to be a regular friend, consistent. Being able to share your heart with someone I think is really beautiful. And I don't know. I don't do that very easily. And so, I have so much love and respect for you, and I'm grateful that KH brought us together.

Will Dwyer:
Right back at you.

Willie Thompson:
Amazing.

Taylor Goss:
That's so sweet.

Willie Thompson:
It is.

Taylor Goss:
That's the sweetest moment we've had on this podcast.

Willie Thompson:
Honestly, yeah.

Taylor Goss:
Wow. Sydney's running for personal best.

Willie Thompson:
Right.

Sydney Hunt:
It's all true though. It's facts. And speaking of facts.

Will Dwyer:
Smooth.

Willie Thompson:
Transition.

Sydney Hunt:
Look at that transition.
Sydney Hunt:
If you've listened to our episodes before, you know that a regular thing we talk about is our improbable facts. So when you apply to Knight-Hennessy, you have to list eight improbable facts about yourself. These are things that are true about you, but no one might know about you. And I'm curious, Will, if you would share a few, why you chose those facts, and/or if new facts that you've learned about you in the last year came up post your application, that if you had to do it again, you would now include them?

Will Dwyer:
All right, yeah. I have two facts if you'll indulge me.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, please.

Will Dwyer:
I have one from the app and then one new one.

Willie Thompson:
Okay.

Taylor Goss:
Okay. Okay.

Will Dwyer:
So the one from the app that I really liked is when I was in middle school, when I was a kid, basically during my childhood, I had a makeshift lab in my parents' garage. And I loved collecting periodic table elements, of all things. So I just ordered these crazy things from eBay. I had things like no kid should have. When my parents were gone, I evaporated iodine in the kitchen and it turned purple. I made some explosive devices with hydrochloric acid and-

Taylor Goss:
Oh man,-

Will Dwyer:
... tin foil.

Taylor Goss:
One weekend I got my hands on some uranium.

Will Dwyer:
Well, I had a couple things like, beryllium and osmium that I realized were actually acutely toxic. So I had to call actually the city, Environment, health, and safety to dispose of it. And to this day, my parents don't know about this. So if they listen to the pod, they'll find out.

Taylor Goss:
No!

Willie Thompson:
But it's no longer at the house, I'm assuming. It's been disposed of.

Will Dwyer:
It's no longer at the house. It's been safely disposed of.

Taylor Goss:
Okay. Did you also get that from eBay?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah, I did.

Willie Thompson:
So it was crazy enough earlier in the class today, the GSB, we had a case where someone was trying to recruit someone from who used to work at eBay as VP of eBay. And then the role-play they did, they were like, well, how much will I need to pay you to work here? And the person's like, I was making a million dollars at eBay or whatever. And now I see why. It's trafficking toxic materials across state lines. My goodness. What a profitable endeavor. Anyway, I just thought about that. But yeah, so collecting periodic table elements.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. I was a cool kid.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
It sounds like it.

Sydney Hunt:
And you were using these just not with protective gear. Right? I remember you telling me you were like-

Will Dwyer:
I had gloves, I had gloves.

Taylor Goss:
You'd grab a couple paper towels.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah. But the people who came to pick it up were in full suit, came to your house and-
Will Dwyer:
They were better equipped than I was. Yeah. It was a little DIY, but it was fun and I survived.

Willie Thompson:
DIY.

Sydney Hunt:
All is well. You're safe, you're alive.

Will Dwyer:
And my new fact, if I may.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
Yes, yes.

Sydney Hunt:
Yes.

Will Dwyer:
I've realized just how good of a snoozer I am. I can literally sleep forever and every morning I start my
day by snoozing at least four to eight times.

Willie Thompson:
Four to eight-

Taylor Goss:
So how far ahead of time do you set your alarm?

Will Dwyer:
30 to 45 minutes. Cause the snoozes are-

Taylor Goss:
That's not terribly bad.

Will Dwyer:
... eight, nine minutes each.

Taylor Goss:
It's not great, but it's not the worst I've heard.

Will Dwyer:
It feels so good though.

Willie Thompson:
To hit snooze?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
So it's like a dopamine

Willie Thompson:
So you get to fall back every time you hit snooze. Okay.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. Just falling back asleep or just falling asleep in general, I think is my favorite feeling in the entire world. And waking up, I love life and being awake, but waking up is just not something I'm great at. So, I feel like I can minimize the pain and continue getting that dopamine from falling asleep by snoozing eternally in the morning to my housemate's dismay, because I think he's hearing my alarms.

Taylor Goss:
'Cause they have to hear the jingle over and over again.

Will Dwyer:
Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
I know that whenever I hear the iPhone alarm jingle in a context which is not sleeping, I get-

Willie Thompson:
It's so jarring.

Taylor Goss:
... I get chills.

Sydney Hunt:
Your heart starts beating fast.

Taylor Goss:
Exactly. Yeah, yeah.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah. No, I know. I know.

Willie Thompson:
It's like a Pavlovian response.

Taylor Goss:
Exactly. It totally is.

Will Dwyer:
I have the gentle, just like beep beep, beep, beep, beep beep. And it takes me 10 minutes to wake up from it too. Yeah.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
There's also a frog one on the iPhone, you should check it out.

Will Dwyer:
Really?

Sydney Hunt:
Really?

Will Dwyer:
Wow.

Sydney Hunt:
Wow.

Will Dwyer:
Full croak in the morning.

Willie Thompson:
Wait, can you play it?

Will Dwyer:
Yeah. Let me find it.

Willie Thompson:
I've never heard it. I'm curious.

Sydney Hunt:
I worry that that would play into my dream. I don't know that it feel like an alarm and then be like, oh, another animal. Like birds chirping in the morning. You hear the frogs croaking now, but now it's time to get up.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Rib-It. Rib-It.

Taylor Goss:
Sorry, Willie's stomach is acting up.

Will Dwyer:
Oh, it's a duck. I'm sorry.

Taylor Goss:
That's so much better.

Sydney Hunt:
Wait. That's better.

Will Dwyer:
I don't know. I love it. Imagine waking up to that.

Sydney Hunt:
Oh my gosh.

Willie Thompson:
I was like, that's the craziest frog I ever heard in my life. Now that it's a duck, it makes sense.

Sydney Hunt:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
Okay. Those are some pretty good facts. Thank you for sharing them.

Will Dwyer:
You're welcome.

Taylor Goss:
Before we ask our final question, we want to close out with one final flower fact. I brought my guitar and we're going to do a little bespoke theme song for you.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, we talked about a theme song.
Taylor Goss:
Yeah, yeah.

Will Dwyer:
Oh my gosh.

Sydney Hunt:
I'm so excited for this.

Will Dwyer:
I'm so honored.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, of course.

Sydney Hunt:
This is a big moment because Taylor, as you know, is a musician, but this will be the first time that he's playing on the pod.

Will Dwyer:
Wow.

Willie Thompson:
Wow. Here we go. You're making history, Will.

Sydney Hunt:
It's an honor. Making history.

Taylor Goss:
It's just an electric guitar, so it's kind of shitty for the purpose, but it'll be fine. Okay. What if it's like, Flower Fact!

Willie Thompson:
Oh yeah! That's crazy. That's crazy. We did not play that at all. That's crazy. Yeah, that's wild. All right, let's go. Flower facts.

Taylor Goss:
Flower facts.

Sydney Hunt:
Flower facts.

Will Dwyer:
Flower facts.
Taylor Goss:
Flower facts.

Will Dwyer:
Flower facts.

Willie Thompson:
Flower facts.

Sydney Hunt:
Flower facts.

Will Dwyer:
Let's go.

Sydney Hunt:
Oh my God.

Taylor Goss:
All right, Will. What's our final flower fact.

Will Dwyer:
All right, I'll leave you with this one. So orchids, we all love them. We all know them. Orchidaceae is one of the largest plant families in the world. There's like 20 thousand-ish species of orchids. Every single one of them has tiny microscopic seeds and they need fungi to germinate. So you wouldn't have orchids if we didn't have fungi. Pretty sick.

Sydney Hunt:
Wow.

Willie Thompson:

Taylor Goss:
Flower facts.

Will Dwyer:
Flower facts.

Sydney Hunt:
Flower facts.

Taylor Goss:
Flower facts.
Sydney Hunt: Flower Facts.

Will Dwyer: Flower Facts.

Willie Thompson: I love the Twist.

Sydney Hunt: So good. Thanks for coming to Flower Facts with our friend, Will Dwyer.

Willie Thompson: Right, right, right. Well, Will, we've come to the end of our time here. A feeling that you noted at the beginning of our time was that you're feeling nervous. How are you feeling now?

Will Dwyer: I'm feeling great. Feeling loosened up and happy.

Taylor Goss: That's amazing.

Will Dwyer: That was great.

Willie Thompson: Fantastic. Well, we love that. And you've actually, we've made history with flower facts.

Will Dwyer: Yeah.

Willie Thompson: We've also made history 'cause I believe you're the first European we've had on the pod this season. So continue to break records.

Will Dwyer: Represent.

Willie Thompson: You got to represent.

Sydney Hunt: Yeah.
Willie Thompson:
And in terms of representing, you're representing a bunch of identities, perspectives, and backgrounds here at Knight-Hennessy. For folks who are listening, who would want to join this experience to be part of this community, what parting words would you leave for them as they think about applying and considering to be a part of it?

Will Dwyer:
I think the Knight-Hennessy app is really unique and really fun, and I think you shouldn't be afraid to be a little weird with it. So many of the things you'll apply for in your life are so formulaic. If you're a scientist like me, you're constantly applying to grants and there's a very specific language. There are things you should say, things you shouldn't say. I just got rejected from the NSF probably because I was a little too lyrical with my last paragraph. But the Knight-Hennessy app is not that. You shouldn't be afraid to be a little out-the-box. This community is full of wonderful, eclectic, unique people. And if you want to be a part of it, I think you should really put your unique weird foot forward. You'll be valued for that over here. That's what I tried doing in the app, and I am not someone who's had the privilege of these fancy scholarships, these recognitions, these awards, and it worked out. So yeah, good luck.

Willie Thompson:
Awesome.

Sydney Hunt:
I love it.

Willie Thompson:
Will, thanks again for taking the time. This is a great episode. We appreciated spending some time with you, and we'll leave it there. Take care.

Sydney Hunt:
Thanks Will.

Will Dwyer:
See you.

Taylor Goss:
Thank you, Will.

Sydney Hunt:
Bye.

Taylor Goss:
Peace.

Will Dwyer:
Bye-bye.

Taylor Goss:
Thank you for joining us for this episode of Imagine A World. Where we hear from inspiring members of the KHS community who are making significant contributions in their respective fields, challenging the status quo, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible as they imagine the world they want to see.

Willie Thompson:
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