

Fordham Footsteps: Christine Schwall-Pecci, FCRH '09, Interview Transcript

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Welcome to Fordham Footsteps, the podcast that features Fordham alumni and discusses their path from their time as a student to their current career.

Matt Burns:

Some will have a direct correlation to their majors-

Matt Burns:

And others will describe how they took some unexpected turns.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Either way, expect an insider's guide to certain industries and some great stories from our esteemed alumni. I'm Sara Hunt Munoz, senior director for strategic initiatives.

Matt Burns:

And I'm Matt Burns, associate director for young alumni and student engagement. And with us today is Dr. Christine Schwall-Pecci, Fordham College Rose Hill Class of 2009. Christine, we are delighted to have you today. Thanks so much.

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

Oh my gosh. Thank you so much for having me. It's such a pleasure and an honor to be here.

Matt Burns:

So Christine, tell us about your major. You were a bio major, right?

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

That is correct. Yes. So at Fordham I majored in biology and I also minored in chemistry and sociology which were later additions to my Fordham career after taking a few classes while I was there.

Matt Burns:

And how did you land on those?

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

So while being at Fordham, we all know we have to take the core classes, core curriculum, and as a public school, Long Island student, I hadn't been exposed to very much of what Fordham was going to require for me to take. And I thought it would be a good opportunity to try out some new classes. So I

ended up taking a couple of intro to sociology classes, which were very, very fascinating to me considering especially that I had been used to looking at things through a more biological, chemical type of mindset, looking at science from that perspective. I felt like sociology really provide me with another perspective of looking at very similar kinds of problems, things that are affecting society and the public at large. So I really, really wanted to take that as a chance to broaden my horizons a little bit, get out of my biology work stream, and try to learn some new things. So it was really, really fascinating to be able to experience the world from a different perspective that way.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And did you come to Fordham knowing you wanted to major in science?

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

Oh, I love this question. I did, but I didn't know what I wanted to do with it. So when I was in high school, I didn't really know what I was most passionate about, but I ended up doing a research program actually that my school had offered that allowed us to partner with SUNY schools and get college credits for doing research. So it seemed like a good opportunity. I didn't really know what else I wanted to be doing. So I followed that research program through a couple of years in high school, did a whole project about psychological perspectives on genetically modified foods. So if you ever want to talk about that, happy to chat, but had a lot of good experiences learning about how to do statistical analyses, how to conduct a proper research experiment, and found it really interesting.

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

Didn't really know what else I was passionate about, so decided to go in as a biology major, but you can imagine most of the biology majors at Fordham want to go to med school and I didn't want to do that. So it was kind of an interesting journey for me that way, where I was one of the very few who didn't really have any desire to become a doctor, but was just kind of continuing with that passion that I had for science. So while I was at Fordham, I ended up in research programs in the chemistry department in particular with Dr. Banerjee. And this is going to be my theme of today, fell into that by accident because in my chemistry class, my organic chemistry class, my sophomore year at Fordham, my professor Dr. Ciaccio approached me and said that there were some opportunities to get scholarships to do research at Fordham if that was something that I was interested in. And at first I was like, absolutely not. I hate all of my lab classes. There's no way you are going to make me do more research work. That is not what I want to be doing. But I applied and ended up receiving the Clare Boothe Luce fellowship.

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

And that scholarship in particular is pretty awesome because it is meant for females who are in the science, math, STEM spaces, who are not interested in becoming a traditional medical doctor. So it gives us a different opportunity to be supported and figure out what avenues we wanted to take forward. So through that, I ended up working with Dr. Banerjee, was also able to go to Germany to do research for a summer and just kind of continued learning that way about science, but still didn't really know what I wanted to do with that.

Matt Burns:

What did you do with that?

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

Yeah, so I think, like I said, I kind of just kept following things by accident, but when I graduated, like you mentioned earlier, Matt, it was 2009. So still the economic recession and a lot of my friends and classmates were really struggling to find a job. So leaning towards graduation I didn't know what I wanted to do. And there weren't really that many options out there. So I decided to apply to graduate school. And I initially had applied to all masters programs because I didn't really want to commit beyond a couple of years. I thought, okay, just go to school for a couple more years. In 2011 we'll see where the world's at and what I want to do. And a couple of schools got back to me, said I had pretty extensive research experience and that it would be more appropriate if I applied to their PhD programs. And not sure how familiar you are with PhD programs in the hard sciences, but typically they will pay you and waive your tuition if you teach while you're doing the program.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So they were like, if you do the PhD program, you won't have to pay tuition. If you don't like it after a couple of years, you can just stop with your master's and be on your merry way. But at least this way, you're kind of getting your education for free. And we'll see if we can keep you for a few more years. And I was like, yeah, sure, sure, sure. I'll just go for the couple years and I'm going to get out of there with my master's degree. And then a year into grad school, my professor, who I was working with at the time, encouraged me to apply for the National Science Foundation graduate research fellowship. And I ended up receiving that and they basically will fund you to just focus on your research in grad school and not have to teach for three years. So given that I was like, well, I guess I'm staying. Guess I'm doing this PhD. We'll see where it goes.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

I finished it out in five years, and still at that point didn't know what I wanted to do. I just knew for sure what I didn't want to do. So similarly to while I was at Fordham, I knew I didn't want to be a medical doctor while I was doing work in grad school. It was an amazing experience, but I worked with a professor who was very young himself and very new to being a professor, was going through his whole tenure track application opportunity, and the amount of time and effort and passion that he had for research, I realized I did not feel similarly. And I didn't think I wanted to, or had the passion and drive to really put all of myself into just doing research for the rest of my life. So I knew I didn't want to do a postdoc, but I didn't know what I did want to do, but I ended up going to an open house at Mount Sinai Hospital in the city where they basically have you apply just generally to Mount Sinai. And they send all of the resumes out to the different departments that are hiring people and they choose if they want to meet with you that day. And you basically just show up and can do a number of interviews with different departments all in one day.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

I met with a couple of different departments there. Most of them did want to hire me for a postdoc, but I was like, "I really don't want to. If that's all you have, maybe I'll take it." Because I didn't mention, I went to grad school in Connecticut, but I'm born and raised on Long Island, really wanted to come back to New York. So I was really willing to take almost any opportunity to come back to New York, even if it meant doing a postdoc for a little bit. But one lab was looking to hire someone as a grant manager. So they had just received a good bit of funding for the research they were doing actually on Ebola virus. And this was in 2014. So it was when that outbreak was starting to spread around the world and we had a couple of cases in New York City. And so I ended up taking the position with that lab and worked with them for a couple of years, but it was pretty interesting to be able to work in a lab that was kind of on the cutting edge of looking into different treatment opportunities for Ebola and other related viruses.

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

So that was really intense. There were always different companies coming in to interview the professor that we worked with and the whole department on all of the technology and everything they were working on. So that was pretty cool for a little while, but that's how I ended up back in the city post grad school.

Matt Burns:

Can you explain a little more what that job means in talking about grants?

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

Absolutely. So they initially hired me, like I said, to be a grant manager, which basically means that when you have a good amount of funding from many different sources, government and private sector included, that they really need help, especially when it's a collaborative effort, with coordinating across all of the labs that are working on that particular grant project. Coordinating across all of them, the research output, the money that each of them are using. Because as you can imagine, you always need to do a progress report with any grant from the government, telling them what you've done with their money for the year, why you need to continue and want to receive their money moving forward. So I was basically the point project manager across the grants that the lab held, which some of them were from the National Science Foundation, National Institute of Health or NIH, the Department of Defense, which was pretty crazy. They had a couple of partnerships with the army and different things, because as you can imagine, some of these viruses are used as biological warfare products.

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

So it was really, really fascinating to be able to do that. And then because of my science background, they actually kind of expanded my job description as I was there. And I ended up also becoming their ad hoc lab manager slash manuscript editor, slash publication image person. They would be like, "We really need a schematic about how this virus works in the cell. Can you just like play around in PowerPoint and Adobe and figure out how to put this together?" It really expanded over a little bit, but I was there for a couple of years and it ended up not being quite the challenge that I was looking for. So I started to look a little bit more broadly, and that's how I've ended up where I am today.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And tell us where you are today.

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

So I work at BGB Group, which is a medical communications agency, which most people have no idea what that means, myself included until I ended up there. As I said, I was getting a little bit not so enthused about being a grant manager for a lab. It was very, very interesting and the work they did was really fascinating, but the lab was moving to Atlanta and I didn't necessarily want to move to Atlanta. And also it just wasn't the right challenge for me. So I had a friend of a friend who worked at BGB and our mutual friend was like, "I read about their job on LinkedIn and it seems like it's sciencey. So maybe you want to look into it." And I was like, okay, fine. So I reached out to them and thankfully she was super amazing. She was like, "Yeah, I'll totally just get on a call and tell you about what I do."

Christine Schwall-Pecci:

And she explained BGB to me. And I was like, "That sounds amazing. Where do I sign up?" So I went into interview and I've been there ever since. So it's been almost six years, but like I mentioned, BGB is a medical communication slash promotional agency. So I feel like Fordham has a lot of communication alumni and majors. So pretty similar to your typical communications agency, except that our specialty is that all of our clients are pharmaceutical companies or biotech companies. And we basically develop all of the materials that go out to doctors, patients, even the companies themselves to educate them around different disease states or new drugs that are coming onto the market. I will cop to we also do all the ads that you see around drugs that come out. So it ranges from the promotional all the way to the more educational, but it's been a really, really cool experience to be able to find people who are mutually interested in science, but don't necessarily want to be at the front end of all of the science.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So BGB in particular is a pretty cool company because of the 400 so plus people that are there right now, over a quarter of them have a higher medical degree of some sort. So we have MDs, PhDs, PharmDs, master's of engineering. I just hired a PA for my team a couple of weeks ago. So she's like the first PA our company has ever had.

Matt Burns:

Physician's assistant, right?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Yeah. Thank you. Physician's assistant. So we have a huge array of medical knowledge and background. And like I said, it's all these people who were super fascinated by science and really the wider good of trying to get drugs to people in need, but didn't necessarily want to be the ones in the lab building the drugs or doing the research, or even necessarily being with patients day in and day out, but wanting to still be helping the wider population. So we're able to kind of be on the front of everything, but also behind the scenes.

Matt Burns:

I think that's so fascinating. We talk about building a well-rounded individual with a Fordham education, and here you're at a company full of folks who have some kind of advanced degree in the sciences and the medical fields, and here they are taking that knowledge and kind of applying it in a very different way. And I think in an interesting and very important way, helping people communicate it to clients or to patients, whatever the case might be. Right? Is there anything in particular from your Fordham experience you lean on in your day to day or in this work you have?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

You really hit the nail on the head. I love all of my scientist friends, but as you can imagine, we're a pretty awkward group of people sometimes, which I think is a big detriment to a certain extent. They're super intelligent. They're in the research, they're learning all these amazing, fascinating new things, but we don't always know the appropriate way to communicate that in a way that other people will understand. And I truly feel like my Fordham experience set me up for success from that perspective, because you are required to take those more communication heavy, writing heavy, presentation heavy types of classes, and a lot of people who started taking biology as an undergraduate maybe at a bigger school that truly focuses you in on that doesn't give you that same experience. So I definitely had the chance to build up my writing skills, to think about how I communicate with other people, to try to take

what I've learned and make it more approachable for someone who maybe doesn't have the same background or knowledge or experience that I do.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So I think that in and of itself has been invaluable to me over the course of my career. And I still see it to this day with newer people coming out of their PhD that we hire at the company. Sometimes I'm like, "What are you trying to tell me right now? This is just too much information. We need to simplify it. We need to bring it more accessible to everyone." And I really do think Fordham laid the base for me for that. And I think also what I mentioned earlier with having a minor in sociology as well, and just the ability to take all of those core curriculum classes to take myself out of that science focused mentality sometimes really helped me to become a more well-rounded person who thinks about every side of the story when I'm approaching different problems. And I know we always like groan when you sign up for Fordham with the core curriculum. You're like, do I really need to take all of these classes? For sure, I 100% was that person.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

In public school I didn't really have the opportunity to take a lot of nuanced classes and I didn't have really that religion focus. I went to religious classes at night to get my communion and confirmation. But once that hit, I was like, "Mom, I'm out. I don't want any part of this." But when I went to Fordham and I was required to take some of those classes, they're some of the most influential ones that I was required to take that I am so thankful for having taken. I think one of the best ones I ever took was a class focused on apocalyptic religious texts with Father Denniston. And it really has almost nothing to do with a day to day basis. But now when we think about how we've been living in this pandemic world for a couple of years and just how different cultures have approached that mindset, it just keeps you open to different perspectives on really anything. And I think that's also been really invaluable in the scientific field to just keep an open mind to anything new that's coming down the pipe.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

You probably became really savvy at time management too, because you had a rigorous course load. You had labs and you were also involved with a lot of extracurriculars.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Oh, that's so true. I love time management though Sara, but yes, you're so right. One of the biggest things with my job now is the number of projects, number of accounts, different drugs that I work on. I have multiple people on my team right now. And if I hadn't learned how to manage my time or my projects appropriately early on, it would be a hot mess right now. But yeah, I think having multiple classes and especially being a biology major, multiple labs during my time at Fordham, as well as some of the extracurricular activities that I took part in, as well as the research that I did on my own in Dr. Banerjee's lab outside of that really did require me to try to prioritize and think through how I was spending my time and really force myself to be on top of what was going on. So I totally agree.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And back to Germany, can you tell us a little bit about that experience? How that informs the work that you do now?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Yeah, absolutely. Like I mentioned, while I was at Fordham I received the Clare Boothe Luce Fellowship. And as part of that fellowship, you are required to do research in between your junior and senior years as an undergraduate. And so I was trying to figure out what I could do because also throughout most of my life, I've been on the younger end of my class grade. So when I was in high school doing research program, a lot of labs wouldn't let you work in them until you were 18. And I was 17 when I graduated high school because I'm at the end of my year. So I feel like I've always hit up against this opportunity of like, where can I go? So a lot of the research programs, even when I was looking at Fordham had to be like 20, 21, I think I was 19 at the time. So I was trying to find the right fit for me.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

And so I ended up coming across this opportunity that is through the DAD, which is German so don't ask me to tell you what it stands for. Research in Science and Engineering or RISE program, which is kind of like an exchange program of sorts, where Germany sends some students to the United States and Canada and the United States and Canada are able to send some students over to Germany. And you basically take a little bit of a test to see which lab you want to place in. And so the lab sees who applied to their lab and you get to see the different labs. You kind of do a matching program of sorts. And so I ended up getting into that program. I was in Germany for almost two months doing really my own kind of independent research while working with one of their grad students in Germany, basically.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So got to be able to live there, immerse in the culture, which unfortunately being in a science lab in Germany, they all wanted to practice their English on me. So I'm really embarrassed to say that I never really learned German because I didn't need to, but it was a really cool experience. There were a couple other American students at the university in Germany that I studied in. So I was able to also have some connection to the US while I was there. So I wasn't so homesick because being in Germany was also the first time I had ever traveled by myself and outside of the United States. So it was a little bit overwhelming at the time to just be there in a culture that I didn't speak the language at all. But it was really awesome to be able to just be there nine to five every day in the research program. I studied new technologies to look at different drugs and binding agents, which I'm not going to get into the details of, but it was a really, really great experience to be able to do the research, but also to get to know people who were from Germany and even just from around Europe, who had all come to that university to study.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

And it was my first experience really embracing other cultures and being immersed in other cultures like that. So it was a really informative experience for me.

Matt Burns:

A good reminder to take a step outside of your comfort zone.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

100%, and always being open to different opportunities.

Matt Burns:

Speaking of comfort zone a little bit, and being open to things. You graduated in 2009, like you kind of said earlier, not the best time for the economy, but we have another cohort of folks graduating in

another difficult time, classes of 2020, 2021. Any advice you have for those folks graduating into a tough job market, trying to navigate it, thinking about your own experience?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Yeah, that's a great question. I definitely think grad school is never a bad idea, especially in the world that we live in right now, which to your point there may be not the opportunity that you're looking for when you graduate. I don't think it ever closes any doors for anyone. I think it always opens them. And I've made some of my closest friends while I was in grad school as well. I've made connections that I would totally have missed out on if I hadn't done that. So I think even just from that perspective of learning something new, getting to know different people, just exposing yourself to something else is always a good idea. I also think on top of that, like I mentioned, I didn't even know my career existed when I graduated Fordham. And I think if I had not taken that chance on grad school and just seen where life had taken me, I would've completely missed out on this opportunity because I didn't know it was here.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

And you also need to have a higher degree of some sort to work at BGB, where I work now. So if I hadn't gone to grad school and then found this out, I would've been kind of out of luck anyway, because I wouldn't have been able to even take advantage of the opportunity. I know that's not the case for every job avenue or pathway. Some are completely, completely fine having a bachelor's degree in whatever you've decided to study, whatever you're passionate about. But I think if you're really unsure of where you want to be and you don't see the right opportunity for you maybe going right into the job market, I definitely would encourage people to go to grad school. And I think sometimes people get a little bit concerned that if they go to grad school for one thing or the other they're going to pigeonhole themselves, and nobody's going to look at them without thinking they're only interested in that one avenue they went through in grad school, but I really don't think that's the case at all.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

I can just speak from my own experience, interviewing people now on my side, even being able to interview people outside of the science part of our company, but also in other parts of our company where you don't need to have a graduate degree, nobody ever looks at someone's resume and is like, "Oh, you've only looked at this and this. I absolutely don't want to talk to you at all." It's always about that bigger picture and how you're able to hold yourself and interact with other people and communicate and all of your experiences go into who you are and form you and what you can bring to the table at any company. And I really truly believe that. I think people sometimes get a little overwhelmed thinking, if I don't take this exact class and do this exact thing and get this exact grade, I'm never going to get to that job that I had laid out or that I want.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

I think we need to be a little bit easier on ourselves sometimes. So I think if people are thinking about it, I really don't think you can make a bad decision. You might maybe change your mind later on, but that doesn't mean it was bad to begin with. And I feel like most of the time we can change our minds, something my mom always used to tell me when I would get really overwhelmed. She was like, "Most decisions you could change your mind. It might not be easy to go back and redo it, but you still can." So I think nothing's usually set in stone. So why not try it out if it's something that maybe you're interested in?

Matt Burns:

And really good advice too for our graduate students, we talk about undergrads the most in this podcast, but something I didn't even realize until I started this job is that PhD candidates often have no idea what they want to do after they graduate anyway. To provide them with mentorship, exposure, different careers, that sort of thing is very important. And they should hear that it's totally okay to be in that situation right now, not really be sure where you're headed next.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

But take advantage of everything that it has to offer. Like you said, the mentorship, the networking opportunities, the friendships, really lean into graduate school and take it for everything that it's got.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Yeah, for sure. And I think even if you have the opportunity to just even live somewhere else that maybe you haven't thought about living before, it's not just about what you're studying, it's really about the whole experience that could be for you. So I definitely agree.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

So going back to when you were a teaching assistant and a research assistant, I know that was part of your doctoral program. Is it something that gave you a competitive edge and something that you would recommend others do?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Yes, I totally do. I was really fortunate, like I said, that I had that fellowship from the National Science Foundation for a few years, so I wasn't forced to teach while I was there and I could focus a lot of my time on my actual research project and my classes instead of also teaching. But I did teach my first and last years while I was in grad school. And I would have regretted not having had that experience because I think it really is another way of building on the tenets of communication that I had learned while I was at Fordham, because when you're trying to teach someone else and not only just one person, but a whole classroom of people, something new and different, and I had to teach biochemistry lab classes the both times that I taught, which are pretty intense. It was definitely helpful to be able to lean back on what I had learned around distilling down more complicated topics into something simpler, more digestible, and gave me some of that practice that I wouldn't have had if I was solely in the lab, just doing my research.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So I definitely think that from that perspective, to your point, Sara, even if you have the opportunity to go to grad school and you're not totally convinced what you want to study or what you want to do, if you do have the chance to teach or do research or really layer anything else onto that opportunity, it's only going to help you hone those more translatable skills that a lot of employers are looking for, which I think goes back to what I was saying earlier. That it's not necessarily so much always the topic that you've studied or what you've decided to move forward with. It's really about how you take the skills that you've learned and translate them into any other new opportunity that you've been able to take. And I think as long as you're passionate about what you're doing, it's never a bad decision.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

You mentioned a few professors that you had at Fordham. Were there any that you emulated in your teaching?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Probably Dr. Banerjee. I feel like she flies under the radar a lot. She was always super invested in the lab and in teaching and I think she's kind of a quieter person, so she didn't always have the spotlight on her or anything, but she was so good at identifying with all of her students and being able to pick out what you were struggling with and how she could help you walk through it and think about different ways you could approach a problem. And I feel like I never actually thought about this explicitly until you asked me this question, Sara, but I really think that she had a lot to do with how I've approached trying to teach my team now or when I was in grad school teaching to think about not just what I'm trying to convey to them, but how they're hearing what I'm saying and trying different ways of approaching it that way.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Because you can tell someone something until you're blue in the face, but if you're not telling it to them in a way or showing it to them in a way that they're going to be able to digest, you're not going to get anywhere with them. So I think having that unconscious thought maybe in my head about needing to think through how someone else might learn or perceive something is always really helpful. And I think without even realizing it, she was the one who started me thinking about that because that's how I think she approached trying to teach all of her students.

Matt Burns:

With that in mind, thinking about some current biology majors, students who might want to work in biological sciences, but don't want to be a medical doctor. Any advice you might have for those students to follow in any of your footsteps?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Like I said, my theme for today was to just really be open to experiences. And I think our world is changing at such a quick pace, especially now we're all remote. You're working with people all around the globe, or you have opportunities for things that you never really thought possible before because of this new virtual connectivity that we all have, is to really just continue to be open. I think as long as you are passionate about what you're doing, doors will open for you, and you just need to be open to different opportunities. Because I think even if you ask me now what I wanted to do with my life, like I love my job, but do I think I'll be doing this for the next 15 years? I don't know, maybe, but maybe something else will come up that didn't exist now or five years ago that will be a thing that I could work on and do in the future.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So I think just letting yourself explore different opportunities and not being so hard on yourself to decide necessarily right now what you want to do with the next 30 years of your life, but being open to what could come down your path. And as long as you just continue to try to push yourself to do what makes you happy, just being open to that. Because I think when I was in high school, I was like super hard on myself that I didn't know what I wanted to do. Felt like everyone was going to college or even in college. I just sometimes felt like I was a little bit adrift because I didn't know what I wanted to. I didn't really have that end goal of this is the job that I want to have, and this is what I'm working towards.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So it was sometimes a little bit hard for me to identify with them because I've always been a very driven person. And so I was very committed to my studies and doing well, but I never really had the drive towards an end goal necessarily. So I think looking back on it, I'm proud of myself for being that way, but at the time it was really hard. So I think just for anyone who's feeling that way, don't be too hard on yourself because it will end up working out and you'll stumble upon something that you never even knew was a possibility and that could exist. And I think, especially for people in the sciences right now, a number of careers are just exploding. So I mean, medical communications really didn't exist that much 25 years ago, we still had ads for drugs and there were education for doctors, but it wasn't the powerhouse job market that it is today. The companies are growing by the minute. My company has grown so much in the past couple of years. So I think just being open to all the different opportunities that are coming up as the world continues to change is really my biggest piece of advice.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

I also love that you talked about chasing challenges and not being complacent and wanting to be a lifelong learner and knowing that it's time to move on because you're not being challenged. I think that's really important.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Yeah. For better or worse I've always liked to put myself through the ringer. So I've definitely always liked to be continuously not only challenging myself, but learning. And I think that's one of the reasons I've been really drawn to my current position in working at BGB is not a single day has gone by where I haven't learned something new or tried a new project or talked to a different doctor. I think every day is a different challenge, a different opportunity. And one of the reasons I really do see myself potentially being here for a really long time is that no day has ever been the same, for better or worse. Some days I show up and I'm like, "Can it just be the same as it was last week?" But for the most part, it's really an exciting opportunity to be able to continuously have that change and those challenges. And I also have been really fortunate that my company that I work for as a whole also has a similar mindset that way, where they like to continuously challenge their employees, but also encourage us to be the best versions of ourselves. So I think it's been a really fortuitous coupling on my part that I've been able to find this place, but I really appreciate that you mentioned that because I definitely, like I said, for better or worse, like to challenge myself continuously.

Matt Burns:

It's never too late to change your mind. That sort of thing. One thing I think that's also neat from your story, that it shows it's also never too late to get involved with Fordham. You were gone for five years, finished your PhD. You came back and got involved in a big way. Can you talk about your time with the Young Alumni Committee and anything you've done since?

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Yes. I'm glad you mentioned that. And I think it's aligned with, I've always liked those challenges and always liked to be involved in anything and everything I can. So I've been involved in volunteer work since I was in middle school, I think I've always just been drawn to trying to raise funds, doing walks, be involved in as many things as I possibly can. And personally, I've been really involved in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society for quite a while. And that started while I was right at the end of Fordham while I was in grad school. And then when I came back from Connecticut to New York from grad school, I think

I had a friend who saw that Fordham was doing the Young Alumni Committee. And we were both like, we're still young alumni. It's been five years, but we can still be young alum. We went to the meeting and I'm so glad that we got back involved because I met both of you.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

I've made some really, really great friends for people who are also Fordham alumni, who we didn't overlap at Fordham, but we've now met each other afterwards. So I think making those connections has been awesome. And it's been really great to be able to share my unique-ish story with other Fordham alum and undergrads and even grad students. I've had the opportunity over the past few years to chat to the current biology students and the Clare Boothe Luce scholars who are currently receiving that fellowship. In the past year or so I was speaking to a group of biology students, and one of the grad students, her fiance, husband was also in the science field, but couldn't figure out what he wanted to do. And after I told her what I did, she was like, "I feel like my husband would really like that," connected us. He interviewed at BGB and he currently works there now.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

So you just never know who you're going to meet people or connect. And I think being able to be back involved and not just be able to help get other alumni involved in Fordham, which has been awesome through the Young Alumni Committee and be able to get the word out there around what Fordham has available for their alumni. And even through the Alumni Association now where I'm helping to work with Sara a little bit, it's been really great to be able to share my story and make new connections with people through Fordham. I'm so glad that I was able to rekindle my love of Fordham and come back to Fordham and be a part of the Alumni Association. And I got married at Fordham. So I think so many great connections that just continue to surprise me every day.

Matt Burns:

Christine, I guess that's all we have for you, you've been incredibly generous with your time. I want to thank you again for coming onto the podcast. You've given so many nuggets of wisdom I'm sure undergrads, grad students and fellow alumni are going to learn from, so thank you very much.

Christine Schwall-Pecchi:

Thank you again for having me. It's really been a blast, I'm so glad I got to talk to you guys today and it's been an honor. Thanks so much.

Matt Burns:

Well, that's another edition of Fordham Footsteps.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Fordham Footsteps is brought to you by the Fordham University Alumni Association.

Matt Burns:

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