

Caitlyn: Welcome back to another episode of Northeastern Next, your showcase for the stories, talents, and thoughtful insights of our university's current and future alumni.

I'm your host, Caitlyn, a current DMSB Graduate student.

Today I'm here with Elke Thoms. Elke graduated from Northeastern in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. Elke is a comedian and writer performing stand-up at various clubs throughout the country. In addition to comedy, Elke's written plays that have been produced in Los Angeles, Boston, Minneapolis and Richmond, And she's had poems featured in various Boston-based publications.

Welcome, Elke!

Elke: Hey. Thanks for having me.

Caitlyn: Yeah, thanks for joining.

So, tell me about your time at Northeastern. What were your experiences like there for your undergrad degree? I know Northeastern is also where you first gave comedy a try, so I would love to hear how that came about.

Elke: Yeah, absolutely. So let's see, I started at northeastern in 2013. I did the full 5 years, and as a freshman I started out actually as a psychology major, I wasn't, you know, totally set on what I wanted to do at the time, and it seemed like a good place to start.

But I had always been interested in writing, and I think I almost viewed psychology as like, maybe I can, you know, get to know different types of people, and write better characters.

I was being very strategic about it, and then very quickly, it became clear that I actually should switch to English, because writing was always what I was interested in.

So then I became an English major. I think technically, during my midler year. So my third, out of the 5 years.

I started stand-up at a class at Improv Boston, actually around my third year, and sort of took it on a whim.

That's sort of where the standup journey started for me, but I just loved my time as a husky. I very much love northeastern.

Caitlyn: So that's awesome, and it sounds like after doing that class at Improv Boston, you started getting involved in stand up around campus. Is that right?

Elke: Yeah, so, I did the class at Improv Boston, kind of on a whim and I really loved it. And I sort of went through this phase. I like to joke that I was hooking up with comedy for a while, where I would like do it, and then I'd be like that was really fun.

But I'll never do it again. And then 6 months would go by, and I'd be like, I kind of have the urge to do that again, and what was cool is around that time Northeastern actually started to doing a stand-up competition, which I believe was called "Last Husky Standing" and that was one of those occasions where, like many months later, I did stand up again, and was just like, Oh, I do really like this.

And it definitely was one of those stepping stones that encouraged me to start like reaching out to venues around Boston.

I performed at Laugh Boston a few times. I did win, I'm doing air quotes the "Last Husky Standing." I believe it was held in after hours.

I loved it. I had a wonderful time. So yeah, it was every one of those stepping stones in the early days that made me feel like, oh, not only do I really love this, but you know maybe there is a little bit of a future here.

Caitlyn: That's so cool.

Did you ever have any fears at the beginning of getting on stage those first few times? Any stage fright And how did you overcome it (if you did) or do you not overcome it?

Do you just kind of live with it, and joke about it, and make the best of it as you're going in your sets?

Elke: Yeah, totally. It's funny, because I always think if I could go back to my elementary school self, she would die if she knew that I was doing this because like for fun because back in the day, if I had a book report that, like, ruined my week. Just the idea of standing in front of people for even 2 minutes, to summarize something that I knew very well, was terrifying and ultimately I think it was that roller coaster -- like the adrenaline rush -- that drew me towards it.

I hate actual roller coasters, but for stand up, I think it created that same endorphin hit. So, definitely super felt the nerves with stand up. It is now much more manageable.

I like to think I'm still getting a little bit of that, you know, positive, like, yeah, that was so cool and energy around it without being terrified, which, of course, comes from not doing it once every 6 months. And instead doing it many times a week. And at Northeastern though, I definitely was facing some of that initial stage fright, but I was also a husky ambassador. I was a campus tour guide so that at least mentally I had already started doing that, and I think that actually helps me get over the additional scary stuff as a comic where You're like, how am I gonna talk to people for 15 min straight? I'm like, well, I talk about Northeastern for an hour straight, so talking about me shouldn't be that hard!

Caitlyn: I guess just, you know, trying to get started with any sort of public speaking is a really good catalyst to getting more comfortable in front of a larger crowd.

Elke: Yeah, 100%. And the more you do it the more comfortable it gets.

I think any stand up, I mean most will tell you like we still get nervous like it would be weird if you didn't, especially because you never know what the rooms gonna be like.

But ultimately you get way more comfortable like with yourself, with your cadence and your voice, and that all tends to improve over time.

Caitlyn: So I know when you graduated from Northeastern, you moved out to LA originally because you were interested in writing for TV, and you were doing comedy on the side -- kind of like how you were doing that on the side when you were in Boston, but after you got there it kind of flipped and became the reverse, and comedy was kind of the main thing. Tell me a little bit about that, and what your first few months were like on the West Coast, figuring everything out and really starting to climb the comedy ladder out there.

Elke: Yeah, totally. Again. I've always been a writer first, in that's what I did as a kid, and was very into creative writing and humorous writing and so stand up seemed like a fun anecdote side project to that which is sort of how I was treating it in Boston. I moved to LA because I was like, well, I wanna write, but I need to make money. So TV writer, it is! I moved to LA. Knew nobody. I mean, I had no contacts out here, and so I initially signed up for a stand up class. Kind of similarly, I seem to lie to myself every time. I don't even know why I'm doing this kind of as a joke, and also because I was like, oh, well you need to meet people, so surely this will be a good way to meet people while also improving this like skill set. I did meet friends there that are still close friends here to this day. But I also was like, oh, that is what it really clicked that I really loved it and wanted to commit to it. And because of just the wealth of opportunities out here, I just started saying, yes, after that class to everybody who, you know, approached me and was like, oh, I have a show. Do you want to be on that show? And then that's how your network grows, you know. Northeastern talks a lot about the importance of networking, and it is very clear and comedy, because that's what it is. You go to shows people see you, they invite you on their shows, and it sort of grew from there.

Caitlyn: So it sounds like to really get started in the comedy world, you need to network. I think that a lot of people would assume that networking is finding someone on LinkedIn and reaching out to them and sending a cold-call style direct message, but like no, you can leave your house you can go do things and meet people in the wild, even if its someone like you said how you said you were kind of in a situation where you moved there and you didn't really know anyone but you went to classes, and you started networking and meeting people, like there's kind of no right or wrong way to go about networking.

Elke: Yeah, in comedy It's, you know, networking is more like coming up to someone after their set. And being like, I love that weird joke about your mom!

My mom does the same thing. So it's a little more informal. But like the path is there in terms of you have to constantly be looking for opportunities. It's similar to networking, I'm sure a lot of people will feel where you know, if you think of like classic business networking like you've had a long day, do you really want to go to these after work events? You'll force yourself to, you know. You'll make those connections. It's similar with comedy. Sometimes you just want to duck out at the end of the show so you're exhausted, and it's 11 pm. But if you stick around and chat, that's where the opportunities are going to open up.

Caitlyn: And who would you say is your favorite comedian, either favorite, most influential, aspirational or you just think they are absolutely hilarious no matter what they put out, who is that for you?

Elke: well, I have to give the number one spot to Conan O'Brien, because I do think that he is why I am a comedian. Like he was my strongest influence growing up and I say that because, again, here I am like my whole life. Being like I don't even really like this, but I used to come home and watch Conan's show every single day after camp. You know, right, when he was going from late night TBS. I watched it every single day, like the entire show, not just the monologue. So him for sure, and then close second, I would say, is Ally Wong. She is incredible, hugely inspiring to me. I feel like she gets stronger and stronger with every special which is so difficult as a comic with her level of success. And yeah, so she would be close close second.

Caitlyn: So I know that writing for TV is an interest of yours. And of course you said Conan is kind of the be all end all for you, I would love to take on the current writer's strike that is going on. As of this recording, at least, we can't predict the future – we don't have a crystal ball and we don't know when it will end...But for anyone out there listening, there is a writer's strike going on. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about it; your perspective being in the field of writing (not as member of the guild), but being a writer being LA-based, having those sort of aspirations and influence... and everything you know I think kind of no matter what field you're in it's always such a small world, so I'm sure you've had those experiences with what you're doing as well, but I would love if you could just provide some context for anyone who's not familiar on what's going on and provide your take on it all.

Elke: Yeah, absolutely. So, The writer's guild is striking against the studios. You know. If you think of your Amazon, Paramount, Sony, and they're striking for better pay, you know, more consistent pay, I believe.

Protection against AI as well. I'm not a member of the guild yet, I certainly hope to be one day, you know I would say that it is something obviously that I, 100% support. It's so important for artists to be paid fairly for their work. And it's funny, you know what I was even saying at the beginning, where I was like I was like, well, I want to make money writing boom, TV writing, moving to LA. Even if that had been the path that I had initially taken. that's very optimistic of me to say. I do unfortunately have a lot of writer friends, who's pay is incredibly inconsistent and the benefits that they receive just continue to get smaller and smaller. Everybody is looking to reduce that bottom line, and unfortunately, writers have taken a lot of the hits.

So I'm in full support of it, and hope to one day be alongside them there. But it's very brave and strong. Everybody who is participating in that is so very supportive of it And you know, fingers crossed.

Caitlyn: Yeah, 100%. Well, thank you for sharing that.

So, for any listeners in the LA area if they want to see you in person, or if they just want to follow along on social media, and see what you're up to and what you're putting out there. Where can they find you?

Elke: So it's ElkeThoms.com, and my Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter. All of that is, @ElkeThoms, that's that's it. So you can follow me on all of those things, particularly Instagram and Tiktok is where I'm the most active, and shows I always post on my website. So especially if you're in the LA area, that's where you can find information. And if you're a husky, please come up to me after the show.

I always love meeting other huskies.

Caitlyn: awesome. So if anyone is listening and they are a husky, and you are in LA, go to the show. See Elke in person. This is your opportunity!

So Elke, because this is the Northeastern next I must ask what is next for you.

Elke: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I've got some shows here in La this week, and 2 weeks from now I'm heading to New York for some shows, visiting my sister as well, so very excited about that.

And hoping to pick up some additional festivals this year.

Caitlyn: Awesome. That's really cool! I was actually thinking of the festival circuit as music. I didn't realize that was also comedy.

Elke: oh no, they can be comedy.

Caitlyn: okay, I need to do some research on some near me.

Elke: Yeah, a hundred percent. It's very similar, except you're gonna hear of a variety of different comedians. But yeah, 100% huge for us.

Caitlyn: that's a hundred percent better! I would love that, that's cool.

Elke: You know, depending on festival. You can have the same experience of like. Oh, I just heard this act and then you go over to this table and you're like, Wow, this person's talking about something completely different.

It's a great way to just see like a huge variety of voices.

Caitlyn: that's so cool. Okay, I will be doing that the summer for sure!

Elke: Awesome.

Caitlyn: Well, thanks so much Elke, for joining this show today and sharing your background and all that kind of the comedy world. It's really awesome.

Elke: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for reaching out to me. I graduated literally 5 years ago this month. So this is really awesome for me. So thanks for having me!

Caitlyn: Thanks for listening to this episode of Northeastern Next, If this episode brought back some great memories, check out our husky starter page online to support current student endeavors, or reach out to us via our email, alumni@northeastern.edu or on Instagram [@Northeastern_alumni](https://www.instagram.com/Northeastern_alumni), to point us in the direction of a great story, for you or a friend.

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