

Keene State Today

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Adam Wade '98

Hoboken, NJ

Storyteller, New York City

Major: Communication and Film Studies

I went to Keene State to become a public school teacher like my dad and my grandfather, and because I loved the campus. It was small, and I was on the shy side. Best of all, I'd landed a scholarship that covered my tuition.

I'd always been into independent movies, so I took film classes and eventually switched majors. I enjoyed the production end of things. We made real movies with real film, and it was very creative. I was president of the Film Society, so I met all of the other film majors plus the people in the community who went to the movies we screened. It made me feel like I had a place in the world. Same thing with the radio station – I was a DJ there.

Deep down my dreams were always to come to New York and work in TV or film. Talking to people in the Film Department, those dreams seemed like a possibility. Other people were finding work in entertainment. If they could do, it

why couldn't I?

The best year I had in Keene was my sophomore year, because my brother, Matt, a UNH grad, came to get his teaching certification. This was before I dropped the education major, so we were together in classes and outside of classes. He teaches middle school geography in Manchester now.



By my senior year I knew a lot of people. On my radio show, I was starting to just kind of talk, tell stories. And I'd go to open mikes at the Night Owl Cafe on campus and at Brewbaker's in town, and talk and play the guitar. I was awful at it. But I got better. **One of the stories I would tell was about my little league days. The story was called "Fat Boy, You're a Hero." It was about me.**

I'm really thankful for the people I met at Keene State. I'm grateful for the community there. I got to New York because of those four years, and when I look back on them, well, **I don't want to say they were the best years of my life because it's corny to say that, but they were the most groundbreaking and meaningful four years, becoming an adult.** The quality of people I met in the community, and the school and my instructors. I'm just very, very fortunate.

My graduation was on a Sunday, and I had three interviews for internships set up in New York City for Monday. I really wanted to go to graduation. But my dad said, College is ending, and your real life's starting. It made sense. I skipped commencement and landed an internship at 20th Century Fox.

“Storytelling, it’s more important than ever. And it’s here to stay. You know, people want to be connected. It’s nice to look at your phone, but there’s a lot of people that want to be engaged. They want to listen to people. They want to feel. F-E-E-L.”

The internship lasted the summer, and then I had to find some income and permanent housing. I found a job at Virgil’s Barbecue in Times Square, right next door to the Good Morning America studio. The people at Virgil’s were so nice; they pretty much adopted me. I was the worst waiter, I got the worst tips, but I’d show up on days that I wasn’t scheduled to work. They helped me find a basement studio apartment in Fairview, New Jersey, at the bottom of a hill next to a cemetery. Every time it rained I’d get flooded from the groundwater and then from run-off down the hill.

So I worked at Virgil’s and played a lot of open mikes with my guitar. One of the waiters said I should apply to the NBC Page program. So every other week I would drop off a resume at 30 Rock. I did that for two years and finally got an interview. I got the job, and that was my real big break, as far as getting into the business. We’d have page talent shows, page comedy nights, so I was getting out there a lot and playing the guitar. But unlike 30 Rock the TV show, you can only be a page for a year. At that time budget cuts made it hard to get entry-level jobs, so I worked weekends at NBC Sports and I drove the van to pick up props for Conan O’Brien. This stuff was all important. **You’re meeting people. You’re in entertainment. The friends you’re making are not the celebrities; you’re making friends with the camera guys. You’re making friends with the sound guys and the scenery people.**

30 Rock at that time became my Keene State because it was a community. It’s been like that wherever I’ve moved or whatever job I’ve had – you form this community around you.

About four years into being in New York, I was working for Colin Quinn's Comedy Central show. My job was to pick up props and dry cleaning. Colin heard that I did comedy, and he asked to see a tape of my work. His advice to me was: **Stop playing the guitar. The setup, the little stories, those resonate. The songs, not so much. Focus on the stories. You know, coming to New York from New Hampshire and your family and the people you've met along the way.** It made a lot of sense, but it was a very difficult transition because the guitar was almost like a shield. And now I didn't have that shield.

But within a year I had found The Moth, a storytelling event that is huge now, but at the time, the crowds were small. They would listen, they would laugh. There are no hecklers, no mean people. It's almost like an open mike where you go up and tell a story based on a theme. The Moth has kept me here. You're working all these tough jobs, but you have something to look forward to. It used to be once a month and then it was twice, and now it's three times a month. Each time you prepare a new story. And I continue to get better.



I don't tell made-up stories. They're about my life and experiences. Like the time I got caught at Inspiration Point with my grandmother and my aunt my junior year in high school. The other kids would go to the town airport to make out on Saturday nights, while I'd take my grandmother and aunt out to eat. They had a fascination with airplanes. I did not want to be seen at the airport with them, but one night it was early so we pulled in, we watched a plane take off, and then all the kids showed up and they spotted us. So the story's about trying to deal with that and also trying to deal with, you know, the two women that love you unconditionally.

I'm also teaching storytelling now. I try to work with each person to get the best out of them and show their vulnerabilities and their strengths and everything else. I get actresses, I get lawyers, I get finance people trying to get over a fear of public speaking. It can be a way to help people overcome things, to help people find themselves.

Storytelling, it's more important than ever, and it's here to stay. People want to be connected. It's nice to look at your phone, but people want to be engaged. They want to listen to people. They want to feel. F-E-E-L. **The Moth is just exploding. The shows are selling out online. Years ago, I did shows with four or five people in the audience. There are lines out the door now.**

I've been doing it for 12, 13 years. I'm supporting myself. You definitely have to multitask. You know, the writing, the acting, the teaching, the shows. **Could my life be better? Absolutely. But you know what? I'm very happy right now and I want to just keep doing it. And I think happiness is another thing that's very undervalued.** I've been here 17 years. The first eight I lived in basement apartments and I'm asthmatic so it wasn't good, but you make these sacrifices, and every day's been well worth it. Because the reason why you're making these sacrifices, why you're living in the basement and you're working these jobs, waiting tables in Times Square – **the experiences I've had and the people I've met, they're the basis of these stories that I'm telling. That includes my experiences at Keene State College.**

Part of what is sacrificed is a personal life. I go to the local bar and I have Chicken Francaise every Thursday night, and that's about it. **I'm teaching two nights a week, I'm doing shows three nights a week. So the two free nights, you know, every once in a while I go on a date, which is great. I hope to be married and have a family soon, but the right woman has to come along.**

My advice to people who want to tell a good story? Speak from the heart.

Just be you. After I'd been doing The Moth for three or four years, I realized that the more natural and the more myself I was, the more the audience enjoyed the stories. And the more I enjoyed telling the stories. I stopped trying to be funny and I ended up being myself.