##### [00:00:01.070] - Brian Shelton

I'm Brian Shelton, and you're listening to Harper Talks, a coproduction of Harper College alumni relations and Harper Radio. Today on Harper Talks, I'm excited to speak with Michael Nejman. Michael is one of those seemingly rare cases of being both a student at Harper College and an employee. Michael served in several positions at Harper and retired as director of student activities in 2012. Michael joined me for the Harper Talks podcast over Zoom.

##### [00:00:31.780] - Brian Shelton

Welcome to Harper Talks. Thanks for being here today, Michael. How are you doing?

##### [00:00:35.460] - Michael Nejman

Very good. Thank you for having me, Brian. I appreciate it.

##### [00:00:38.370] - Brian Shelton

It's good to have you. I'm sorry that we couldn't have you back on campus today. A little bit of interference with COVID and some things happening in the studio, but thanks for joining me over Zoom.

##### [00:00:47.420] - Michael Nejman

Pleasure. It's going to be a fluid situation for a while, I think so. We just have to kind of go with the flow. Yeah.

##### [00:00:53.190] - Brian Shelton

We're hoping to get people back in the studio for these interviews soon, but we'll see how it goes.

##### [00:00:57.980] - Michael Nejman

Are you in the WHCM studio or are you in your office?

##### [00:01:02.750] - Brian Shelton

I'm in my office on campus in the D building, looking out at the beautiful pond and the Ender family Pavilion out here. And it's just it's gorgeous day.

##### [00:01:13.520] - Michael Nejman

Nice. It'd be nice to be having shows out that way.

##### [00:01:16.250] - Brian Shelton

Yeah.

##### [00:01:16.490] - Michael Nejman

I wish I was back on site.

##### [00:01:18.260] - Brian Shelton

So speaking of shows, I have to ask you, I have lots of things I want to ask you about because I'm very interested. But I love talking to folks who were at Harper College in the 70s. What was it like to be here in the 70s, man?

##### [00:01:31.840] - Michael Nejman

Yeah. I was a student in 1977 when the furthest building east on campus was the library. So literally, it was half the College that we see now. And, I mean, we didn't know any better, so it was fine. I think M building was brand new, though, for your listeners, though. My job at Harper was campus activities coordinator than the director. We used to do all the big events. So at that time, the only places we did shows were, believe it or not, the student center. And then I was the first person to do big shows and building M. So we had to make the gymnasium kind of work. So I didn't have great venues, our facilities, but we just had to work with what we had at the time.

##### [00:02:08.480] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. What was the vibe like on campus? I mean, are we in Bell bottoms and such? What's going on?

##### [00:02:14.910] - Michael Nejman

Yeah. From a fashion. In fact, back then, I hate to admit this, but I actually had a perm. If you look back, I wrote for the Harbinger. I did a weekly entertainment column way when I first started at Harper, and I was a big fan of Ian Hunter of Mott the Hoople. And I thought, do a perm. I was, like, one of the worst decisions. I think I ever did. And I was lucky enough. At one point, I got to meet him. He did a show at Dirty Nellie's in Palatine, and a friend of mine who produced the show.

##### [00:02:42.580] - Michael Nejman

Let me go backstage, and I wanted to meet him. I said, I love your music, but you helped me make one of the worst decisions in my life. I had a perm, and he said, Sorry about that mate. It was cool to meet him because that got to do such an influence on me when I was younger, that's for sure.

##### [00:02:58.490] - Brian Shelton

Well, that's really cool. And the fact that you were able to do that a pretty uncommon these days. It's kind of hard to get backstage these days.

##### [00:03:05.140] - Michael Nejman

So I know things have really changed. Obviously, when I first started out, you learn on the job. And if you walked around to clipboard and went to a concert, chances are you were able to get backstage because if you had a clipboard, you looked official and people never questioned it. So I think that's how I got to make a lot of my initial contact, as I just had a lot of Moxie. And I just go into events. And, hey, I'm Mike Nejman from Harper College. And how are you and those contacts really paid off later when I was doing a lot of booking.

##### [00:03:34.010] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. I remember when I was in College, we went to Cleveland to see this band called Rusted Root. I don't know if you're familiar.

##### [00:03:40.640] - Michael Nejman

Yeah. Yeah.

##### [00:03:41.960] - Brian Shelton

And we were all wearing our College radio T shirts. And the radio station that was sponsoring the concert. I saw one of the guys, and he says, you guys are in College radio. And so we had a chat with him, and he goes, do you want to meet the band? And he took us backstage and this giant arena to meet the band. And it was like, wow, this is so cool. So wear your College radio T shirt when you go to a show.

##### [00:04:01.960] - Michael Nejman

You know, in the business, people are so kind to people in College. So if you're a College student, if you've got students who are listening right now, use that to your advantage. If you want to learn more about a particular business, letting people know that you're in College and you want to learn more about it, and maybe you do an information only interview. Those things can be really beneficial.

##### [00:04:21.490] - Brian Shelton

So part of that, you brought journey to campus. Is that true? I hear stories.

##### [00:04:26.030] - Michael Nejman

Yeah. 77 came to Harvard College. I was the first person in my family to go to College. That was never part of the plan. My father was very bright. He told me it goes, look at it Mike. If you're not gonna go to College, you need to get a job and pay rent. And I thought, okay, I can do that. So I went to Converse gym shoes, in Elk Grove Village. And I worked in their warehouse, and I filled orders and loaded trucks. And I had this epiphany one day. It was like 90 degrees with a lot of humidity, much like today that they were talking to each other. I looked around the situation and said, there's got to be an easier way to make a living. Coincidentally, I always wanted to write. So I was doing some writing and some cartooning for their newsletter, and people took notice. And I got a Copley, think it was Coplier Padic Publications Scholarship. And it was for $150, which back then was just enough for three credit hours at Harper College. And there began my College career. It was funny. I signed up right away. I took a full load. I loved Harper in the 70s. And I know Harper hasn't changed that much now, but back then it was this very robust environment where you were making connections and you were talking to a lot of people. And I got involved right away. I wrote an entertainment column there for the Harbinger. And then I got involved. Some friends of mine around the programming board, which is now called the Campus Activities Board.

##### [00:05:43.780] - Michael Nejman

But they said, Mike, you know a lot about entertainment. You want to be our concerts chair. And I thought, okay, I'll give it a shot. And then to get to your question, one of the very first shows I did was a little known band at that time, name Journey. And we put them, believe it or not, to was Student Center. It was $2.50 to get in, which is reflective over the time. And then they drew so much power I remember the lights and the parking lots were all dimming. As a student then I booked John Prime shortly after that, and Steve Goodman.

##### [00:06:12.390] - Michael Nejman

So I had a really positive experience doing that. And then my friends who were involved with program board at Harper transferred to NIU. And they said, they got on that concert board. And they said, do you want to get involved? And I said, sure, NIU. I got to work with The Police, the Ramones, Robert Palmer. In fact, I interviewed Sting for The Prairie Sun, which was like an only entertainer type publication. And even I was writing for the only entertainer, too. And I interviewed one of my first interviews was Rush.

##### [00:06:43.050] - Michael Nejman

And they played at the small club called Beginnings in Schaumburg, which is now the DMV. So when you go with your license renewed and Schaumburg, that used to be a very cool club. It had some pretty in fact Iggy Pop play there. The Ramones played there on the truck, a lot of huge bands. I actually got to start there. So it was an exciting time. It's really exciting times.

##### [00:07:03.630] - Brian Shelton

Well, that's really interesting. And it's so cool that you had those experiences and also that so many students on both of those campuses had those experiences. I got to see those bands being what a thing to think about, right? You're thinking back now like, man, I saw The Police in a tiny club

##### [00:07:18.330] - Michael Nejman

And being able to interview Sting. I'm working the show. And back then I said, I'm writing for this paper. Can I get ten minutes with you? And he was very gracious about that. I got the interview, I got a front page story out of it. So I was getting bylines. And when you're young, you can just I recommend to all the students listening to those give it a shot. It never hurts to write a letter, an email, or get on the phone and talk to somebody and say, hey, can I interview you?

##### [00:07:45.400] - Michael Nejman

Can I do this because you never know what doors might open up for you?

##### [00:07:49.000] - Brian Shelton

Well, I tell students that all the time the worst that can happen is the person says no, and then you just move on with your day. So just go out there and ask and make it happen.

##### [00:07:56.710] - Michael Nejman

And my experience has been nine times out of ten. They're gracious. Most people want to help other people, I think that's an innate kind of thing with people. So I think as long as you're genuine and enthusiastic, I think it's to your advantage to do that.

##### [00:08:12.430] - Brian Shelton

It goes a long way. So you came back to Harper College as an employee. You became the coordinator of student activities shortly after graduating from Northern Illinois University. How did that come about? How did you go from student and then graduating and coming back and running this program?

##### [00:08:30.060] - Michael Nejman

What's really funny is I shared about how important is to reach out and get interviews and information only interviews. And when I was still at NIU, I knew I wanted to work for a record company. And my first job was actually Warner Electro Atlantic Records. And there was a crummy situation. Even with a College degree, you had to start in the warehouse. That's how they did things. And so it was really frustrating to be back in a warehouse with a college degree. And it only lasted about six months.

##### [00:08:54.550] - Michael Nejman

I really wasn't happy and the Harper job opened up. But the way I got that job, by the way, is I called a marketing person over at we. And I said, hi I'm Mike Nejman and I'm taking a journalism class and marketing and advertising as an extra credit project. If I interview you and learn more about the business, I can get some extra credit. And the marketing guy was really very gracious. And let me come in. And I interviewed him. And what I did really, though, was I was asking him, so what do you look for in people when they want to start in your business?

##### [00:09:27.170] - Michael Nejman

What would be the ideal candidate? And what's great is six months later, I went in for an interview and used all that information my advantage and got the job. Unfortunately, it wasn't the right fit for me. So at the time I needed to make more money. I just got out of College. And so I saw that the position at Harpor opened up. And I had such a great experience at Harpor I thought the truthful thing was I thought, well, I'll do this for a year or two.

##### [00:09:53.590] - Michael Nejman

Now. I'll figure out what my next plan will be. And as it turned out, it was such a perfect fit. And I loved my experience at Harpor. The people were so wonderful. And I liked working with students a lot. It was a real positive thing for me.

##### [00:10:06.400] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. I remember the first year I was teaching. I was like, well, I'm going to teach for year or two, and then that's going to be the end of that. Have 22 years later.

##### [00:10:12.940] - Michael Nejman

That's funny. That right.

##### [00:10:17.050] - Michael Nejman

So that's okay. But you were at Harper. You spent most of your career here, right? How long were you here?

##### [00:10:21.840] - Michael Nejman

Yeah. 30 plus years. I started out as a coordinator or myself, working my way as a director. At the top of my career, I was helping to produce over seeing, like, 200 plus events a year. We would get 20 to 25,000 people to come out to our events. We had, what, four or five active venues. I was using J 143 for shows. I was using the gym for shows. We were doing outdoor events. So it was really robust. And there's things that people probably don't even realize how dynamic the student activities program was at Harper for many years, we started a leadership program.

##### [00:10:58.240] - Michael Nejman

The Excel Leadership Program was the first one of its kind in the state. And a lot of the other schools, all the other junior colleges, kind of followed suit. We did what was called curriculum infusion you bring artists on campus. An author of some sort of a good example. We had Ray Bradbury, a very famous science fiction author, come to Harper, and we tied it into a faculty member syllabi where the speaker would go to the class, talk to the students, and, oh, my God, if you're reading Fahrenheit 451 and you actually have Ray Bradbury in the room to ask questions, I mean, what a cool experience is that for a community College student.

##### [00:11:33.930] - Michael Nejman

And so they would would do a daytime program or they would do daytime classes, and then they would do an evening program on campus for the community. And we were the very first school really to do a lot of that in the state. And I'm very proud of that. And then we did a lot of diversity programming, which was I think we were really ahead of the ball there. In fact, Brian, a lot of people don't even realize this. But there's a book out, by the way, I don't know if you've seen it or read at the 50 year anniversary Trig Thorson wrote it, and I helped him compile a lot of the information about all the authors and performers. And celebrities that were here on campus because we wanted to document that. But Harpor College was way ahead of the curve. Even back in 1969, when they first started doing programming. We had Jesse Jackson Jr. And Julian Bond, who are both civil rights leaders. And if you look at our history, we had Maya Angelou, Oprah, Michael Eric Dyson, Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy, Winton and Bradford Marcellus, Sherman Alexie, the Native American author who's got books and movies out to Gregory.

##### [00:12:34.130] - Michael Nejman

We had three times at the College. He's a comedian and activist. Darryl McDaniels from Run DMC came to the campus, and one of my all time favorite programs was right before I retired. Actually, we had Dr John Carlos, who, if you remember from the 1968 Olympics, he was one of the gentlemen who did the Black Power Salute along with Tommy Smith. And having Dr Carlos on campus was such a positive experience to hear his story. He said here we were getting international attention, international Fame. We were being respected and applauded on an international level.

##### [00:13:06.800] - Michael Nejman

Yet when we come back home, we do not get the same respect because we're black and we can't even get jobs so we can't get a home. And so it was really interesting for me to learn more about white privilege and institutionalized racism. And he was such a dynamic individual to work with. So it was a really good experience. And he was at Harper in 2012 right before I retired.

##### [00:13:27.280] - Brian Shelton

Well, I mean, that's all amazing and kind of leads to a question that I wanted to ask, but I have to frame it. Harvard College is a very positive place, very positive experiences here. But I have to ask I hear these stories all the time about how we used to have all these great events on campus. So I guess two questions, how do you make all that happen? But then what happened to all of that? Because it doesn't seem to really exist here anymore, right? I've started here in 2014, and we do have events on campus. We do have shows and that sort of thing, but it's nowhere near the level that you're talking about. And I'm kind of curious if you have an understanding of explanation for that.

##### [00:14:03.770] - Michael Nejman

Sure. It was a very different time, and I don't want to take anything away from Erin, who's currently doing all the cultural arts programming, and she's in charge of student involvement. There's been a shift, though, in the change, and they do more student involvement, kinds of things, lots of clubs and organizations and activities that way, which is very positive. But it's really shifted. Back when I was going to school, there was an association called the National Association for Campus Activities. NACA, and most colleges and community colleges had very robust entertainment programs.

##### [00:14:36.310] - Michael Nejman

I was very lucky. My predecessor, Jean Pankinin, who was actually my boss for most of my career at Harper, had developed this really great program with all kinds. She brought Steve Martin to the College and Oprah, for instance. And so she was very supportive. So when I came in and had visions of grandeur, which I'll admit it. I was interested with film and music and art, name it. So my big goal, my big overview, was that I wanted to bring people together over cultural events, and that was what I thrive to do. So getting 1000 or 1, 500 people to come to a building M event where there were community members who could take a look at Harper College for the first time and say, hey, maybe I want to take a class here. Or where I saw so many times where parents took their kids and they have these really positive experiences. So Harper is having this positive view in their mind. That was really wonderful. And we just kept building off of that. And I got lucky early on, too. I learned very early in my career to work with rather than compete against.

##### [00:15:40.550] - Michael Nejman

So there was a gentleman named Rick Hewitt. He was the owner of Zanies. And then at the time, he only had one night a club in Chicago. He wanted to see if there was a market for comedy in the suburbs. And I needed programming. So I got to meet him. One of those things were just kind of knocked on the door and said, Hi, man. I worked at Harpor. What do you think if we ever wanted to do anything? And through Rick, we had, like, Jay Leno three times, Jerry Seinfeld Bill Marr, John Stewart, Jeff Garlin, Richard Lewis, Paula Pasta, Louis Anderson, Rita Runner and Frank Calliando. And that's just naming a few. There were the others that we booked as well.

##### [00:16:14.910] - Brian Shelton

Let me ask you, though, do you think you could have those comedians on campus today, or is the environment so toxic?

##### [00:16:21.380] - Michael Nejman

That's a great question, Brian. Here's the big dilemma of two things. One is if you've heard the name, they're probably out of your budget at this point. So one of the things I had to do is I had to grab artist on their way up. At the time, nobody knew who Journey was or very few people or when I had Jay Leno, do you know, we had Jay Leno three times. And the third time I finally when he sold out, even though he was incredible. And now the problem is, and I sit on another cultural committee at this point.

##### [00:16:49.120] - Michael Nejman

Schaumburg Chamber Cultural Commission, the performing Arts Center in Schaumburg and the challenges now everything's so dispersed. There's so much segmentation in the market that's impossible to find artists that crossover that are within your budget, that you can sell out shows with. It's just a whole different marketplace. And so back then, Jay Leno would cross over. He would appeal to young students as well as parents and so in community members. So we were able to bring him in for $1,500, I think, was one of our early contracts and charge minimum.

##### [00:17:21.960] - Michael Nejman

Students were paying activity fees, so we always make sure that they received a good discount in at the door. So they never paid more than four or $5 at the door. And so we were able to build up this program, and we had so much success that we had so many big names over the years. Joan Jett played in building M and Violent Femmes and Psychedelic Furs on and on. And we get 15 hundred people to come. So if our breakeven point would say 1000, we would then make a profit because we would get on those hundred people in the door.

##### [00:17:50.470] - Michael Nejman

So our marketing expertise helped us out. So we built up this big program. But then I think with not only the marketplace changing, but then I think Harper's focuses were changing. I think Erin does a dynamic job, especially not with COVID. Oh, my God. I don't even know how you would do any kind of program like I used to do under these conditions, doing more things where students can get involved on the job, training kinds of things where they learn more about student government or the radio station or the Harbinger or whatever.

##### [00:18:21.570] - Michael Nejman

I think there's real value to that. And I'm not sure if they could duplicate a lot of what we did next then was a very different time.

##### [00:18:28.990] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. I wonder two things off of that. One, are students less involved on campus because there are less things for them to do on campus, or is it because they have so many other things to do? Like you're saying there's that market segmentation? Students have so many more opportunities of ways to spend their time today that it's different than what it was definitely in the 80s and 90s, that's for sure.

##### [00:18:52.120] - Michael Nejman

Right. I'm just trying to tap into that. I think we'd be really challenged my heads off to Erin and her staff, because I know that it is really challenging to say, hey, look at us. Get involved in student involvement. And why should you or why would you? And that's right. I always told my students back in the day my observation of students at Harper is that a lot of them come to campus with blinders on. They go from their car to their class, their class or their car in the back home.

##### [00:19:18.420] - Michael Nejman

And I always told my students to develop your peripheral vision, look at the world around you, get involved, make contacts. And I think to this day that's still really, really good advice. Take advantage of the fact that there are I don't know. Back in the day, there were 45 to 50 clubs and organizations. I think there's actually more now. And even if it's Zoom meetings at this point, get involved because you're going to make contacts, you're going to network. You can get real life experience. If you're on the student government, you can learn more about politics.

##### [00:19:48.630] - Michael Nejman

If you're with the radio station, you learn more about what it is to be a spokesperson. If you're on the Harbinger, you're writing articles. I'm a big proponent, by the way, of the speech and debate team. I think Jeff Pryzbylo and his team do an excellent job and a student going into any field, I can't think of a field that this wouldn't be correct, being able to speak in front of an audience, being able to connect with people and feel comfortable with that is always a benefit.

##### [00:20:17.140] - Michael Nejman

So I think at the very least, you should be doing things like that. We also have a great theater program. Kevin Long does an exceptional job. And Laura Pulio, Harper College is so blessed to have such great staff and faculty. That's my personal opinion. I think that's the case. We do a very good job of hiring wonderful people who really put their heart and soul and what they do. People like yourself. Being at the College as long as you have and being involved with WHCM and keeping that alive is important. And I think students will really benefit from that overall. Yeah.

##### [00:20:49.000] - Brian Shelton

It's been interesting taking the radio station from something that was kind of dying on the vine at the time and then bringing it back to something and then going through COVID and losing most of our people. And now we're in this big rebuilding phase. We've had so many students come to us saying, I want to get involved with the radio station in the last week that it's almost overwhelming, but we're going to find a way to get them involved. So it's really exciting.

##### [00:21:10.640] - Michael Nejman

That's good to hear.

##### [00:21:12.160] - Brian Shelton

I know you mentioned I mentioned a litte bit of this before, but you were involved in a lot of early training or what I'll think is early training for folks interested in diversity and multicultural training. How did that come about? How was that a thing for you? How did that evolve?

##### [00:21:27.010] - Michael Nejman

As I mentioned, there was an Association I was a member of called the National Association for Campus Activities and anybody who did, but we didn't. We went to these national conferences where they talked about what the hot trends were and what programming you should be looking for. And they mentioned it was back in the late 80s, actually, early 90s, about diversity. And I've always been very diverse and the music that I enjoy, what I read, the culture or whatever. I traveled to 29 countries, five different continents.

##### [00:21:55.350] - Michael Nejman

I've had lots of international experiences. So I've always loved diversity. And I thought this is something we could pursue. And as it turned out, I got my master's degree at DePaul University with their School for New Learning. And at the time, there was no diversity multiculturalism program. So I developed my own and went to the National Multicultural Institute in Washington, DC. And I got a train the trainer session. I developed workshops. I brought stuff back for Harper. I did all kinds of research. And at the community College level, most research was done at the four year level.

##### [00:22:27.220] - Michael Nejman

So I had that whole market for myself, which was kind of great. And so I saw this big niche and the market took advantage of it. So I wrote the book, the first one to address multiculturalism and diversity at the community College level. And Senator Carol Mosely Braun wrote my fore word. The National Association for Campus Activities published it, and then the Illinois Community College Student Activities Association endorsed it. It sold a lot of copies. And it was for a very long time the only book of its kind. And I think it still might be the only book of its kind. So I was way ahead of the curve, which is thrilling. But in another way, it's very sad. I think that a lot of what I was teaching back in the 80s and 90s, actually more so in the 90s, it's still so relevant because we're still having so many issues and concerns. And I should mention to Brian, I did a lot. I spoke at the national level. I did a lot of national conferences where I spoke about diversity concerns.

##### [00:23:16.420] - Michael Nejman

And then I shifted over to conflict resolution. I thought there was something that I could address, and I wanted to address because of all of what's going on in our country. And so up until 2019, I was doing workshops at community colleges in the Northern part of our state. But with COVID to kind of put the end to that. And we'll see if it comes back or not. But we'll see how that goes.

##### [00:23:34.590] - Brian Shelton

I think that's so important. Absolutely. But I know you wrote two books. Tell me about the other one, Laughing at the Sun.

##### [00:23:41.760] - Michael Nejman

So one of the reasons I had a retirement project in mind when I retired, and I had this idea for a book. It was a road trip book I had taken with a buddy of mine. And it was interesting because we were both going through these transitions. He was married and had a family, and he came out as being gay. And I never knew we had been friends for 15 years. I didn't have a clue. And I had another bad relationship, mostly my fault, another failed relationship.

##### [00:24:07.950] - Michael Nejman

So he talked me into going going with him on a road trip out west with his we had, a U-haul, filled with his artwork. And our goal was to get to LA, where he was living with his partner. And along the way, we had it was a rolling confessional. And Bob was actually his name is Bob Fisher. He's an artist. You think he would have an art degree, but he didnt', he had a psychology degree. So he was sort of my therapist along the way. So we had some of the incredible conversations.

##### [00:24:35.160] - Michael Nejman

And what's really funny, though, is when I was thinking about writing the book, I approached him because since he would be a subject of the book. I said, Are you okay with this? I'm going to write about our road trip. And he goes, oh, is that the one where you almost threw me over a cliff? And I had a pause for a moment. I completely blank that out. I had forgotten. But he has this way of getting under my skin. We're like brothers in a way.

##### [00:24:55.210] - Michael Nejman

And he just needles me all the time. And I think I got to a point where I was literally ready to toss him over a cliff. I think I needed to threaten him. So he'd just back off. Once he said that, I said, oh, I forgot about that. Yeah. That's how I'm going to open the book, actually. So I put out the book in 2015, and it was up for a couple of IP Awards, the Independent Publishing Awards, and sold a lot of copies and had some success with it.

##### [00:25:17.260] - Michael Nejman

And I'm actually working on another book called Chalk Marks in the Rain, another memoir of a situation that I had in Paris back in 1986. So I'm working on that. So it's an opportunity for me to work my muscle when it comes to writing.

##### [00:25:32.050] - Brian Shelton

Sounds good. So I have to say, as a radio person and a person who teaches production and does this podcast, you have a very impressive is career. And all of your stuff is really fantastic. It's really great. But for me, the fact that you work with Jim Derogatis and Greg Kot.

##### [00:25:49.990] - Michael Nejman

This is how my life unfolds sometimes. I got to be honest with you, Brian, I never had a plan. Never. I was not one of those people. I knew what I was going to do. And so things just kind of open up. And in fact, I saw Jim DeRogatis on WGN this morning talking about the R Kelly trial, write that book out called Soulless. If you haven't read it, you gotta read it. Jim and Greg to Harper two or three times, and they did extremely well. We brought in the classrooms, we tie in the music classes, and then we also had the events for our community. I love their show, Sound Opinions. It's a podcast on WBEZ.

##### [00:26:24.220] - Brian Shelton

It's amazing. That's an amazing podcast. And it's an example that I use for all of my students. I say, go listen to this, right? This is what you want to do. Yeah.

##### [00:26:30.730] - Michael Nejman

I'll pass that along. And they're great guys to work like, oh, my God. In fact, what's funny is Greg Kot was actually he edited some things that I had published in the Tribune. And I don't even know if he remembers those days, but I had met him way back when. And Jim, I always followed you. They're the Ebert and Siskel of rock and roll. I know that's an older reference to a lot of your students are probably not going to know who that is. But Ebert and Siskel were film critics.

##### [00:26:57.250] - Michael Nejman

One was for the Tribune and one was with the Sun Times, and they had this kind of competitive relationship. Jim and Greg has the same thing initially, where Greg was with the Tribune. Jim was with the Sun Times. I read both of them all the time. I love their Bylines. I love what they had to say. So I brought them the Harper. And what's interesting is once I mentioned to them I was retiring and they took me out to dinner. And to my surprise, they said, hey, would you be interested in representing us?

##### [00:27:20.740] - Michael Nejman

They thought that I did such a great job. I'm very detail oriented in overtime, very neurotic, I think, which is traits that are really positive for somebody who has to be focused on details. And so I started booking them, and I've worked with them now since 2012. So almost nine years or so, and I book all of their College and library and community types of events, and that's just been a joy. I so love working with them. They're total professionals, fascinating people. It's so funny, too, that if you saw the movie Almost Famous, where he opens up the drawer and there's all these backstage passes and ticket stubs.

##### [00:27:54.900] - Michael Nejman

I have a whole display of ticket stubs and backstage passes from as early as the 70s through current times and photos of Keith Richards and Mick Jagger. I've got autographed albums from Muddy Waters and the Police. I am such a fan. And I thought I knew a lot about music until you start chatting with Jim and Greg. And I can't tell you how many times that we'd be backstage at an event waiting to go on. And I make some comment about something I just heard some. I really love this new record, and they would fill me in on how it was so derivative and important. Well, I still like it, though, so sometimes having critics as friends can be challenging. But for me. And I'm so glad that you're a fan, too, because I love what they do, and it's such a privilege for me to work with them.

##### [00:28:41.380] - Brian Shelton

Well, those guys are great. And it's funny that you compare them to Siskel and Ebert, because I'm currently listening to a podcast about Gene and Roger about the history of that show and everything and how their relationship developed. And I grew up with those guys. And you're right. Jim and Greg are very much the Siskel and Ebert of rock and roll, for sure.

##### [00:28:59.550] - Michael Nejman

And do you know we had Ebert and Siskel at Harper, they spoke in the student center. If you look in the book by Trig Thorson on the 50th anniversary book, you'll see it's a date because it all blends in my mind. That's why I have to always take notes and looking for. But they spoke in the student center, and the program they did was exceptional. They did what do we look for in a good film? And so I had read their columns all the time. And so it was so insightful to get this additional information and front yard type of thing and a student activities. I couldn't ask for a better situation. So that was very cool.

##### [00:29:31.540] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. It's funny what you said about them critiquing your music choices. I have a colleague who he's a mentor of mine for teaching film history and also down to dinner to talk to him. And I just get schooled. I know a lot. Like, I really know my stuff, but I just get schooled by this guy every time I sit down.

##### [00:29:47.600] - Michael Nejman

Another dear friend. And I knew him for years, and he was so supportive of everything I was doing at the beginning is Dan Guyer, who wrote for the Daily Herald. And he supported a lot of the shows I did. We had Robert Altman coming out to the College and Paul Bartell a lot of different directors and stuff in. And we showed a lot of cool films, Almodovar and a lot of the early French films. Harper, we did a lot of experimentation to see what kinds of things that students would like.

##### [00:30:14.470] - Michael Nejman

And Dan was so cool. He supported what I did. We became friends, and he was very sweet about letting me come to some of the film screenings. And that was another situation where I would see this film with him and go, wow, that was really a great film. And then he was very calmly and sort of pick it apart and say, well, you did notice that the police were shooting on a public street and people could have been injured or killed. And I'm like, oh, yeah, I didn't think of that.

##### [00:30:39.480] - Michael Nejman

Drove on the Express way this way. And again, like you said, he schooled me, I think. But those are all beneficial, because then you get to really learn about what to look at, what to see when you go to films.

##### [00:30:50.820] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. I should say his name Ron Schultz is my mentor, and he's a film collector as well. And it's wonderful to be schooled by someone so intelligent, but sometimes you think, my goodness, I know nothing.

##### [00:31:01.450] - Michael Nejman

Well, there's nothing wrong with liking something for your gut instinct.

##### [00:31:04.960] - Brian Shelton

That's true. That's true.

##### [00:31:06.190] - Michael Nejman

I'm a sucker for a good melody. I'm a sucker for. And I we all have our guilty pleasures. And I think that's not a bad thing. Yeah.

##### [00:31:14.470] - Brian Shelton

I tell my film students all the time it's okay to like what you like, but just let me show you some other stuff. Okay. So you became a Harper Distinguished Alumni in 2013. What was that like for you? That had to be an honor after working here all that time.

##### [00:31:27.930] - Michael Nejman

What an incredible honor. And I'm so grateful that people felt that what I did here at Harper was important. There's nothing like putting 30 years of your life into a program. It's so nice said people acknowledge that I don't have any kids and so I consider a lot of my former students part of my family. And it was so great to work with thousands of students over the years. And first time I was a mentor, the things we taught them and got them involved and got them enthusiastic about things.

##### [00:31:55.720] - Michael Nejman

And some of my former students got involved with MTV or they got involved with I've got friends who are working at theaters now based on their experience at Harper College. So that's really wonderful to look back at your career and know that you've if you've had an impact on some people, it's very positive and fulfilling.

##### [00:32:13.810] - Brian Shelton

That's great. So you've touched on this a bit already. But I try to ask every one of the guests that we have on the show a very simple question, but I think an important question. What advice do you have for current Harper students or for someone who is thinking about coming to Harper?

##### [00:32:30.660] - Michael Nejman

What I shared earlier, I think, is still effective advice. I think it's important for students to take off the Blinders when they come on campus. Look around. There's lots of great opportunities to connect with your faculty members. Connect with your other students. What's bad about social media now, in my opinion, is that you're always focusing on your phone. People don't make phone calls, let alone personal connections, as much as they used to. From my observation, meet students in your class. Ask them what their game plan is if they have similar interest, think about it.

##### [00:33:00.680] - Michael Nejman

If you're in a a journalism class or a theater class or whatever class you're in or math class or nursing class, find out what those other students in the class, what are they doing? What's their game plan on? Where are they transferring for a 4-year school? What kinds of internships do they have? And take advantage of that because making contacts that's been the secret of success for me, and Harper College is just a hot bed. There are so many opportunities. And I was going to mention, too.

##### [00:33:29.280] - Michael Nejman

Besides, like with clubs and organizations, I wanted to share just to make sure to get that in here. My wife and I have a scholarship for nursing students. Because of COVID, we realized how critical it was for students who wanted to go into the nursing field that they got help to do that. And so we opened up the scholarship and it's out there. But getting involved with the Student Nurses Club or any other club on campus, a lot of them belong to national associations. I know that for a fact.

##### [00:33:57.060] - Michael Nejman

So if you want to go into a particular field, find the related club and you could possibly go to some conferences on the colleges dollar on the student activities dollar, which is a great experience. So take advantage about it or using people like yourself. Find a mentor. Find somebody who can help you figure out your journey, your route to success.

##### [00:34:19.750] - Brian Shelton

That's all great advice. Thanks so much for being here. Thanks for everything you've done to Harper. That scholarship. I mean, to do that, to give back in that way, I just admire that so much. That is so great. Think of you and your wife to do, and that's it's just amazing.

##### [00:34:32.620] - Michael Nejman

Well, Harper College makes such a big difference in both of our lives. And in fact, that was the slogan. The marketing slogan when I first got there was Harper makes a difference. And boy, it's so reflects on my experience. I got my education thanks to Harper. I got my career thanks to Harper. And I got my wife. Thanks to Harper's. I met her through Harper. So Harper did make a difference in my life. And I hope it continues to do so for all the students that are there.

##### [00:34:56.440] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. In reflecting on what you're saying, there my friend and colleague who's your friend in College as well. Jeff Pryzbylo. So one time in a speech, he said to be a Hawk, and what he meant by that was to be involved, to be totally in on Harper, to absorb and take in and use Harper for all that it has. And then to go out and promote Harper for all that it has as well to be a Hawk. And I really took that to heart when he said that. And I've always tried to live by that as a faculty member here at Harper College. So thank you so much.

##### [00:35:25.080] - Michael Nejman

Thank you so much, Brian. It was a real pleasure.

##### [00:35:27.690] - Brian Shelton

Michael Nejman is a man of many talents, author, agent, conflict resolver, and a 2013 recipient of the Harper College Distinguished Alumni Award. If you're enjoying Harper Talks, please subscribe. And while you're at it rate and review us so that others might find us, Harper Talks is a coproduction of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio. Our show is produced by Shannon Hynes. Our technical producers are Eric Bonilla-Sanchez and Meric Renner. This episode was edited by Ashley Rosenthal and Brian Diaz. Our theme music was created by Aiden Cashman.

##### [00:36:02.370] - Brian Shelton

I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.