Interview keywords/topics: Ireland and Appalachia, Community

Interviewer: GG
Interviewee: JG

GG (00:02):

This interview is part of an oral history project for WRC 2202, a Spring 2024 course about Ireland and Appalachia. This semester we discussed different ways of using and understanding historical information, and we are creating our own historical documents in this project. My name is GG and I'm here today with JG, and we are in Belk Library on April 18th, 2024 on a lovely, sunny afternoon. [00:00:30] Um, hello, JG?

JG (00:33):

Hello, GG.

GG (00:33):

How are you doing?

JG (00:34):

I'm doing great. Thank you. Thank you for having me here.

GG (00:37):

Oh, it's so awesome having you here, <laugh>. Um, so my first question for you is, what is your major?

JG (00:45):

I am a physics major.

GG (00:48):

Awesome. Um, was that like your first choice or did you come here as something else?

JG (00:54):

I, it was, it was not my first choice. I actually kind of ended up in physics in a very roundabout, [00:01:00] like, through a very roundabout path. Um, I came to App State as a political science major, thinking I wanted to do law. And then as I went about my life over the course of a year, and, you know, talked to friends, talked to family about being a lawyer, three different lawyers came up to me unsolicited in public and told me not to do it. And I found that pretty convincing.

GG (01:23):

<laugh> maybe.

JG (01:25):

Yeah. <laugh>. So, so then I was undecided for about [00:01:30] a semester and while I was undecided, I actually started doing some physics research. Um, and I just enjoyed it so much that I was like, might as well spend the rest of college and then probably a PhD and the rest of my life doing this.

GG (01:46):

That's so awesome. <laugh>. Oh, that's, so, so when you, so you said you were doing research and then you decided, did you, was it like, did you decide just because of the research you were doing? Or was it also like, were you working [00:02:00] with people that you were like, oh, I really like this group. Like, I don't know, like what the community of physics people is like here at app?

JG (02:08):

Well, it, it's a really good community. When I first became a physics major, I was not really in that community. I was just working with one professor and then another student. Um, but after I became a physics major, my second year I started taking those major specific classes. Uh, and that's where I really got connected [00:02:30] with the community. Um, I'm involved with PandA Club, which is the physics and astronomy club, P-AND-A, PandA. Uh, so that's been, I think, really nice. Physics obviously is, well, maybe not, obviously physics is challenging, at least for me. And so it's, I think, really, really important to have kinda that positive community that, you know, challenges you and is like a little competitive, urges you to [00:03:00] try your best , but also is supportive and not trying to, I guess, drag you down or like discourage you from succeeding. Um, and I think that's one of the things I really like about being here as opposed to maybe some of the schools that people more associate with physics is that our community is so supportive and so positive and so tight knit. Um, yeah, I think it's been really, really helpful.

GG (03:27):

Awesome. Um, so [00:03:30] I know that, I mean, we just speaking on your physics community, but like, I mean, Boone is, it's medium sized, but it has a wide variety of people. Like do you only, do you only dabble in physics or do you have, like, like are you into like the music scene or is there like anything else that like you love to do here?

JG (03:51):

That, that's a good question. Um, so I rock climbed for most of my childhood. Competitively. Um, and I [00:04:00] came to App State partially because, you know, it's just in the middle of the mountains and there's all this climbing. I've done a lot less climbing than I thought I would do, but all of my roommates are rock climbers. A couple of them I met through Watauga Residential College actually. So I kind of have that community. Two of them are math majors, so that's fairly similar to Physics <laugh>. But, um, yeah, no, that, that's been really, nice. I think there is a lot to do in Boone. Definitely. [00:04:30] Like, you know, indoors music and everything. But I'm, I'm more on the outdoors, side of things.

GG (04:38):

I, I used to rock climb in high school, but I was never good at it. I loved though.

JG

We should go together

GG

Yeah. We totally should. Oh, okay. Um, so back to your, back on that physics track. Yeah. Um, so what is your big future plan with your physics degree? <laugh>, if you have one or like your dream?

JG (04:57):

My dream. Um, [00:05:00] well, I, I definitely wanted to get a PhD. Uh, I'm gonna be applying next fall for PhD programs. Um, and then hopefully after that I, I would like to get a job as like a staff scientist at a

government lab or, um, for the past year or so, I've been working at NIST, um, National Institute of Standards and Technology.. And I found that really, really rewarding. Um, yeah, I don't know, [00:05:30] maybe after the five to seven years of physics research, I'll decide I wanna be a professor or something else. But right now that's the dream.

GG (05:38):

And I know you just got back from a fun trip in DC

JG (05:41):

I did. That was, that was actually to visit, it was technically to Gaithersburg, Maryland, which is right outside of DC. Okay. Um, but that was, that was also to visit NIST. Um, we were doing stuff with an electron beam ion trap. It was very fun.

GG (05:56):

That's so cool. Oh, well, as we said it, or [00:06:00] as I said at the beginning of this interview, um, it is a part of a project for the class, the history class that, um, JG and I are both in. Um, and, uh, so I just wanted to ask, how has your understanding of Appalachian history and culture changed this semester? If it has, or if you feel as though you already knew it all.

JG (06:20):

All, <laugh>. Well, I, I definitely don't feel as if I already knew it all. Um, I, I think as I said, you know, I kind of associate Appalachian [00:06:30] with like being outside and just the Blue Ridge Mountains and the wilderness and rock climbing. And when I thought about the region, it was mostly that like nature and not really the people or the culture that exists in that area. Um, so I really enjoyed learning about that through this class and getting a little bit, I, I guess a broader perspective on everything that there is here. I also viewed the Appalachian region as like just North Carolina, and it is much, [00:07:00] much bigger. <laugh>.. Um, but yeah, one of the things I thought was really interesting was we talked a lot about, um, the idea of the Appalachian region as like the othered other

JG (07:14):

So people, especially in, you know, the Northern United States will sometimes view people from the South and people with a Southern accent negatively or assume that they're less competent because they speak that way. Um, but [00:07:30] there's a similar effect with people in the south who aren't part of Appalachia do almost the exact same thing to, you know, Appalachians. And so they are, you know, two steps down on the totem pole of discrimination <laugh>. So, yeah, I don't know. It was interesting to learn about that. And it's given me, I notice it a lot in the media now, and I'm, I think I'll be more aware of how I approach [00:08:00] those topics.

GG (08:01):

Does kind of open your eyes, I feel. Um, so speaking about the othered, other, uh, your major being physics, um, which is obviously in STEM. And I know that STEM is like super, super competitive to get like a quote-unquote, like good job. Like you wanna be like top at the top, I guess. And, um, I know that a lot of that is centered around like, going to like a reputable school. And I was just wondering if like, you feel that going [00:08:30] to a school with the name Appalachia, like as, as the first like, name of the double name, like, do you think that affects your future prospects? Like outside of the area or like, or, or am I just crazy

JG (08:44):

<laugh>? I, I definitely don't think you're crazy. It's something that I've thought about that I, I really didn't anticipate this as I, I wouldn't call it an issue, but I didn't anticipate it as something that was gonna be on my mind when I applied [00:09:00] to the school or when I decided to go here. Um, but yeah, I, I've definitely had some experiences, especially as you kind of get out into the scientific community and you're in these situations where you're interacting with people who are maybe from those schools that people more typically associate with. Yeah. Uh, you know, science or being reputable there. Um, one, one example that has stuck in my mind for a little while is, uh, [00:09:30] at the internship I mentioned at NIST last summer, I went to a tech demo day with two of the people in my cohort.

JG (09:38):

And like, we were all there doing the same internship. we all got in. Um, but the person behind one of the booths asked us what schools we went to, and it was me and two guys, and they went first and they said, Princeton, also Princeton. And you know, the person on the other side of the booth going, oh, oh, wow. And then I was like, [00:10:00] Appalachian State University. And I don't know, I, I did, I, I felt some complicated emotions about it. I knew that I, I don't think they even knew what school that was 'cause this was all the way out in Boulder. But I, I think there is something to the idea that it can impact people's perception. But I mean, I applied to that program with the other [00:10:30] two Princeton people and we all got in.

JG (10:32):

So I think that it's, I I don't feel like it's really gonna be holding me back. I've had some opportunities here that I don't know that I would've had otherwise. Um, and I also think it's really important, as much as, you know, I've maybe felt negatively about having to say Appalachian State after the two Princeton. That's really, you know, my own biases. And I think that that's something that should, I really need to work on [00:11:00] because in order for people to not like, respond negatively to that name, people need to go out into the world and like be good scientists and say proudly I'm from Appalachian State University. And I think that's really the way to combat it, rather than trying to hide that part of yourself.

GG (11:19):

I can totally Totally see that. Yeah. I feel like it's deeply internalized, even even for like the Appalachian people. Like, and it's honestly become some sort of like weird niche like joke I feel like [00:11:30] Yeah. For us, like anytime I'm like, yeah, I go to Appalachian State ROLL NEERS

JG (11:34):

Yeah <laugh>,

GG (11:35):

I'm out here. Yeah. And I, I mean, I love App. It's one of the greatest schools that I've ever seen and I applied to like 10.

JG (11:42):

So yeah. I applied, I applied to 10 <laugh>. Yeah.

GG (11:44):

But, um, yeah, I, you were talking about like wanting to see scientists, like be proud to say that they're from the Appalachian or just say they're from App State, but like, honestly to even say they're from the area. Um, I know that you are in your PandA Club. Uh, I, [00:12:00] I know that y'all do a lot of outreach and I was just wondering like if you had any fun examples of like up and coming young scientists in Appalachia?

JG (12:08):

Yeah, absolutely. So I am actually the outreach coordinator for our PandA club. Um, and I just well sort of finished, temporarily finished a project to build, uh, a laser balloon popping demo. which is exactly what it sounds like. You use lasers to pop balloons. Um, it's, it's very, very fun. Um, [00:12:30] but yeah, so we brought that to Build Fest I think last Saturday. Um, and that's a huge event sponsored by a children's museum here. It's called the Children's Playhouse. And they put it on every year and have all these kids from all over the region come and like learn about science and yeah. I don't know. We, we do a lot of events like that. We'll have, um, field trips come to App State or like we will go out. [00:13:00] Um, I think it's really important to kind of what you said, like this isn't a region that people necessarily expect scientists to come from.

JG (13:14):

But a lot of that is just people not being exposed to it early enough or realizing that, I mean, it took me a long time to realize that scientist was a genuine thing. I could be. I, I didn't really understand that that was like [00:13:30] a real job. Someone would pay you to go just do research. Um, and I think having members of the club, like these college students go to schools or have the kids come to us and like then be able to see real physics majors. like being excited a lot. I mean, I'm not from Watauga County, but several of the people are from that area. And I think being able to be like, yeah, I went to your high school and look at me now I'm [00:14:00] doing science. It's so important.

JG (14:03):

And yeah, it's something I'm really passionate about. Um, something that I think we're trying to combat with that. is uh, they call it brain drain, where the people who have the potential and get lucky enough to have like an opportunity to go do something really cool, like be a scientist or be a doctor, whatever, um, [00:14:30] a lot of them will leave the area. Um, and some of that is just, you know, if they don't see an opportunity to be educated or to have the opportunities that they need in the area, um, but a lot of it is just not having jobs for them. To come back to. And so, you know, creating this culture where we have the next generation of people and saying, you know, you can be a scientist and you can do it right here, you can learn how to be a scientist right here and you can come back and have [00:15:00] these jobs. Um, I think that helps to improve an area.

GG (15:07):

A hundred percent.I think it's honestly like, I feel like you can, there's, there's definitely a big shift that you can feel in our generation, in this area of like wanting a change and like wanting progress. I don't know. But thank you so much, JG. This has been So fun <laugh> um, thank you to all you listening out there. I hope you live [00:15:30] wonderful lives.

JG (15:31):

<laugh>. Me too. <laugh> <laugh>.

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GG (15:34):
Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

JG (15:35):
No, I think that's about it. Uh, <laugh>.

GG (15:38):
Alright, well bye now.