Interview keywords/topics: Ireland and Appalachia, Community

Interviewer: MM
Interviewee: TQ

MM (00:00):

Hi, my name is MM. I use she/her pronouns and I'm here with–

TQ (00:06):

TQ. She/her

MM (00:09):

Um, we're both current students at Appalachian State University and we're recording this in Belk Library on April 18th, 2024. This interview's a part of an oral history project for WRC 2202, which is a spring 2024 course about Ireland and Appalachia. This semester we discussed different ways of using and understanding historical information and we're creating our own historical documents [00:00:30] in this project. So TQ, um, how would you describe your identity or identities in particular? Uh, like in, as a member of different groups?

TQ (00:40):

Um, I am, I would identify as a cis woman and for my sexuality, I'm just queer. I would date anyone. I don't really have like, uh, opinion on sex or gender. I am also Cherokee indigenous from Oklahoma, so western band [00:01:00] and I practice, um, Cherokee, um, spirituality in particular.

MM (01:07):

Um, has your identities changed during your lifetime?

TQ (01:11):

Uh, yes. Whenever, obviously when I was younger I didn't really understand my sexualident–sexual identity, but during Covid is when I really discovered, like, um, at first I thought it was lesbian, but the person I'm dating right now is non-binary, so I identify as queer and that's how it's kind of evolved.

MM (01:30):

[00:01:30] Mm-Hmm. Um, so you're from Oklahoma. That's very interesting. How would you describe your hometown, especially now that you live in North Carolina, which is quite a ways away from Oklahoma?

TQ (01:42):

It's always interesting because every time I'm up here people are like, describe like, the place that I lived in North Carolina before I moved to Boone is still like pretty small. And they describe it as like a small town. And then even Boone is kind of described as a small town because it is besides [00:02:00] the students, but my actual hometown is 10 times smaller than this. It's wider because, um, in Oklahoma it's so flat you don't like push everything together, but it's like, small, poor, and there's not a lot of people around. And that's because, you know, obviously indigenous people got shoved to like a poor state and everything. And we live about an hour from like the, like the official reservation. But we go there all the time [00:02:30] because that's where I have to get a lot of my important stuff done.

TQ (02:33):

But it's very conservative, very small town mindset. So every time I go back there, my family doesn't really understand like different identities and they don't understand like the, the idea of transness. So it's kind of hard for me because I am dating a trans person. But, um, this course has actually helped me, like, love my hometown and everything more because [00:03:00] being so far away from my family is hard and I don't really know what makes it like, well actually, I feel like the most interesting thing is like where, um, the place I would live near is where this trail of tears led through actually. And I just think the actual, like the indigenous people there in general makes it really special. 'cause even though it's small and poor and everything, they still have like, traditional games there and powwows. So I think that's really fun.

MM (03:30):

[00:03:30] Talking about, like your hometown and how, like you use the word poor to describe it, um, with those like systemic issues relating to how native people are treated in this country specifically, were you impacted by Covid in like a different like way?

TQ (03:48):

So whenever Covid hit, I was in North Carolina. I had moved to North Carolina when I was in seventh grade, so I've been here for a while. But I think it has impacted me in general because you [00:04:00] have to think like family, family, um, trauma type thing, of like the poorness there, it's kind of like transferring. And then my mom, she worked at the casino 'cause I did live on the Cherokee reservation for a little bit. And in North Carolina, should we clarify that? And whenever, you know, she lost her job because you know, no one's going to a casino. And so like, we were living off like government and everything. [00:04:30] And so it was like, I didn't feel like it didn't impact me that much because it was not that much different. But I don't know, it's like a hard thing because my mom, she grew up in extreme poverty and everything. So like anything like, it was just more than what she had and it was enough to support us and everything, 'cause my mom didn't go to college, neither did my dad. So I'm just, I was just very like, I don't think it was that bad. [00:05:00] But also we weren't like on like the super like far end to where like, we had access to like good internet, 'cause our internet was really bad. And like, it was just like, it was definitely not the best, but it could have been a lot worse.

MM (05:13):

Okay. That's a good answer. Um, during the COVID-19, uh, pandemic, did you, would you say you learned anything about yourself or like maybe more about your family going through that?

TQ (05:25):

I definitely learned I cannot do anything online. I cannot trust myself to be like that. [00:05:30] But my, I didn't have, like, a really like strong, stable like life to where people were doing helping me do my homework. So it was like, very independent and I don't know, I feel like I learned more about my– my being instead of like my, my per– myself as like a student. I learned about like my sexuality, what I liked and everything. And like my friends and I started dating my current partner during the pandemic of 2020. [00:06:00] So, I think that's like what I learned the most. And then like, I obviously got closer with my like siblings and stuff, which since they don't live here right now, it's very hard 'cause I really, I really miss my sister. So.

MM (06:14):

That being said, like learning about who you are and like getting closer to the people around you, does that, would you connect any of that? Like what, what are you proudest so far in your life? Does that have anything to do with–

TQ (06:27):

Um, I'm very proud of myself [00:06:30] for going to college and getting a second, like a higher education 'cause my mom didn't go to college. My mom's mom didn't go to college and my dad didn't go to college. So, and like a lot of my family since they, they all like live in poverty basically. So like going to college, like besides my dad's family, which, um, they went to college, but like a lot of my, like almost no one in my mom's family went to college. So they didn't really support me and like understand it. And [00:07:00] so that's why I'm like really proud of and like, following what I wanna do with my life and not like letting people like tell me what to do. People who don't even have degrees tell me what to do. And I think it's really important for me to like do what I want.

MM (07:14):

So that being said, what are your opinions about going to college? Like the value of a college education?

TQ (07:22):

I think it's really interesting because whenever college became more widely available [00:07:30] to people besides just like the top rich percent, I think it was really encouraged and really important and everything because you could go to get a four year degree and you could get a good house and like everything, like you didn't necessarily have to go to grad school or PhD. But now if, if you can get a job that pays more than a four year degree if you don't go to college. And now, [00:08:00] and if you do get a four year degree, you can, you still get like, it's like barely anything. Like, like you might be able to get 60,000 depending on what your um, your area of study is. So I think it's important to go to college, not just for money but like, it's like you learn a lot of things.

TQ (08:19):

You learn a lot about different people, different cultures. And I think it's important to understand like different people's lives and not just be such in like a small town world or like your own mind. [00:08:30] But I also understand why people don't wanna go to college now. Like people, people still can't afford it fully. It puts you in debt and then like the, the jobs you get out of it aren't always guaranteed. Like most, like I know psychology, you have to go to grad school to even be a therapist. And my friend who's literally graduating is gonna like, they're still looking a job and like the jobs they have are like barely like not even [00:09:00] that much. And it's still like work five days a week and you have to work an overnight and it's like, I think it's important to go to college, but I think it's okay for people not to want to go to college and I don't think it should be like looked upon on. And I think um, blue collar jobs and like trades are becoming more popular especially.

MM (09:18):

Yeah. I definitely agree. I think now as we have more materials to do with whatever we want, I don't think college is the only path to success in the modern day and age.

TQ [00:09:30]

I agree.

MM

Especially trade school like you said. That's very true. Um, so that being said, is it your college experience, what you expected it to be or what you were led to believe it to be?

TQ (09:43):

Uh, no. Not at all. I thought I was gonna be having more fun and I thought I was gonna go to parties and I thought I was gonna be going doing all this cool stuff, but it's like quite the opposite. And the worst part is like you're depending, [00:10:00] at least my experience, a lot of my professors, they're not willing to help you outside of classes. Um, so it's not really what I thought it was gonna be like honestly. And it's hard and it's kind of um, isolating. Especially when you don't live close to your family and especially, I don't know, it's just, it's just completely different. And I mean I'm glad I came to college, but it's like I think no one can really know what [00:10:30] their college experience is gonna be like. And it's like I can't even go party or anything because everything around Boone is like super conservative and everything. So like it's not super, um, at least the parties, they're like really open parties. They're really not safe for me to go to.

MM (10:48):

Um, what courses have you been taking like that have professors like that with your program of study?

TQ (10:54):

So when I first came in I was a chemistry forensic science major. And so [00:11:00] honestly I did really good in chem one and chem two. And then I went, got to Orgo and um, like a pre-calculus chemistry class. And literally my Orgo professor, he was like, half of you were gonna drop out of this class and blah, blah blah. And like literally last semester I knew this girl who had taken the class the second time with the same professor. And she said last semester so many of them went and complained about the professor [00:11:30] and they said that he was gonna be required to have a class schedule and what was gonna happen because he didn't, he doesn't post, he doesn't do notes. He, he lectures the whole time. So if you're not there in class, it's not gonna be able to work.

TQ (11:42):

And it's like a really short class and it's like full of tons of people. So it's like you can even ask questions whenever you do it makes you seem stupid. And he try, he thinks that he's like the smartest person in the world when he's not. And so they promised this last semester students that something was gonna [00:12:00] happen but then he literally didn't change. And literally I think like we had our first quiz and most of us made like sixties and that was high. That was a high, that was a high. And it was just, he does not teach and he's tenure here so he like, he can't get fired and I think he will probably get renewed. And then when I was like at my last straw, I needed extra time for an Orgo lab report. 'cause the lab reports, [00:12:30] once you get past gen chem, they're real lab reports.

TQ (12:34):

You don't just follow a guide, you physically write like 12 pages about what you did in the experiment. And it's in a scientific way. And I emailed the chair because I emailed my, my lab instructor and I was like, um, can I have extra time? He's like, no, I can't give you extra time. Like that's just the policy of the um,

the department, the head of the chair. I'm like, well that's stupid. And so I emailed the chair [00:13:00] of the professor. Still to this day I've not gotten a single email back. Literally. And it's just, and it's so sad because whenever I was changing I did end up changing my major and whenever I did my qu– quantitative analysis, um, lab professor, like she knew like I could do it and she knew what I like I was capable of 'cause when she asked she was like, is it about grades?

TQ (13:24):

Like I want to help you succeed in everything. But I was like, no, I just can't do it. I just can't see myself [00:13:30] going to the line of work. And like I genuinely think if I had a different kind of like set of professors, I would've been able to do it. And I did freaking– and like I feel like it's really sexist too. I've experienced a lot of sexism like in my department from men and like it's just horrible. And like it's always the straight cis white men who are saying that the chemistry department here is so good even though half of their experiments don't work 'cause they have bad equipment. So.

MM (14:00):

[00:14:00] What did you change your major to after that?

TQ (14:02):

I'm right now a dance study major with a minor in integrative learning experiences.

MM (14:08):

Awesome. That's quite the jump. How did you, how did you go from like chemistry to dance? Like how did I guess grapple with such different courses of program of study?

TQ (14:19):

So when I was in third grade I started a ballet and gymnastics class and I loved it. And, but then I moved because I traveled with my mom [00:14:30] and so I didn't get back into dance until I started what is winter guard slash color guard, which is like flags in the air rifle saver. And a lot of that includes dance. My dance instructor was a rockett and so she was really big on dance. And so I just knew I loved performing. I loved guard and I loved dancing. And so I was like, this is what I want to do with my life. I just thought about it all the time. I was like, I wanna teach dance. I wanna go and like instruct [00:15:00] people, like I wanna perform, I want to do like things that I love. And so that's why I, and I just felt like it was right for me. And then the integrative learning experience, it has a lot to do with Watauga classes and I'm part of Watauga Residential College. And so like part of the classes is you physically go out and do stuff and like that's a great skill to have especially with such a physical major. It's like good to be able to do stuff like that.

MM (15:30):

[00:15:30] Definitely. Are you in the color guard here?

TQ (15:32):

I did do the Color Guard last fall and it was–

MM (15:34):

How was that? Yeah–

TQ (15:36):

Interesting. The best part was that we went to Universal for free. So that was my favorite part. And then I'm also part of the winter guard here and we just got done with like our championships and we meddled third place. So I'm very happy about that.

MM (15:50):

Okay. Um, I don't really have the best transition here prepared, but I'm gonna ask the next question anyways. Um, how would you [00:16:00] describe the current climate on campus?

TQ (16:03):

Horrible. Disgusting. I hate it here. I don't even wanna be here anymore, but I don't really have a choice so I'm gonna finish it out. But I hate App State. It is horrible. The, thankfully we have a different chancellor coming in because the past one literally for marching band we have to practice on the football field here, which is like really like a big like privilege 'cause a lot of bands don't get that. And so she [00:16:30] wanted to kick us off for practice and make us go practice on literally half the size of a football field. So the band is like over like 500 members. And, and then you have the guard, which is like 30 members. Like how are we supposed to fit five– like almost 600 people in like a really small space for a meeting that was not even on the football field.

TQ (16:50):

It was like in a whole like building, like it's like the football building. I don't how to explain it, but she literally wants to kick us off for that. I'm like literally you market the football. [00:17:00] And so that is really annoying. And then you have the expression tunnels, like why there was no point in changing them for one, which they might still be changed, but they're gonna get sprayed, painted over, taken away. Freedom of speech on and like expression on campus. And then you have the Wey hall, literally I knew a friend whose professor, the reason that they had to close it down was because a piece of concrete from the ceiling fell in this professor's office and like if she wasn't in there it could have got [00:17:30] killed. Yeah. And then so you have like that whole thing which isn't even gonna be done till like next year then there.

TQ (17:38):

And it's just like the stabbing did not even know about it for like 20 minutes after it happened. Like the school should have been put on lockdown. Like that's what should have happened. Nothing happened, everything was normal. It's like no one even cared. And so, and then on top of that, the students here, if you're not queer, there are a lot of super bad people here. like me and [00:18:00] my friends get hate crimed on campus daily. I'm not even exaggerating. I pictures taken, my friend got a drink thrown on them for walking on the sidewalk. And um, me and my partner were being called lesbians even though my partner is non-binary, which is just transphobic in general. And it's like, I literally hate this place, but gotta do what you gotta do.

MM (18:23):

What year are you?

TQ (18:24):

I'm a sophomore. Second year.

MM (18:27):

And you're not planning on transferring?

TQ (18:29):

Oh no.

MM (18:29):

Okay. [00:18:30]

TQ (18:30):

Okay.

MM (18:31):

I see.

TQ (18:32):

Okay. I think it's gonna be okay. It's just like the social aspect about being in Boone. It's really hard and there are queer pockets within Boone. Like I feel like Watauga is definitely one, but it's like I can't, my friends and me can't go out and do a lot of things because we're gonna get hate crimed, we're gonna be recorded and like, it's like, oh yeah, just ignore them. But it's so much whenever like, okay, like literally we could physically be hurt. Like we could have, we could be followed, we could be [00:19:00] like, you know, people like when they get hate crimed, like they might do something, they might think it's like, oh whatever, but it's really not whatever. And emotionally it's overwhelming.

MM (19:11):

Talking about the like queer pockets in Boone, especially like relating it back to Watauga, I know you're a part of the Watauga Residential College. Did, or does being in that like I guess residential college, did it teach you anything about what a community looks like in practice [00:19:30] or how it should be in practice?

TQ (19:31):

Yes. I love Watauga so much. It's like such a safe space for like any person. You don't, you don't even have to be in Watauga. You can like still come to our events and everything, but it really has because all of our classes we're like, it's more discussion based generally. And we'll be in like I remember last semester, or no, it's like two semesters ago I had a class and we literally would just like sit in a circle and talk about like what was like whatever we were talking [00:20:00] about that day. And like even though like there were people I don't like, but that's gonna happen everywhere. I was like, compared to all my classes, it's like so much better because I'm not just sitting there being lectured. I can build like relationships and everything and I can build understandings with people and I really enjoy that. And so, and also it's taught me like how to bond with people more and do, like whenever I go out and I'm older, how do I create a community space where people feel happy [00:20:30] and accepted and like they wanna be there. And so that's kind of what has taught me.

MM (20:36):

I definitely agree with the WRC class that we're in right now. This is the first one I've ever taken and I definitely feel what you're saying about it being an open discussion rather than just getting lectured at. So like with this class, with this specific WRC class, how has your understanding of Irish history and culture changed throughout the semester?

TQ (20:57):

Whenever I started this class, I had no idea what Irish history is. [00:21:00] It honestly took me like three weeks to understand stuff still. 'cause like Irish and Scottish really confused me even though they're completely different. I know that, but I have like learned a lot because I know about the troubles and then the bog bodies were one of my favorite things to learn about. I just think it's so interesting to learn about different cultures and everything. And so I am really happy about it that I chose to take this class even though it's really confusing at times and like I really have to push myself to understand like what is [00:21:30] being talked about. Um, it's just like, and then like our connections between Appalachia in Ireland and like I did not even know about any of that. And it's like I'm really happy that I was able to like learn about Irish history because like it's a white culture and so a lot of times white cultures can be grouped together even though Irish or Ireland was colonized by Britain and they had their own types of, um, they had their own types of their, their own culture and [00:22:00] their own language that was taken away from them.

TQ (22:02):

So even though they aren't like technically like a POC community, it's important to recognize like their own culture and history.

MM (22:10):

Mhmm definitely. Um, what other, I'm curious what other WRC classes have you taken that have been like, this is an awesome class. I love this, I love this specific topic.

TQ (22:20):

So your first year in Watauga you have to take Watauga classes for both semesters and they're both six hour credit classes. So, um, the first [00:22:30] one I took, oh gosh, it was about food and about food and Appalachia and just food in general. And so for our physical part we went down to the food hub and we volunteered like every other week we would switch off on who went. And so we learned about food poverty and stuff like that. And so for my final project I like presented on like indigenous food communities and how like it's hard they don't have access and everything, how it's affected their health and everything. [00:23:00] And then my, the semester after that I took, it was like a global experience about we let, we read books from every like other culture and then we talked about like different topics like sexuality and religion and stuff like that. So I really liked that class 'cause we read really good books in it and so. And they've all been with Professor Martell.

MM (23:30):

[00:23:30] Oh really?

TQ (23:31):

Yes. I don't know. I don't know why. I'm just obsessed with her classes.

MM
That's really funny.

TQ
And then I'm taking her class next semester too.

MM (23:37):
Really? Which class?

TQ (23:38):
The hon–, it's the honors, like the one that's the next Ireland class.

MM (23:43):
Oh the one that, the email that we got.

TQ (23:45):
Yeah

MM (23:45):
I thought about signing up for that but I didn't know if it fit in with my schedule. Yeah. That's awesome. Lucky, I really like this class too. Okay. Well I think that does it with all the questions. Thank you so much.

TQ (23:56):
Thank you.