Interview keywords/topics: Ireland and Appalachia, Community, 2024 Election

Interviewer: SJ
Interviewer: CW

SJ (00:00):

[CW: Okay, just press record.] This interview, conducted in Belk Library on November 4th, 2024, is part of an oral history project for WRC 2202, a fall 2024 history course. This semester, we discussed different ways of using and understanding historical information and we are creating our own historical documents in this project.

CW (00:29)

I am CW; I'm a sophomore, um, and my expected graduation date is 2027.

SJ (00:35)

This is SJ interviewing CW. I'm a recreation management major, a sophomore, and my expected graduation date is Spring 2027.

CW (00:47)

and I'm a chemistry major. Forgot to mention that <laugh>.

SJ (00:51)

So, let's get this started.

CW (00:53)

A hundred percent.

SJ (00:54)

So, CW, how are you impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? How did it change you? What did you learn about yourself and those around you? Is it still impacting you?

CW (01:07):

Man, I mean, yeah. I'd say the biggest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was that it kind of like stripped me bare in the sense that, like all the habits, all the things that I thought I had going for me kind of just all disappeared in that two-week, two-year sort of period. Because whenever they opened up schools for like the hybrid learning, I never, I didn't go because I didn't want to, I didn't want to get COVID at all. So, I was pretty socially isolated. Um, I realized like I wasn't as functional of a student as I thought I was, and it was just a big wake up call. And I mean, to say that I'm still affected is just absolutely the truth. The fact of the matter is, is the COVID-19 pandemic opened my eyes to how I need to be as a student, um, and to how into just how I need to be as a person in general.

SJ (01:54):

Okay. I have got another question for you.

CW (01:59):

Yeah.

SJ (02:00):

This isn't regarding the pandemic but rather the upcoming election. So, what are the main events, current events, or political topics of 2024 that you're interested in?

CW (02:12):

American fascism is incredibly alarming. I'm a firm believer that if you were to describe Hitler-era policies to your average Republican today, they would, and you just did it with an American flavor, and you said it was immigrants instead of Jewish people. They would wholeheartedly agree. I think the fact of the matter is, is that we are incredibly radicalized as a people, and it's just creating just a dysfunctional dis democracy. I am incredibly worried because I feel that if Trump wins this election, then we're gonna have four years of anti-intellectualism, um, racism, homophobia, just bigotry of all swaths. And I truly do believe that the soul of our country is at Stake. Hmm.

SJ (02:56):

So why are you hoping that Trump loses the election?

CW (03:03):

Because, but there's a couple reasons. He's a convicted felon, for one. Um, he's a known bigot. He has completely, completely fumbled the economy in his, uh, term. He had a great economy coming from Obama, completely ruined it, and did it in a way where he could blame Biden politically. I feel that a lot of the rhetoric that Trump pushes is about the failures of the Biden administration directly stem from his failures and his administration. Um, I, I mean, you can just look at the accounts of his aides. His, uh, national security advisor would sleep in gym clothes because he was scared that Trump would fire off an unauthorized nuclear strike. Uh, he's an unstable person fundamentally. And I think if you look at the other side of the aisle, you see Kamala Harris; she's an incredibly accomplished lawyer. She's been on the prosecution and the defense side. She's always been fighting for the people. Um, and, and I think her policies are just sound, I think specifically the issue of reproductive rights is very, very apparent this election. I think the issue of climate change is very, very apparent. And the fact of the matter is, is that if Trump wins, he's going to be giving tax breaks to the oil Barr and billionaires. He's going to be giving tax breaks to anybody. Like there is no ins, there's no green economy under Trump. And particularly now whenever we're experiencing all of these effects of, uh, global warming, all this climate change, I mean, it's, it's very important to wake up, to open your eyes and to engage with the scientists, engage with the science, and I mean, That's pretty much it.

SJ (04:33)

So, do you have a prediction on who's gonna win?

CW (04:38):

I think Kamala’s gonna win. Um, I think if you look at voter turnout historically, the more voters that turn out, the more Democrats win. Um, I, you can look at the rally size. I think that that's, it's kind of a weird

metric to gauge the actual popularity of a candidate off of the size of their rallies. But whenever Trump is so consistently struggling to fill up venues, and Kamala Harris is just constantly having lines around the block, I think it's pretty clear that Kamala Harris is going to win. But the fact of the matter is that we live the electoral system that we have doesn't see people voting, it sees land voting, and unfortunately, there's a lot more land that is read, so we'll see.

SJ (05:18):

So, in the future, what are you hoping would change about the electoral college process?

CW (05:28):

I think we either need to institute ranked choice voting. Um, this will help dismantle the duopoly between the Republicans and the Democrats. Um, I think the Electoral College, as it stands, is kind of obsolete. It was initially created to equalize the votes between less populated areas and more populated areas. But the fact of the matter is, with how urban development is, with how people have been moving away from the rural areas, it just leaves these incredibly unpopulated areas with maybe a couple hundred thousand people, uh, out-voting genuinely cities with tens of millions of people. So the fact of the matter is, that the current electoral system is just not analogous to a democracy the way that I see it.

SJ (06:12):

So why do you think it's important for people of the future to hear about your experiences of the events of 2024?

CW (06:22):

I'm a firm believer that history repeats itself. Um, Mark Coltrain, who's the special collection [librarian] who does all this oral history stuff, likes to say that history rhymes. But I'm a firm believer that it simply does. And I think if we make a marked effort to make sure that our circumstances are known to the people, then at the very least, even if we fail, the People in front of us can learn.

SJ (06:48):

How do you get news and information about what is happening locally, statewide, nationally and globally?

CW (06:54):

I get a lot of my news. I first hear about events on, uh, social media. I would say my favorite. I really like to get sort of cast a wide net and see like, okay, this news reporter reported this, this news reporter reported that. And sort of, I don't take, I take everything I hear with a grain of salt, and I only start to sort of form conclusions once I see a lot of commonalities between them. And I think sometimes there's a very clear-cut picture that's painted, and sometimes it doesn't take many different sources to sort of conclusively say, okay, there's only one real way that this is being reported. But I think other times it's like it takes going to international news outlets specifically. Um, I think, as it stands, international news outlets are generally a little bit better just because of how sensationalized American media has become. I mean, case in point, how Fox News won a lawsuit by arguing that their entertainment and not an actual

news source. Um, so, so I guess, uh, the short answer would be just a variety of sources and sort of seeing what, uh, is in common between them.

SJ (08:00):

How well-informed are you about what is going on locally, statewide, nationally, or globally?

CW (08:08):

Um, I'm definitely much more informed nationally and globally than I am statewide and locally. Um, I think those issues ironically are the least impactful, the national and the global ones, to my day-to-day life. And yet I know the most about them, and the statewide and the local things that are most impactful to my local life, I don't know much about. Um, but I would say I strive to always have an opinion on, uh, sort of what's going on in the world. Uh, I wanna always be able to have a conversation, maybe change somebody's mind and, and so I try and stay pretty affirmative. Hmm.

SJ (08:46):

All right. Now, let's shift away from politics and think more about the planet. So, we should all take our part to determine a solution for climate change. What do you think about climate change?

CW (09:04):

I mean, I think It's the most existential pressing issue that we have. I think none of this electoral, none of this election, none of this history that we've been discussing will matter ultimately if the planet can't facilitate human life to the degree that it has today. I mean, the fact of the matter is, we are seeing increasingly strong, increasingly unpredictable storm systems. Um, I can only imagine how stressed out your average meteorologist is nowadays. Um, if you wanna point to last year at App State, we got to experience literal arctic weather as, um, the Arctic vortex, uh, sort of shuffled through the United, the continental United States. None of this is normal. Uh, the fact of the matter is that all of this is unprecedented and all of this is directly traceable towards fossil fuel emissions and climate change. Um, if we don't do something in the next 10 years, we are going to be past the point of no return. And I try not to think about it because my individual agency regarding the issue is incredibly low, and yet the stress and the anxiety that I feel from it is disproportionately high. Well, I'd say proportionately high, but I can't let myself feel that because otherwise, I mean, it's just a ball of anxiety and depression about the future Of the climate.

SJ (10:25):

So we just had a storm come past our area about a month ago. Do you think climate change had something to do with that?

CW (10:35):

I think So. I mean, I think if you look at the rhetoric, uh, moving around that storm, Helene was initially supposed to go through, um, Florida actually, but I, I forget the specific meteorological phenomenon. Uh, another storm system actually sort of slungshot it up through the East Coast. And I think, I mean, I can't say for certain, but that sort of just highlights that the unpredictability of these storm systems and, and the fact of the matter is, is after Helene hit, there was three or four systems that everybody was super,

super worried about. I mean, Florida got hit again, uh, the name is escaping me [Ed. note: Hurricane Milton], but there, I mean, it's just, it's just a catastrophe. And this is the start of the season.

SJ (11:18):

So, with climate change amping up each year, do you expect to experience more storms in the nation?

CW (11:29):

Yeah, and I think the other thing that we could expect is places that don't historically see storms are going to get storms. Um, there have already been sightings of storm cells in like forming in the middle of the Atlantic and instead going east towards Europe than West where they traditionally go. Um, yeah, I just see, I fully expect unprecedented weather events to become the norm.

SJ (11:55):

Uh, that's too bad, but let's hope that there's a positive outcome to all this. Yeah. Let's, let's hope, uh, speaking of weather patterns and the impact on the Boone area, uh, what do you think people should have done differently? Uh, now that the storm has passed through our community?

CW (12:19):

I mean, I think Helene was largely a wake-up call. I think while there's no reason to expect hurricanes to hit this far on the mountains, I think it definitely highlighted the failures of our infrastructure in the community and specifically at the university. Um, I'm a huge proponent in advocating that the university is growing too fast and is experiencing growing pains as a result. Um, I believe that a lot of our buildings are outdated fundamentally. I mean, you could look at Appalachian Hall, you can look at East Hall, you can look at Walker Hall, you can look at parts of Garwood Hall, even the quote-unquote nicer buildings are worse for wear, to say the least. Um, and have been, they have needed renovations. I think if we were to do something different, it would just be future-proofing. It'd be storm-proofing. It'd be making sure that our buildings can actually withstand the next 10 to 20 years of Appalachian State's functionality.

SJ (13:19):

You mentioned the term growth within your response. Why do you think Appalachian State is experiencing so much growth?

CW (13:29):

Well, I think our school is particularly well situated to handle a large amount of students in some ways and in some ways not. I think obviously the terrain makes building housing, uh, an issue, but I think it has a very central location and it has a lot of very enviable programs. I'm personally a part of the second-best chemistry program in North Carolina. Um, I know that our arts programs are fantastic. I know that our psychology programs are fantastic. Our math programs are fantastic. Our physics programs are fantastic. There are facilities here that people want to have access to. And I think on top of that, people transfer a lot from App State. Um, you see, a lot of people come in their first semester and realize, okay, I don't like the weather here as much as I thought I did. I don't like the walking as much as I thought I did. And they, and they just leave. So I think a part of that growth is the fact of the matter that we have to offset the

incredibly high transfer rate that we experience. Um, but, but it's sort of just a multitude of things. I think if I were to narrow it down, uh, and summarize that whole spiel, app state is just particularly well situated to educate a large variety of people.

SJ (14:41):

Yes. So do you think, uh, the results of the upcoming election will impact the amount of growth for university?

CW (14:54):

Absolutely. Um, I fully expect Kamala Harris to, at the very least, not defund public universities. I cannot say the same with how Donald Trump's, um, platform around education is, uh, notably wanting to dissolve the Department of Education is one particularly alarming thing. I think the Department of Education is generally a good thing. Um, and I think, uh, the universities who are critical of Trump, and I mean, that's sort of just a general fact. You look at most college professors; they lean Democrat. Uh, there are very, very few minority who lean Trump. I think these sorts of institutions of thought are going to become more and more persecuted as they were in other fascist regimes, which I truly believe Donald Trump is attempting to institute. Uh, you know, the rise of American fascism and all that, what I mentioned earlier. Um, I just don't think if Trump is elected that, education and intellectualism will take the same shape that it has been even over the last 15 Years.

SJ (16:08):

Okay. Now, let's mention a different subject. Let's talk about the university as a whole. So, how and why did you decide to attend App State?

CW (16:23):

Well, sort of going into, Uh, playing off of my answer to how the pandemic affected me, I realized that the person that I am today is largely a person that was formed externally. So to say, like none of my character traits are really, they were generated and they were propagated through the external wishes of those around me, the external pressures of the community that I was raised in. And I think that sort of left me feeling very, very empty in a way, um, because I wasn't, I'm not me, and I don't really know what I look like. Uh, and I knew that App State had a huge variety of people. My sister went to App State, and she absolutely loved it. She graduated last year. Um, so I always knew I was seeing the community helping her move in and things like that. I loved the weather, I liked the walking. Um, and I knew that their chemistry program was fantastic and had a lot of research opportunities. And that was sort of the one thing that I could reliably say I liked, which was my chemistry and studying chemistry. So, sort of just to find myself, I guess. That's why I came to App.

SJ (17:34):

That's good. So, what advice would you give to next year's incoming students?

CW (17:40):

Oh, where to begin? Where to begin? I think get outta your dorm. And it doesn't necessarily mean get outta your dorm and talk to people because Lord knows I don't do that. But it just means like, don't

study and sleep in the same place. Don't relax and study in the same place. Like, you need to really understand the psychology of having places. Um, and I think the implications of that because one of the big things that I learned in my first year is if you don't split it up, you're sort of always just going to be a mess of, uh, anxiety and worry because you know, you're in your, um, you're in your dorm, and that's where you sleep, that's where you relax, but that's also where you do your work. So you're constantly thinking about your work, you're constantly thinking about, but you wanna relax. So, it just creates a very conflicted state of mind. So I would say that's, first off what I would say. Um, and then the only other really universal piece of advice would be to study the pro study your program of study and look at degree works. Because I have heard so many people complain about their advisors not doing their jobs without realizing that it is very much possible to be your own advisor, and you just need to take charge. You need to be very goal-oriented because if you come into school, if you come into university, if you come into college with sort of these loose expectations for where you want to be in four years, you are not going to, you are not only not going to meet those very loose expectations, but you're not going to find yourself situated for success once you graduate. So I think have a plan, take charge, see the school, I mean, it is a beautiful area. It's a beautiful area, so go out and see it.

SJ (19:20):

I agree with you. It is indeed beautiful with all the mountainous views. But you also mentioned, uh, studying as a challenge with facing difficulties. Speaking of challenges, what has been the most challenging aspect of your time at App State?

CW (19:41):

Probably rebuilding my learning from the ground up. Uh, my first semester was not good. I passed with C'S some B's. I think I got an A, um, but it's not nearly what I wanted, how I wanted, or how I expected myself to do. So the hardest thing was definitely, well, first off, understanding that the student that I came in as is not functional enough to leave this school, uh, as a functional, uh, as a functional adult, uh, fact of the matter. So I had to really sort of look at my foundations, look at how I learn, look at how I could change, look how I could change my schedule, and just changing myself. I mean, change is always hard. Change is always incredibly hard.

SJ (20:27):

Uh, I agree with that. Speaking of change, how have you changed since you arrived at App State?

CW (20:36):

I mean, I'd Say I'm slowly, slowly becoming more honest with myself. Um, I've become, honestly, I still don't talk to people, but I never really talk to people. Um, I'm a hundred percent more productive than I was. Uh, whenever I came in with high school, it was always like kind of me struggling to catch up. But really in my second semester of my freshman year was whenever I saw myself actually being ahead. Um, and then this year, the most noticeable change was that I became a morning person. Um, so yeah, I mean, I guess not that much, but We're on the track. We're on the track towards change.

SJ (21:19):

That's good. How do you compare your high school self to yourself now?

CW (21:25):

I mean, myself, Now I'm just 10 times more proud of what I was; I felt very pretentious in high school in a way because I felt like I was above it all. Um, I felt that the people that I was around weren't engaging with the schooling as much as I was. And even if they may have gotten higher grades than me, I, I kind of paradoxically felt like I was getting more out of it than them. And I think it was just a very self-assured and very, very ultimately toxic attitude because not only would I be bringing people down around me, but I would also be, uh, sort of lying to myself that I was a much more functional person and student than I was. Um, and, and I mean, as it stands now in college, I mean, I've just been really taking it as it comes. I mean, I think cutting back on the ego, cutting back on any of that, and just simply trying to be the best regardless of how the people sort of being the best in isolation, not being the best because of the people around me, if that makes any sense.

SJ (22:30):

Indeed, it does. Uh, has your life transformed since you arrived at App State?

CW (22:40):

Yeah, I would say so. I mean, it's, becoming a morning person is definitely, uh, the biggest transformation. I used to be the person who would be asleep at 2:00 AM every morning, and I'd still be getting like eight hours of sleep, but I'd be waking up an hour before my 10:00 AM, and I wouldn't really get anything done. And I would find myself, like, at the end of the day, after I'm done with all my classes, I had a bunch of work to do, and I was ultimately just kind of unhappy and stressed as a result.

Uh, so becoming a morning person has definitely improved my mental capacity. I mean, I wake up at six-thirty every morning, go straight to the library, get as much work done as I can, and then go to my classes. So then by the time I'm finally done with everything, I can just call it quits at the end of the day and relax.

SJ (23:23):

That's good. If you went to a different university or a community college or didn't attend college at all, what would your life have been like?

CW (23:37):

Don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I mean, it's a weird thing to try and follow like an uh, way forward and to really like, think and rationalize how it would be. But I think, I mean, maybe if I went to, if I went to a different school, maybe it'd be the same thing, maybe it wouldn't. I mean, I mean, it's really hard to say. I think if I went to another university, another college, I think it's fair to say that I might've ended up similar or samey. But I mean, if I went into, like, a community college, I would still be around my friends from high school. And as much as I love those guys, they're not really functional people. Um, they're sort of on their own journeys, and you know, our paths just split. And the path that I have right now is so sort of shrouded in trees that I can't even see the adjacent paths that I may have taken and what they may look like.

SJ (24:32):

Alright. I got one final question before we wrap up the interview. That question is, what has changed about you over the years?

CW (24:54):

Not a lot. Not a lot. I mean, I was always a quiet kid. I never really, um, meshed well with the other people around me. And it's, it wasn't necessarily for, like, a lack of interest or it was more so just a lack of trying. I think I would receive a little bit of pushback, um, and then I would just immediately crumble. And that came to social situations, that came to academic situations. And I think if one thing was to change about me, it was that I got a lot, a lot, a lot more comfortable with failure. And I really like to understand that failure is a part of success, is completely different than actually applying it to your own life. And I think to actually apply, like, a lesson, like, that takes experience. It takes a lot of living and it takes maturity that I just simply didn't have. So I mean, if anything, I'm kind of just an older person of that same kid. But I mean, it just goes back to, like, the fact of the matter that like, I, I kind of feel like a person that was built up from the outside instead of a person that was built up from the inside. So, I mean, I'd say my, my change is infinite, you know what I'm saying? I, I feel like I truly have infinite potential with where I could go. So while I may not have changed much so far, I think, I mean, I mean there's always the future. There's always the future, indeed.

SJ (26:21):

That's right. So, thank you for listening to our interview. My name is SJ

CW (26:24)

and my name is CW.

SJ (26:26)

I hope you all have a great day. Go App!