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

Interviewer: KD
Interviewee: DB

KD (00:01):

Hello, my name is KD, and today I'm interviewing

DB:

DB.

KD:

Um, and today is November 4th and it is 10:13 AM. We are in the Belk Library at Appalachian State University, um, conducting our oral history project. So, you ready to get started?

DB:

Yes.

KD:

<laugh>. Okay. Um, starting off strong, um, how would you describe your identity or identities in particular as a member of different groups or communities such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, et cetera? <laugh>?

DB (00:38):

I would say that if you were to write down like all of my identities, you would say I'm a white queer

KD:

<laugh>

DB:

Appalachian woman, grew up in the Episcopal Church. Um, I'm a Democrat, a liberal <laugh> <laugh>. Um, I am an outdoors person. Uh, I am a theater person.

KD:

Nice.

DB:

A musical person. I don't know. I, I feel that I hold a lot of identities and a lot of the identities that I identify with

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

um, come from the personal connections that I make with people

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

In communities. So I identify less with like the term like of like whiteness.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

even though like that is, that's something that I, I'm like, I receive privilege in a certain experience from that identity

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

that I can't separate myself from, but I don't feel emotionally attached to that label in the way that I do with womanhood or,

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

um, being in the Episcopal church or, um, queerness like that feels a lot more reflective of who I am.

KD (02:05):

Yeah. That's cool. It means a lot more to you.

DB (02:08):

Yes.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

But it's also like, it's important to be aware of like the way that my whiteness affects my identity

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

and the way that it informs the, how I'm able to move through the world as opposed to others. But it's, but whiteness is less of a culture or an informative factor of like how I act and who I am.

KD (02:29):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB (02:30):

I feel personally.

KD (02:31):

Yeah. Would you say this has changed like throughout your life?

DB (02:36):

I mean, I think there was definitely like a moment in time that I realized that I was like queer and I really like

KD (02:41):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>.

DB (02:42):

took that label to mean something in who I am. Um, but I also feel like it was always there. I just didn't have like a word for it.

KD (02:50):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>.

DB (02:51):

Um, and there was definitely a time in high school where I was very like anti-religion and I was very like, you know, I've grown up in the church, but I really don't believe in any of this stuff.

KD:

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>.

DB:

And like, I really don't think that it's something that I will be involved in as I grow up. But coming to college I found myself like finding comfort in the Episcopal church. Um, and like I think growing up in the Episcopal church has given me like a very specific experience with Christianity.

KD (03:25):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB (03:25):

Um, especially when it's been used for like, so much like horrific stuff in this country.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

It's odd to claim that as a label that I'm like proud of, but I feel like I learned my values and the way that I moved through the world from the Episcopal church and I find that to be like the most informative of my like, politics and my belief that like everybody deserves rights and

KD (03:57):

Yeah.

KD (03:57):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

like a livable life and Yeah.

KD (04:00):

Yeah. No, I think that's really cool. And I kind of feel similar 'cause I've, um, grown up in the church too, specifically more like non-denominational.

DB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

KD:

But like, I definitely get that in. I mean, obviously the church and church culture has been used to kind of produce and justify a lot of hatred.

DB:

Yes.

KD:

So I definitely <laugh> get it. It kind of can feel some guilt from that at times, but Okay. Kind of shifting gears, um, what do you think are some of like the broad perceptions of our generation?

DB (04:32):

Um, I think from older generations they see us as these like, um, chronically online

KD:

<laugh>

DB:

depressed, anxious,

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Snowflakey, fragile

KD:

<laugh> people.

DB:

Um, and it's interesting because I think that's kind of like a broad perception, but also like my personal experience with like older people in my life is like this. Like, you guys are gonna save us and like it's all on you.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

And it's like, yes, they are empowering to us, but it's also like this like heavy responsibility

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:
of like all of the stuff that previous generations have done to the world before us

KD:
Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:
like coming down as this like, huge responsibility for us to fix and like for our generation to deal with.
KD:
Yeah.

DB:
Um, but yeah, I think we're seen as like this alien form of human being

KD:
<laugh>

DB:
because like nobody before us had the like, same like media literacy and like ingrained, um, instinct for like, the way that technology and media has like, overtaken our world.

KD (05:52):
Yeah. So would you say like those stereotypes are fairly valid?

DB (05:56):
I mean, I think we grew up in an age where it was non-negotiable to like

KD:
Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:
know how to interact with the world through the lens of the internet.

KD (06:08):
Yeah.

DB (06:08):

Um, there are very few people that I know, even if their parents were like very strict with like screens on internet and stuff, there are very few people that I know that just don't get it.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, and something that I've like talked to my mom about before is like, it is really this language that comes now. It's like, it's like the first language of Gen Z and the reason that like 50 year olds can't navigate their phones is because they, they're, they didn't learn the internet and then when their brain had enough plasticity

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

to like ingrain it in who they are. And we did

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

like, that is like a fundamental difference in the way that we function in the world, whether we like it or not. And no matter what like choices our parents made or how we're raised.

KD (06:50):

Yeah. No, I would agree with that. And it's really funny, you know, whenever I hang out with my parents or my grandparents, they're like, how do you, how do you search something on the internet? You know, like just something so simple for us.

DB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

KD:

Um, and something that we do probably like a hundred times a day, but like for them, that's not a common event that occurs in their life.

DB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

KD:

So it's just, it's interesting to see that. Okay. Um, why do you think it's important for people of the future to hear about your experiences of the events of 2024 <laugh>?

DB (07:22):

Well, <laugh> right now everything feels really big Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

and really consequential.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

We, tomorrow is election day tomorrow.

KD:

Oh my gosh. That's crazy. <laugh>.

DB:

We'll find out if Kamala Harris or Donald Trump is the president. We will find out if Donald Trump is going to contest that election. And if like, we're gonna have a felon for a present.

KD:

<laugh>

DB:

I'm not gonna get into it. I, I probably cry. Um,

KD:

<laugh> real

DB:

but like, you know, a month ago we had the biggest flood in Western North Carolina since 1916.

KD:

Yeah. Yeah.

DB:

Like, there are like monumental catastrophic events happening. And like when you look back on like history and the times in which like civilizations have crumbled and like these really big turning points in history, it doesn't evoke the same kind of like emotion that we're feeling in this moment. Like if you look at like the fall of Rome, I'm not like, oh, that's so sad.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

That's so scary. But I'm sure that if you were just a regular citizen during that time, like that's a crazy thing to happen. And I kind of feel like we're on the brink of something like that at the moment. <laugh>. Um, so I think it's really important to hear like the feelings and experiences just like everyday people who are being affected by these like, huge things that we have a bit of control over, but not a ton.

KD (09:04):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB (09:04):

Um, and I feel like a lot of the time the lens that we look through to see history comes from the people who are in power and the people whose voices are amplified the most. Um, and like through like policy and government and like all of that is important, but I think it's really important to also like, hear just like the way that everyday life and experience is affected by like, the current political climate and the current climate climate.

KD (09:37):

Yeah. For real. No, honestly, like doing this project right now is kind of crazy. Like this is a crazy time to be doing it. <laugh>

DB:

like actually insane.

KD:

No. Yeah. The day before election day y'all. It's crazy. Yeah. Um, okay. So we're gonna move into some app state questions, so hopefully these are more fun.<laugh>.

DB:

Okay. <laugh>.

KD:
Um, so kind of basic, but how and why did you decide to attend app and was app your first choice?

DB(10:04):

I, junior year of high school when I like first started kind of thinking

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

about schools, I just didn't feel like applying to school. I was a junior during Covid, like the height of Covid 2020 2021. Um, I was like so depressed and I had no ambition and I didn't know where I wanted to go and I didn't wanna put any work into writing an essay.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

I couldn't even like write an essay for my AP Lang class

KD:
Yeah <laugh>.

DB:

I was like so unmotivated.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

I just like didn't feel like putting any of the work in. Um, and so I remember like my mom trying to bring it up to me and she was like, well, let's look into some schools. And I was like, I just wanna go to App State. Like that's the easiest thing. Like, 'cause I grew up in Asheville and like everybody goes to upstate.

KD (10:53):

Yeah.

DB:

And it's like, at that point I saw it as this like easy school to get into something that everybody does. I would just like do school at app and it would be fine and I wouldn't have to think about it. And so then over like the next year and a half, my mom was like, no, you can't just like decide it's there just because it's like a given.

KD:

Yeah.

And so we looked at like all of these different like tiny liberal arts schools in the Midwest

KD:

Okay.

DB:

and like, like the northeast and then like, it came down to between Guilford College in Greensboro and App State. And I remember learning about Watauga Residential College

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

And it was like the perfect compromise between like a university where I could like have school spirit for football and stuff.

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

and also like, have that small community and those small classes and relationships with professors. Um, I think that's so cool. So it was like my safety school, but then I like came back around and was like, oh wait, this is actually where I want to be.

KD (11:50):

Yeah. No. Yeah. I think that's, that's really cool. So did you know a lot of people coming to app, like from Asheville or from your high school?

DB (11:58):

It seemed like, yes. When I graduated I was like, everybody's going to App State.

KD:

<laugh>.

DB:

But honestly since being on this campus, like I see people sometimes, but the community that I have made is not based on like the people that I know. Yeah. Yeah.

KD (12:12):

Because I know a lot of people who like come from high schools where, you know, they go to college and there's a lot of people from their high school, they like have mixed feelings about it. Um, like I have a friend like that right now. So I was just wondering like your experiences with that, but it sounds like it's pretty neutral.

DB:

Yeah.

KD:

So, um, how would you, you kind of talked about this already, but how would you describe your community at App State and would you say it's different from your community back home?

DB (12:43):

Yeah, I think I have a lot of like, it's a Venn diagram.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

of different communities and places that I know people from.

KD:

Right.

DB:

Um, I would say like my core group of friends are people that I met from my dorm freshman year.

KD (12:58):

Mm-Hmm.

DB (12:59):

Um, and like I feel like that's a pretty uncommon story.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

Like people kind of meet people freshman year and then never talk to them again.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

But I just like had this really cemented and strong friend group that I am still very close with. And we all are very different and we have different passions and ambitions, but I don't know, we just gel for some reason. Um, but then also I kind of have like another like really really close group of friends that it's kind of separate and they're people that I know from working at summer camps together and growing up going to summer camp together. And it's an Episcopal summer camp.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

And I work in an Episcopal church

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

with somebody that I grew up going to camp with. Um, so like that's a community that's just kind of like transformed itself into like integrated itself into my college experience.

DB (13:43):

Um, but I like have that community coming in. Um, and then I also do improv comedy and I

KD:

Oh, okay. I did not know that.

DB:

<laugh>, I'm in an improv group called Noun Improv, and I've been in it since the first week of freshman year when I auditioned on a whim.

KD:

<laugh>.

DB:

Um, and that has been a really, really wonderful community to be a part of.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, like being connected with like the theater department and with like this group of really funny people that are like being creative. Um

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

And so yeah. I just have a lot of like random interests and lots of different ways that I can connect with people.

KD (14:20):

Yeah. So I think that's really cool. I kind of had a similar experience with like making friends in the dorm my freshman year. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And that's kind of been like my core group that I see on a daily basis. But like when I went into college, like people were like, oh yeah, your friends freshman year they'll be there, but you probably won't be close throughout the rest of your time. But I'm like, they've stuck around so.

DB (14:40):

Yeah.

KD (14:40):

I get that. Um, what has been the most challenging aspect of your time at App State?

DB (14:47):

I would say the downsides. Downsides of being at like a university

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

run by the UNC system. Yeah. Um, a lot of the other schools that I was looking at when I was in high school were a lot smaller and like private and I happened to get scholarships that would've made those schools about the same tuition as I get here.

KD (15:16):

Yeah.

DB (15:16):

So, and I didn't get any scholarships to come here because it is a public university.

Yeah. <laugh>.

DB:

Um, and there's like a lot more people trying to come in, a lot more people with more need than I had. Um, and so I think like I really love the community and the faculty here, but I also see the ways that like being part of a larger system

KD (15:39):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

Speaker 2 (15:40):

Doesn't benefit the students here or the town here. Um,

KD:

Yeah.

DB (15:45):

And I have a lot of critiques of the way that this university is run, um, as well as a lot of school spirit and a lot of, you know, appreciation for where I am and the education that I'm receiving. But I do think that students aren't taken care of in the way that they should be. There is not enough housing. Um, the food is not as nourishing as it should be.

KD:

No <laugh>.

DB:

Um, it's, you have to jump through a lot of hoops to really get anything done, um, like financially. Um, and just like within what's happening in the education system of the United States and within North Carolina at the moment, like there is a lot of like censorship happening of like DEI

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

and like, like revoking these safe spaces for L-G-B-T-Q students

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

and people of color and women and like, there's a lot of like national attacks happening and then we can see it like funneling down into our own space that it's just kind of like this microcosm of all of the critiques I have of institutions of the United States of general <laugh>. That went really far.

KD (17:00):

No, no. It was, it was perfect. Yeah. So would you say like you've been personally affected by any of these changes or just like the consequences of being part of a larger like system?

DB (17:13):

I think it just is a little discouraging

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

To be on a university campus and to feel that like the specific experience of like being in college and being in an education system is to like broaden your horizons

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

and to feel that that is being contested and like that goal is like, I don't know, like being broken down by the

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

by the system. So

KD (17:49):
No, especially with the DEI thing.

DB:
Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

KD:
last semester. 'cause I remember when that first like became a conversation and I was like, what <laugh>? That's crazy. Especially coming to a more liberal institution like that affects a lot of people.

DB (18:04):
Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

KD (18:04):
Um, so yeah. Um, I, that's,

DB (18:05):
And I do feel like it is like a progressive institution,

KD:
Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:
but it is also like a PWI like predominantly white institution.

KD:
Yeah.

DB:
So like there, like it's very obvious to see like, my best friend is Hispanic and she has a very different experience of this school

KD:
Yeah.

DB:

than I do because I don't have to like think about that. Um, but it, there's so many white people here. There's so many white people here.

KD (18:32):

Oh yeah. <laugh>.

DB (18:33):

And it like, it's obvious to like see that, um, privilege and the way that it informs the like, culture of this school.

KD (18:40):

No, I agree. Especially 'cause like I, I'm from Greensboro

DB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

KD:

So that's not a very white place. <laugh>.

DB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

KD:

in North Carolina. So it's very interesting seeing like the cultural differences between that like going home and coming here.

DB:

Yeah.

KD:

But, okay. So were you or anyone that you know impacted by Hurricane Helene? And if so, how and what has life been like for you or the people that you know that were affected?

DB (19:07):

So I'm from Asheville.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

um, which was kind of the epicenter of the damage in Western North Carolina.

KD:

Yes.

DB:

Um, and I'm very lucky that I was not super affected in like a substantial way.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, my family's okay. Our vehicles are okay. Our house is okay. Our business is okay. Which is really surprising because our businesses in Swannanoa, which is like

KD:

Oh, wow.

DB:

the worst part of Asheville that got hit.

KD (19:40):

Yeah.

DB (19:41):

Um, but it has definitely been really difficult to like come back to school. Um,

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

and when the hurricane hit I was, I went to Mississippi to like connect with my family because they had fled to Asheville to go stay with my grandparents.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

Um, and then I came back to Asheville and I was like volunteering. I was volunteering at the camp that I work at and then like coming back to school and you know, so many people who go here from like the Triangle

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

or out of state or like, there, there are a lot of people from Western North Carolina, but like there's a whole other faction of people that didn't get affected in Boone and also their hometown is fine and they just went home for a couple weeks

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

And got a little break.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, and for me, even though there wasn't any like, damage to my house that we immediately had to fix or like nobody in my family died or anything like that, it's still been like a really emotional thing to go through and a really like exhausting thing to continue talking about and to continue explaining to people that just like don't understand the like, grief of the land

KD:

Yeah.

DB (20:53):

and the grief of like my hometown. Um, and like I've been feeling so homesick

KD:

Mmm.

DB:

and like I just, I want to be there and I have very little motivation to

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

like do my schoolwork or <laugh>.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Like it is reminiscent of how the first few months of Covid felt.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. <laugh>.

DB:

Um, but I feel like I'm the only one going through it

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

and I'm not the only one obviously, but it is a very isolating feeling to have that like, my life has been irrevocably changed and I'm like feeling this immense grief for my home, but it's not something that's universal.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB:

Whereas Covid was like everybody in the world was feeling that.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

It's hard for me to like, have conversations with people that don't feel the same intensity of like emotion and exhaustion.

KD (21:46):

Yeah.

DB (21:47):

Um, that I do.

KD (21:49):

Yeah. No, my parents kind of felt the same way. They were like, yeah. Like it wasn't really like Western North Carolina and all the flooding and damage wasn't even televised until like a week later.

DB (22:01):

Yeah.

KD (22:02):

And even then, like people still I felt like didn't grasp the, like, the severity of it.

DB (22:08):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

KD (22:08):

Um, so yeah. I'm really sorry

DB:

<laugh>.

KD:

<laugh> that your community's going

DB:

Well thanks.

KD:

through that 'cause yeah I mean there it's gonna feel that way and like even coming home for Thanksgiving and Christmas is gonna feel

DB:

Yeah.

KD:

different and look different for a lot of people.

DB (22:23):

I mean, I was just in Asheville for the weekend and

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

I mean, we're still drinking out of jugs.

KD:

Yep.

DB:

There's not water. Like you have to, you know, make sure that you're not accidentally drinking water while you're

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

showering.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, like we have power back and it's like all semi-normal, but then there's still parts of Asheville that are like completely shut down.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, it's just, it's very like apocalyptic and it's like,

KD:

Mmm-Hmm <affirmative>.

DB:
it's like triggering to go back there. But it's also, I feel so much guilt for not being there

KD:
Mmm.

DB:
and so much like homesickness Yeah. For being here

KD:
Yeah. I bet.

DB:
<laugh>.

KD (22:58):
Yeah. Um, so kind of shifting gears, <laugh>, that, that was a conversation <laugh>. Um, but talking about Watauga residential college, what do you think it has taught you about community and like what it looks like in practice and is there anything that you would change about Watauga to make it more welcoming and hospitable for community to grow?

DB (23:24):
Well, I mean, the reason that I was attracted to Watauga was because of the community.

KD (23:28):
Yeah.

DB (23:29):
Um, and the reason that I was looking at those like tiny liberal arts colleges was because I wanted a tight-knit community.

KD (23:35):
Yeah.

DB (23:35):
And I especially wanted to feel that community with my professors and like with faculty. I wanted to feel known in my classes. I wanted to feel like I could advocate for myself, um, and that I was not just a face in a 200 person lecture hall.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, and so like that really, really drew me to Watauga. Um, and when I was in high school, I went to a semester school called the Outdoor Academy, um, where you live in the woods for a semester

KD:

<laugh>

and like with like 25 other students

KD:

Woah.

DB:

and you don't have a phone and you're like practicing simple living and you have like classes of like eight people where you're just like running around in the woods. And like, I, it was one of the most formative

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

experiences of my life and looking for colleges. I was looking for an experience that was reminiscent of that.

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Um, in the way that classes were taught and the way that education was approached. Um, and I feel like I've definitely found that with Watauga and with Watauga classes. Um, and I've really, really found that like faculty piece of like, feeling connected to the people that are in charge of my education. Um, or well, I I'm in charge of my education,

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

but the people who are educating me.

KD (24:47):

Yeah.

DB:

Um, but it was the peer-to-peer relationships were not exactly what I was hoping for. Even though I do have like a really good group of friends that I made through Watauga,

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

I did not feel as connected with like the larger student Watauga population.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

And I don't really know why that is. I think it, it might have to do with the fact that it is simply a residential college as a part of the larger university and

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

there's limitations to how how much that community can thrive when you're part of such a larger community.

KD (25:31):

Yeah.

DB (25:31):

Um, but yeah, I don't really, I don't really know exactly how I would like try to change it or foster more community within Watauga. I think it's just, it attracts a few different sets of people.

KD (25:55):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

DB (25:56):

Um, I feel like there's people like me who are searching for community and searching for an enriched educational experience that is not just like a lecture. Um, but I would've been totally fine not without Watauga, like I

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

would've been fine in the general population of upstate. And then I do also think that there is a part of Watauga that people are attracted to because they need a little extra help

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

and a little more, not like coddling, but just like they would've struggled more in the larger app state community. And I think that's a really valuable resource for people to have. But I think it creates a little bit of division within the community because there's a little bit of like different reasons that people are attracted to it.

KD:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

DB:

and it, um, I don't know, people, people are like attracted to their own little groups and then people have their group but they're not really like part of the larger

KD:

Yeah.

DB:

Larger group.

KD (27:04):

Yeah. No, I would agree with that. And I definitely see that a little bit, especially due to the hurricane and coming back.

DB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

KD:

like we've had so many interruptions <laugh>. Um, so it's, and that makes it hard to build community, but yeah. I get what you mean. So. Alright, DB.

DB:

<laugh>

KD(27:31):

well that was the end of the interview. Um, I know I kind of, it was long-winded, but

DB:

I was long-winded. It's okay. <laugh>.

KD:

No, yeah, no, you were great. Um, but yeah, thank you.

DB:

Thank you.