Interview keywords/topics: Ireland and Appalachia, Community

Interviewer: SB
Interviewee: JW

SB (00:00):

<silence> 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semester, we discussed different ways of using and understanding historical information, and we are creating our own historical documents in this project. I'm SB, a sophomore, and my major is East Asian Languages and Cultures.

JW (00:30):

And I'm JW. Uh, I'm a senior, uh, in the history department with a minor in the Watauga Residential College and Integrative Experiential Education.

SB (00:47):

Alright. So JW, Where do you consider yourself to be from?

JW (00:48):

Um, I am from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, which, um, is right down the mountain. I grew up there. My dad moved to Charlotte, uh, freshman year of college, or sorry, high school. Um, and I spent a lot of weekends there as well. Uh, but I would say Winston for the most part.

SB (01:12):

Oh, that's fair. Like, what's your hometown like?

JW (01:16):

Um, let's see. Winston <laugh> is very interesting. You, so there's like a huge arts district downtown, and it's like full of galleries and shops and stuff like that, and it's really, it's really sweet. Um, but there's also a lot of history of tobacco and cigarettes, so that's like the RJR tobacco. I actually went to RJ Reynolds High School. Like it was a big, it was a big thing. And their smoke stacks are still up downtown. Um, it's a pretty rapidly growing city, but there is, it's very clear that it once was, um, kind of, uh, slavery was very prevalent. In Winston-Salem, you can see there's particular streets, like one called Arbor that you drive down Arbor, and you have some of the biggest, like, the biggest houses I've ever seen personally. Um, and then the street kind of just turns into 25th Street after about a mile.

JW (02:12):

And then 25th Street is where the old slave houses used to be. And it's now where kind of like what the, you know, less, um, expensive houses are in town and there's usually more crime there. And there's usually like a socioeconomic and even racial, um, factor that goes into that. It's like where the, the fire department will like burn down some of the abandoned houses in that part of town for practice. So like, and these, this is the same street, you know, so there's a lot of great, but the history of Winston is still very like in your face. Um, but I loved growing up there. I loved seeing, um, you know, I grew up next to the Southeastern Contemporary Center for Art. I think it's called the Museum of North, wait, North Carolina Museum of Art, Winston-Salem now. Um, but I grew up around a lot of historical buildings, like the Greyland Estate, again, the Reynolds, um, family household. It's called Reynold Village now, because

there's like, they put shops in there or whatever. Um, yeah, so a lot of history. Not all of it's great, and a lot of it embodied in art. So,

SB (03:18):

Yeah, I've only ever passed through Winston, so it's–

JW (03:21):

Yeah

SB (03:22):

It's cool to hear like, um, I never really considered the, like what living there was like.

JW (03:29):

Yeah, I know a lot of people who said that. Oh, I thought it was just like a hospital and a bunch of strip malls because there's like a part of town that kind of looks like everywhere in America by the hospital, and it's like, no, there's actually a lot to it once you get away from that.

SB (03:43):

I feel like a lot of small towns are like that.

JW (03:45):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. I think Boone is like that. If you compare, like, King Street to 321, where it's just like gas stations and fast food and Starbucks and whatever. And then King Street, you got all the cute little mom and pop shops.

SB (03:59):

Yeah. I know, at least in North Carolina, lots of places are just like,

JW (04:05)

Yeah,

SB (04:05)

from the outside you're like, ah!

JW (04:06):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

SB (04:07):

But then if you actually live there, it's a lot more…

JW (04:09):

You get appreciation.

SB (04:10):

Absolutely. So why did you decide to attend App State?

JW (04:15):

Oh, this is a, this is kind of a long story. So I originally was planning on going to Chapel Hill. Um, I got in, but then I decided that partying was more important than going to a school that was gonna actually challenge me. So, and this is no slander to this university, but I went to UNCW, University of North Carolina Wilmington because like, oh, I wanna go to the beach, I wanna party, I wanna do all these things. Um, I went for a year and I did, I did go to the beach and I did party, and then I got into some trouble with the school and I kind of got into some shady crowds. Um, and so I decided I need to leave. And the mountains have always been, you know, I grew up, um, like going to summer camps, and then I worked in summer camps, like out in Pisgah, closer to Asheville.

JW (05:10):

Um, but I was just like, I–I need to go back and kind of find myself again. So I came, I came to the mountains because they've kind of always just been like a, it almost feels like a spiritual home. Yeah. Um, and up here. So, um, I transferred here and a hundred percent made the right decision. Um, and I, now that I'm here, like for a while, I felt really guilty about not going down the like, you know, Chapel Hill route or whatever. But now that I'm here, I realize that like, college is so much more than just like where you're going to take classes. It's about the city you're living in. And I wouldn't wanna live anywhere else but here. So yeah,

SB (05:53):

I think that's beautiful.

JW (05:53):

Oh, thanks. <laugh>.

SB (05:57):

Like, since you came, like since you transferred here Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, how do you feel like that's changed, like who you are?

JW (06:06):

Um, so I got here and continued to party for about a year. I was in a pretty serious relationship that may or may not have influenced some of my decisions about where to go to college because again, teenager brain. Um, and so that ended my first semester of sophomore year and I kind of went down a rabbit hole into a dark, dark place. Um, but at the end of sophomore year, I decided I–it was time to get sober. And so I have been sober since then. Um, that's been a huge change. Never really thought that that would happen, especially not at 20 years old in college. That's kind of turns out there's a community of us here and I've gotten to meet them. But, um, yeah, I've also definitely stepped out of this shell of like, what I thought I was supposed to look like, how I was supposed to dress, how I was supposed to act, talk, you know, all the rules that we create for ourselves.

JW (07:04):

And they've really shifted. And it's nice because I've always, like, been the person with, you know, blue hair, purple hair, all that stuff. And I don't do it now because I killed my hair and I'm needing it to regrow, which whatever. But everywhere I went, I always kind of felt like an outsider because I looked different and I didn't really care. I wasn't into the like, you know, athleisure or whatever and the, like, all the things. I'm definitely my own person in that way. Um, I've got a bunch of tattoos. I–you know? So it's nice to feel like I get to fully embody myself here. And because of that, I've gotten to kind of step into this new way of like, I like this new identity that I have. Um, and the older I've gotten, the less kind of punk rock I've been <laugh>, if you will.

JW (07:58):

I've gotten a little more, um, since, especially since I stopped partying, I kind of am slowed back down. I almost feel like a grownup. I turned 22 two weeks ago and I don't know why, but that feels like a big girl. You're like, I'm no longer 21. You like go and you, I mean, I was, I celebrated my 21st birthday sober. I had, you know, whatever. But, um, it feels like the last big birthday of like, I mean, there's all the decades or whatever, but like, of your youth 21 was kind of like the, like now you're an adult. And so here I am 22, officially in my twenties, and I'm about to graduate college in the spring. And so I've been kind of finding myself feeling more like an adult in a way, like a pseudo adult. Yeah. But like per, I'm–I'm presenting more in that way, if that makes sense.

SB (08:51):

I think that makes perfect sense.

JW (08:52):

Yeah.

SB (08:53):

Like, I don't know, I think it's, I don't know. I think it's really cool <laugh>

JW (08:59)

Yeah.

SB (08:59)

That you've managed to come so far. Um, like when you're talking about like the, the people you've met and stuff like

JW (09:07):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

SB (09:07):

how would, like, what is like that community like? Like what is your community or personal…?

JW (09:13):

Yeah, so I have an interesting community. I have, like, some friends who are students still. Um, but like they've kind of dwindled because I'm not, I mean, I'm in like the historical… fraternity or whatever, Phi

Alpha Theta. But I'm not particularly active in it 'cause I just have too much going on. And you don't really need to be that active in it to maintain membership, um, to be quite honest, <laugh>. Um, but I have like a few friends, um, who I've just met through–I was really into rock climbing. I broke my foot this past summer and was told that I'm not able to rock climb anymore. Or like, if I do, it just causes a lot of pain stuff with my joints–that's the whole tangent though. Um, and so I met a lot of my like, student body community through, you know, the climbing wall at the SRC,

JW (10:04):

And then we all went to Center 45, which is like the local climbing gym in town. And that's where a lot of my student friends come from. But I have, honestly, I would say the majority of my friends come from the recovery community that I'm in. Um, the like, so I have friends with a lot of older people who from all over Watauga all the way down to like Lenore and up towards Bethel. Um, I would say I probably hang out with them just as much as I hang out with my, like, student friends. And then just seeing them when we gather to like, do sobriety things, I go, um, and work with them like probably a few times a week. Um, and then I also, you know, getting sober has been a very spiritual experience for me. So I've been trying out different, like, spiritual groups in the, in the area. Um, and so I've met people that way. So I would say my community's definitely older people from Watauga County and some of my student friends. Um, so like, it's been, I feel very entrenched in the community. Um, also jobs that I've worked, I worked with the Western Youth Network and so I became really attached to a lot of those kids and their families who are from all over the county. Um, because I would see 'em every day.

SB:

Yeah.

JW (11:19):

So it's, it's a mishmosh, if that's the way you say that, for sure.

SB (11:24):

I'm not actually sure <laugh>, but yeah.

JW:

Yeah.

SB:

I think that's really cool. I think it's important to have a lot of, like, you have a lot of people in your support group and I think,

JW (11:35):

Yeah. My mom calls them my aunties <laugh>, so you need to stay with the aunties.

SB (11:40):

I love that.

JW (11:42):

Yeah.

SB (11:42):

Uh, and is that like the MRC or what is it called? Or is it a different group and there's like, or is it just like a local one?

JW (11:51):

Um, it's Alcoholics Anonymous. It's AA. Yeah.

SB (11:55):

Yeah. Um, like what do you think, like, is important to know about like, <laugh>, I dunno how to phrase this, like, moving forward, what do you think is important for people to know about like, the community around like, the Watauga area?

JW (12:16):

Yeah.

SB (12:16):

Like in the future

JW (12:18):

I–this is a community that genuinely cares for each other and genuinely cares, um, about taking physical and emotional, uh, care <laugh> of each other. And I think that's been hard. Um, as I've gotten to get closer with, you know, people not affiliated with the university, there seems to be like a narrative, um, that the students kind of just come in and they think of this as like this temporary college town, quote unquote, that they're like staying in. And they don't, they're not really tied to the, like, livelihood of the people who live here, they're not really particularly worried about, um, the longevity and the care of this place long term. And then of course you add in the like, frat parties and all that kind of stuff where the land is physically being trashed and just like all that kinda stuff. So there's a rift there.

JW (13:17):

And when I see and talk to people, it seems very much like it's the locals here who have families who have lived here for such a long time, who are deeply connected and caring about this region. Um, and this county, this town. And then students who think about it as kind of like a temporary place to go buck wild and do the things and aren't really particularly attached to that. Um, I don't think that's true for everybody. But that has been interesting, like the students don't really seem to be that connected with the locals and the locals don't really want anything to do with the students. So that's been surprising to me. Um, but this is a resilient group of people who will do it themselves, who will take care of each other. And, um, the students seem like, you know, I've always heard the app was like the hippie school or whatever, and I think there's still like a pretty big presence of that, but it's definitely become more fraternity, Greek life based.

JW (14:23):

And I think that just came from like Sheri Everts being the last, um, the last chancellor who–she–you know, was very focused on growing the student body. And you know, her–her reasoning for that was to protect state funding and federal funding to the university because you need to grow a certain percentage, but not every university is placed in the middle of a valley between mountains where there's nowhere to go, that was not made to have this many people in it. So it's–it, there's no, there's no real winning, I suppose, on that front. I think it'll take a while for the students and the town to, um, rebuild those relationships.

SB (15:00):

Yeah. On the subject of Sheri Everts, um

JW:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

SB:

like what, like current political, or like just current events…

JW:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

SB:

What topics of this year are you, like, have, do you have on your mind right now?

JW (15:17):

Yeah. So political climates of like the campus or like in general?

SB (15:22):

Just in general.

JW:

In general…

SB:

Whatever you are focusing on.

JW (15:25):

Yeah. Um, so to be quite frank, the election is tomorrow; 2024 presidential election. And I have done everything in my power not to think about it. I voted and then I was like, I can't, I said like, cannot do anything else… um, 'cause it scares me.

SB (15:47):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

JW (15:47):

It scares me. Um, and I, I, I can't do anything about it. Um, so I try not to think about it that much. There are particular things, obviously like climate change. Um, it's November 4th and it has been in the high sixties, low seventies since mid-October. So we had a hurricane, then it snowed, and now it's in the high sixties, low seventies. And it's supposed to stay that way like well into November. And if that doesn't tell you that there's something happening with the climate, I don't know what it is, um, what, what could convince you. So that's been pretty on my mind because I, I'm checking the weather every day being like, when is it gonna start acting like November, 'cause this is kind of crazy.

JW (16:41):

Yes. Uh, I'm trying to think if there's anything else that has been really pressing when we get into the like, niche political things of like, um, abortion and immigration and all that kind of stuff. I think there's a real gap between what is considered like a human life and what is a human life, if that makes sense? Like, it feels like who can be cared for, what it should be cared for has become more and more about how can we make the most money off of this, and less and less about, Hey, we're all people sitting on a floating rock in an infinite universe. Like, just lucky to be as close to the sun as we are to have human life. Why wouldn't we wanna take care of each other? And it's when we get to those specifics that like, I just really can't with politicians that I'm like, why are we debating this? And I know it's their job and the only way to like create change right now, I suppose is to play the game, but I really, I can't. Like that's when I'm like, okay, I'm just gonna take care of the people around me and share the resources that I have when I can and do the things 'cause I can't do this <laugh>. Yeah.

SB (17:51):

I think that's perfectly respectable.

JW (17:53):

Yeah.

SB (17:53):

Like, I, I get that. Um, why do you think it's important for people in the future to hear about stuff like this and what's going on this year?

JW (18:05):

I think we're in a time of rapid change. Um, and I think this particular moment is going to be pivotable–pivotal. Um, 'cause I think the general consensus that I've gotten from people is neither candidate Kamala Harris or Donald Trump are their first pick. Um, and so it's kind of picking between the lesser of two evils, which I feel like people have been saying since I don't know the Trump Clinton election truly. Um, and I, I, uh, I, yeah, I think the country's kind of at a turning point right now. Um, and people are getting really fed up. It's interesting because I–people will talk about like, oh, we're getting close to civil war, we're getting close to whatever. But I think people are simultaneously becoming too lazy to like, I don't think anyone's gonna pick up arms and fight. I think it's gonna happen online.

JW (19:02):

I think it's gonna happen on social media. I think it's already started.

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW:

And I think the polarization, um, it's not gonna, nothing changes If nothing changes, you know, like nothing is gonna get better until people decide to start listening to each other. Um, and when it's on something as hot topic is like someone's religious beliefs, someone's livelihood, somebody's this, somebody's that. Like people tend not to be that open-minded from my, um, experience.

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW:

And yeah. I think the results of this election will change the way the world works. We're on a clock with climate change. The rights of women and healthcare for women around the country is dwindling rapidly. Um, and the lives of like immigrants and people who are coming here looking for a better life, or people who are coming here 'cause work took them here, like whatever it may be, they're about to go through serious change.

JW (20:01):

Um, it, I think this is kind of like, it's important to know where people were at before all of these rapid changes happened because, and not to be absolutely totally dramatic, I don't think I am, I think a lot of people talk about Germany under Hitler being like, everybody supported the Nazis and supported his movement, and that just wasn't the case. And I think if Trump wins, Americans are gonna get categorized as something, or this period of time is gonna get categorized as something. And I want it to be known that like this, this is not the truth. There are people who are scared, who want more, who want different, and we're at the precipice of potentially having the first female president in the United States, which is a huge deal. I mean, a long time coming. But I think that's also really cool to kind of know as like a woman myself, that I would love to see representation in that way.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

Yeah.

SB (20:56):

Yeah.

JW (20:58):

<laugh>, sorry that was very long-winded.

SB (20:58):

No, I, I–I get it. It's it's lot.

JW (21:02):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

SB (21:03):

Um, especially with the, the date looming. Um,

JW (21:07):

I know I had nightmares last night that Trump won,

SB:

God.

JW:

And I, um, I literally woke up sweating and I was like, wait, what? What am I gonna do? Because Boone is a very, like, the university's very blue, but we're surrounded by a lot of red,

SB (21:24):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW (21:24):

And I can't go to Tennessee to get healthcare–healthcare can't go to South Carolina. Like, where am I gonna go if something happens? Yeah. Um, it's

SB:

Scary <laugh>.

JW:

It is scary. It is.

SB (21:37):

Yeah.

JW:

Yeah.

SB:

On a completely, well, on a different note. Like COVID-19, four years in retrospect.

JW (21:50):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>,

SB (21:51):

How was that for you?

JW (21:56):

<laugh>? Let me make sure I say this clearly. Awful <laugh>. Um, it was terrible. Uh, I, you know, it was kind of to tie it back to more recent events and why it's important to be doing this. Hurricane Helene just came through, um, biggest flood for a hundred years. I've never experienced a hurricane, period, and I don't think anybody in the region knew how to handle a hurricane in the mountains.

SB (22:26):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW (22:27):

Um, but yeah. Uh, when that happened, we were told that we were going to have two weeks off of school.

SB (22:36):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>.

JW (22:37):

And, and my first reaction was like that gut dread that was like, I have heard this before. I have heard, oh, it's just gonna be two weeks off of school. And that's when Covid hit.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

And then I had no school, the rest of that school year, so the second half of my junior year, completely online school, senior year, and then super quarantined, first semester of college.

SB (23:03):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW (23:03):

Um, and during that time, you know, that's when my addiction really skyrocketed. Things got really, they got really bad really fast because I had nowhere to be in, nothing to do. Um, and I've found that a lot of people in my recovery community have said the same thing. That Covid was kind of a–a bottom for them. Of sorts.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

Um, I think there was, at the beginning it was terrifying. We would like leave, we'd order our groceries and have them delivered to the house, and then I remember my mom leaving them on the porch for like, I don't know, for them to air out. And then she'd take Clorox wipes and wipe them every single item down before it went into the house. I don't know what, like, it was crazy.

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW:

And I remember like, that's when everybody got on their phones and that's when TikTok, I feel like, really took off in a new way.

JW (23:53):

'cause everybody was like, well, what are we gonna do besides make whipped coffee and learn the renegade like, nothing. Um, and yeah, so the first six months, it was like the transition from winter to summer, spring, people started going outside. But it was something about the second, um, like the second half of that first year where things got real dark, real fast when winter came, um, that's when like, there was no longer being outside. It was too cold to be outside. And I, in combination of Covid winter and my, um, addiction ended up spending like six months of my life in like a single room and not really moving from bed. It was awful. It was the, like, one of the worst times of my life. Um, I became extremely sick and I never, I never want to do that again.

SB:

Yeah.

JW (24:57):

Obviously I've made changes in my life, I'm no longer doing and using and drinking the way I was.

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW:

Um, but yeah, so that whole two week thing, my brain and my body were like, I remember, I remember. And then my, so like my senior year got hijacked. I had prom outside and we all stayed for 15 minutes. 'cause we had to be social distanced and like, who wants to be social distanced at senior Prom? Like

that's, yeah. And then my graduation, I got to have a graduation. It was outside though. Um, and it was like 95 degrees outside.

SB:

Oh God.

JW:

It was awful. People were passing out left and right. Um, yeah. It, and this year, my senior year, we got a good month chunk taken out of it. Um, and I know like a big reason why they were pushing us to go back to school is because people were struggling with Covid. Um, and people were, they were like, we don't want them to lose another year or whatever, whatever. But it's like, I don't feel like the community really had time to heal.

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

JW:

There's plenty of people who don't have houses, there are plenty of classes that have to go on Zoom. Like, people are not okay. So the fact of the matter is we are going through something like this again, except we get to be together.

SB:

Yeah.

JW (26:09):

Um, which makes all the difference, you know?

SB (26:13):

Yeah. How, like, going deeper into that

JW:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

SB:

How was the hurricane? Like Hurricane Helene? How was that for you? Like how did that impact?

JW (26:23):

Yeah. So when I, throughout the storm, I was here when it happened. Um, I live across the street from the convocation center.

SB (26:33):

Mm.

JW (26:33):

So I don't know if you saw any footage from that, but the, it was like,

SB (26:36):

Yeah.

JW (26:37):

The biggest road in Boone turned into a river.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

And that we just watched like massive trash cans floating down the side of the road and all that kind of stuff. Um, it was scary. I, one of, I live in a studio apartment, but one of my friends stayed with me because their apartment was in like, it's just like not in good shape because it's an apartment in Boone.

SB (26:58):

Yeah.

JW (26:59):

Um, and so they stayed with me just in case. Um, honestly, I was more worried 'cause I'm on like a pretty big hill of like landslides, trees falling

SB (27:09):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW (27:09):

Um, because, and I'm like up a couple of floors, so I wasn't worried about the water getting to my apartment.

SB (27:14):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW (27:15):

But we were watching the water rise fast and we were just like holed up in, we were holed up in there and they were, you know, we'd be serious, serious, serious, and then we'd see someone floating down the road in a kayak drinking a beer. And it's just kind of like, we're in college, you know?

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

It was like moments of like that, that were relief, but at the same time it was like, get inside, what are you doing?

SB (27:38):

Yeah.

JW:

Um

SB (27:41):

Yeah. Did y'all lose power?

JW (27:43):

We, we did. I did. Um, we made it through the storm, but it was like, it poured for like two days and then the winds the second day got really bad and then when the rain stopped, the wind kept going and it was when the wind kept going and everything was wet that I lost power.

SB:

Mm.

JW:

And then I didn't have drinking water for a week.

SB (27:59):

Yeah.

JW (28:00):

Um, I didn't get internet and for about three weeks, um, I, the power was only gone for I think like four days.

SB (28:10):

Mm.

JW (28:11):

So in the grand scheme of things, I got off very easy. Um, actually the night before, I was in Blowing Rock on Wednesday, um, before like the rain started and a tornado touched down

SB (28:25):

Oh yeah.

JW (28:25):

a mile from where I was. And I was sitting in a meeting and I watched it get pitch black outside and the power went off and the lights were flickering in the meeting and everybody was like, no one knew. 'cause none of our phones went off 'cause

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

JW:

throughout the storm. It was like, warning, warning, get inside, get inside. 'cause when there was a tornado warning in Boone, I like went to go to find shelter,

SB:

Mm.

JW:

and the warnings about not drinking the water, like all of that came to my phone, but I didn't get a warning when I was in Blowing Rock. And so we come back out <laugh> outside of this meeting and it's light again, and we're looking around and it's like, everything's just destroyed.

SB (29:00):

Yeah.

JW (29:01):

and we were just very lucky sitting in a church basement already <laugh>.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

Like, not like to be okay.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

Um, so it definitely like, has launched me into a spell of depression.

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

JW:

Like to see everybody's, to see people's livelihoods, to see their entire lives sat on the side of the street, condemned houses, like all over the place. Walmart, Walmart being closed. I don't know why, but that was like the marker of like, oh

SB:

Yeah,

JW:

It got bad <laugh>.

SB (29:32):

'cause now we only have what, like Earth Fare and–

JW (29:36):

Yeah. Literally I've been going to Publix, it's so expensive. Um, but, but yeah. So it was really scary, but it was almost felt like just you can feel how much people are hurting right now.

SB (29:50):

Yeah.

JW (29:50):

You know, like, I'll go and that's when it's been really hard, like with my community, um, of the town of Boone, not necessarily students because they're like, this has been my parents' land and my grandparents' land and their parents and their parents all the way back to like seventeen hundreds. And for it to just be destroyed to look completely different, you know, I feel their pain. And I have friends who lived in like Bavarian Village and they had to be evacuated on raft boats, like police boats. Um, and a lot of them became homeless. It's become a joke that they're homeless. It's not very funny, but that's so Gen Z to me.

SB (30:33):

Yeah.

JW (30:35):

Um, Yeah, it was really scary. It was really scary. Um, and it just kind of feels like things like right in Boone Proper are fine, but you go five minutes in any direction and you start having to be very careful about the

roads. You have to be really careful about the landslides and the same coals and all that, because it's way harder to get resources and repairs done in the mountains than it is on flatland, like at the beach.

SB (30:59):

Yeah.

JW (30:59):

Um, but everything feels really dirty.

SB (31:02):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW (31:03):

It feels like there's just a grime of like, crap everywhere and it's not clean, like you can't get clean.

SB (31:09):

Yeah.

JW (31:10):

Um, and it's really hard to want to do schoolwork,

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

When this is the world you're living in. And I, I imagine, you know, my friends who haven't, didn't have a place to live and are trying to find that out because, you know, the housing in Boone is so bad right now–there's so little of it compared to the number of people. Um, like I don't understand how they're, they're they're not doing schoolwork.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

They can't. And that's why I'm like, we went back too early.

SB (31:38):

Yeah.

JW (31:39):

Yeah.

SB (31:40):

Not enough time to recover.

JW (31:42):

Mm-Hmm.

SB (31:43):

Well, given all of that, uh, would you say your college experience is anything like you were led to believe in high school?

JW:

Dude, <laugh>,

SB:

<laugh>

JW (31:55):

Um, no. <laugh> No, it wasn't, I was not expecting to get sober. I was not expecting to live–like honestly, I knew the political climate was gonna get worse because in 2016, I was in eighth grade when Trump got elected, and I remember since eighth grade being like, oh, so this is gonna be a thing from now on.

SB (32:19):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

JW (32:20):

Um, and as a historian or like a rookie historian, amateur historian being an undergrad and not graduated, um, you know, history, this is not the first time that things have been this bad. It's not the first time that things have felt like the world is literally ending. Um, not even by a long shot. And so I don't think I'm living in some unprecedented, no one's ever lived under this kind of stress before, because like, that's not true.

SB:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>,

JW:

You know, I'm not thinking about nuclear warfare all the time. I am, sometimes, sometimes that scares me.

SB:

Fair.

JW:

Again, things I can't control, I let it go. Um, but like, there's just so many periods, I'm not worried about how I'm gonna get my food. I'm not worried about whatever, like this, you know? Um, but yeah, so I was anticipating the political climate. Um, I didn't think things were just gonna get better. It seems like we were at a tipping point of things, in fact, getting worse. Um, was not expecting to be, I we were in a tropical storm in Wilmington, uh, my freshman year, but it was nothing like what we experienced this year. And I wasn't expecting to, you know, I came to Boone just looking to be a student. And now that I'm here, like I don't wanna leave.

SB (33:40):

Yeah.

JW (33:40):

I don't wanna leave these mountains. They became such a home that I didn't know that I needed.

SB (33:44):

Yeah.

JW (33:45):

Um, yeah. Like, 'cause I'm 22 and most of my friends are in their, like, I would say forties to sixties. That was not, um, something I was expecting, but I, I love it. I'm so here for it. I'm very grateful for them. Um, yeah. So no, <laugh> not at all.

SB (34:03):

I think that's fair. I think life leads to very strange places sometimes,

JW:

Yeah.

SB:

that we don't expect.

JW (34:11):

Yeah. Especially Covid. Freshman year in the dorms was really weird. People, um, at Wilmington, they like walked around in hazmat suits and they slid your food under your door and you weren't allowed to do anything. You weren't allowed to leave your room without a mask. Like it was,

SB:

Geez.

JW:

It was really weird.

SB:

Yeah.

JW:

It was really weird. But like, people were still, everyone was doing the protocol,

SB:

Mm-hmm.

JW:

But then everyone was still going and partying, so everyone was still sick. And there was covid and then there was the frat flu is what they called it.

SB:

Oh no.

JW:

I got the frat flu and never got covid, but I was sick for about six months.

SB:

Jesus.

JW:

Like, couldn't breathe. Wheezing, coughing up things I don't wanna describe

SB:

<laugh>

JW:

In detail while being recorded.

SB:

Fair.

JW:

Like it was, it was very strange.

SB:
Yeah.

JW:
It was very strange. Yeah.

SB (34:57):
Yeah. Well, that's all the questions I have, I–

JW:
I'm glad I can leave you on that note then. <laugh>.

SB:
<laugh> But I don't, I enjoyed getting to hear all of it. I think it's,

JW (35:09):
I'm glad it's kind of cray-cray.

SB (35:13):
<laugh> I think it's a weird time.

JW (35:15):
Yeah.

SB (35:18):
Yeah.

JW (35:18):
Yeah. Because it's like everything's, everything feels like it's falling down, but I can't tell if it's just because of like social media.

SB (35:26):
Yeah.

JW (35:26):
Where everything seems quantified or is it the, like it's the hot outside <laugh>.

SB:
Yeah.

JW:
In November. Like which one is it?

SB:
Yeah.

JW:
I don't know. Maybe both.

SB (35:37):
The world might be ending, but hey, we're chilling.

JW (35:40):
I don't think the world will end. I think humanity will end. I think the world will be fine.

SB:
That's fair. That's fair.

JW:
Yeah.

SB (35:46):
Yeah. But I guess that's all. I enjoyed this interview.

JW(35:52):
Yes. Thank you for interviewing me <laugh>.

SB (35:53):
Of course.