

Field Journal

A special thanks is due to my colleague, Laura Sisen, for graciously helping me identify the narrators (their friends), Ms. Sara Given and Mr. David Foye. I emailed the couple separately. Sara responded swiftly; we arranged to hold the interview in their home in Annapolis, MD, as the couple has a newborn baby.

Before the interview, I was not entirely sure if I would interview just Ms. Given or if Mr. Foye would also like to participate. I knew that Ms. Given was a middle School Special Education teacher, but I did not know what courses Mr. Foye taught. When I arrived, I was greeted by the narrators and their sweet dogs. We decided to conduct the interview in their living room, as it allowed for us to remain socially distanced. I reiterated the basic parameters of my project: (1) I am not a journalist, and I do not intend to ask exploitive questions; I told them I will ask open-ended questions about their life and work and they can share what they are comfortable sharing; (2) I will be a careful steward of the interview (not posting it for the public on the internet), and I am using it for my class. (3) Lastly, I explained a basic overview of archiving the project and that they would have the opportunity to archive their interview with the Humanities Truck Archive. Before recording, I felt that based on this conversation (and our previous conversations) that both narrators were comfortable and willing to participate.

Following the interview, the couple showed me Mr. Foye's impressive basement classroom for virtual teaching. I reiterated that I was grateful for their support, and I told them that I found their collective stories inspiring because there is overlap with my own. I shared that I too was a 'non-traditional' student, transferring from community college, and I have struggle to find employment as a college graduate. I told them that their story gives me hope, and I appreciate them sharing a little of it with me.

In the early part of the interview, I asked a follow-up question to Ms. Given about a comment she made about being a rebellious youth. Listeners can hear a slight hesitation from Ms. Given, who at that moment was repositioning herself and the baby. I did not perceive Ms. Given as growing more guarded following the question. However, I felt the need to clarify with Ms. Given that if the question made her uncomfortable then she is not obligated to respond. She affirmed, both in speech and, seemingly, in her body language that she was comfortable. This interview broached numerous topics that I could feel that in some ways were sensitive for the narrators. With this being my first time speaking at length with the narrators, I had to find and respect those boundaries—which I hope I accomplished.

Other researchers should be aware, that because the interview is conducted in their living room, there are ambient noises from the house, such as: doors opening, dogs/people moving and drinking, small sounds from the newborn baby, and the crackling fireplace. The narrators were every bit as warm, open, and gracious as they sound on the audio recording. Researchers should also be aware that Ms. Given and Mr. Foye are, ostensibly, Caucasian. I, Walter Jackson, am also Caucasian, and I grew up in a middle-class family in southeastern Virginia. I took ten-credit hours of Education undergraduate classes, including Special Education, and over forty hours observing in a high school (both in general and special education classrooms). In addition, I have experience working with students of all ages and students with special needs through my background as a martial arts instructor and as a substitute teacher. Therefore, unique terms to (Special) Education, like an IEP, were unexplained during the interview. It should be noted I previously interviewed a special education elementary school teacher for this project.