

Oral History Project Reflection

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When the idea of the oral history project was first presented to me, I felt it would be a good learning opportunity for the students. With a small senior honors class of only eleven students, I felt that we could easily adapt different requirements for the senior research project. I had no idea that the project would be such a positive experience for the class. The interaction of the students with the older citizens of Cabin Creek was so enlightening; the rich stories of the past fascinated the students. Each person gave personal accounts of his/her experience in Cabin Creek or in the coal industry. The students were enthralled as history became a name with a face. As they researched and learned more about the history of coal mining and the struggles of life in this area, the students became more involved in discussions with family members. A number of the students informed me that they now know they have family members who were involved in coal mining or the mine wars and they never realized it. This project has not only given the students a sense of community involvement, but has given some of them a better understanding of their families and life in the Kanawha Valley. I strongly feel that the learning and personal growth experienced by the students has surpassed what they would have achieved by doing a more traditional research paper. I look forward to working on similar projects within the community in the future. The joint effort to learn and preserve knowledge by the young and old of the area was a rich, rewarding experience for all of us.

Student Reflections on their Interviews

Interview Reflection – Mr. Harvey Hodges
Tiffany Chestnut

It was truly an honor to have been given the opportunity to interview Harvey Hodges. He was very knowledgeable of every topic I asked him about. This interview was mandatory in order to get information for my senior project, but I ended up learning so much more than what was required. Although my family has a coal mining background, I never really knew that much about how things were back when coal miners and their families lived in the coal camps. I found out so much about where I came from, why I've been raised the way I have, and about who I really am. Harvey told me that you really can't understand how hard things were then unless you lived through it, and because of him I have become more appreciative of the advances in technology and conveniences that we have to use today. I am very thankful to Mr. Hodges for taking his time to come and speak with me.

Interview Reflection – Mr. Monty Shelton
Nichole Hess

The interview with was the best part of this senior project. It was great to hear stories from the people that lived the lives that we are reading and researching. To us, it is lines in a book and to them it is their life. It has made this project very realistic. The interview is what has made this project so unique, to involve people from the community. It felt good to make someone else's life and stories important to others. It certainly made their stories important to me. Interviewing these people has been so enjoyable, and I have learned so much from them. After all, they are the people that the books we read were written about.

Interview Reflection – Mrs. Faye Williams
Ashley Gray

During my interview with Mrs. Faye Williams, I was taught a lot through her stories and life lessons. She gave me various forms of information about the coal towns and mining. I am very grateful that she conducted the interview with me. Her stories about the company store and the many other facilities influenced me to learn more about the coal mines. At first, when I met her, she told me that she had something for me before I even knew her. At the end of the interview she gave me a FBI pen. That was the most joyous occasion during the interview. I will always remember who gave it to me and never forget when she told me to never stop learning. I couldn't thank Mrs. Williams enough for the information that she gave me.

Interview Reflection – Mr. Clyde James Coleman
Brittany Crowder

On April 13, 2005, I interviewed Clyde James Coleman. This was an enlightening and educational experience for me personally. Mr. Coleman gave me a first-person view of what it was like during that time, which was quite different than my earlier perceptions. This experience truly had an impact on how I look at the present and past.

Mr. Coleman telling stories and discussing correlations between his childhood and the present added a human aspect to knowledge of the coal mine wars. The telling of various life experiences opened my eyes to how similar, and yet so different, we are from our counterparts of the past. Mr. Coleman's life story allowed me to grasp what life was like during his time and to appreciate my own time and way of life. Most importantly, the interview with Mr. Coleman gave me a new perspective on the past. I enjoyed my time with Mr. Coleman and found his story interesting and insightful.

Interview Reflection – Mr. and Mrs. Stout
Larry Vernati

On April 11, 2005, I interviewed William T. Stout and Opal Stout for my senior project. Throughout the interview I learned that most people of the coal camps had a rough life compared to today. They didn't rely on television and video games as we do today. Mr. Stout worked for Carbon Fuel and made about a dollar a day. I'm not sure what anybody else would think of that, but it makes me think of Mr. Stout as a courageous man who did all he could to support his family. When I started the interview I thought it would just be Mr. Stout, but his wife Opal made an appearance, and, I have to say, that she was quite informative. She told me about how the coal companies owned their workers' lives and how they used whatever they could to survive. Before I started the interview I was really nervous because I wasn't sure at how Mr. and Mrs. Stout would respond to my questions, but, instead, they made it a very enjoyable environment and I had quite an experience. Even though I had to spend many hours typing up the transcript for the interview, I would definitely do something of this sort again.

Interview Reflection – Mr. Bob Farley
Amanda Schmitt

I learned a great deal in my interview. I interviewed Bob Farley who worked in and around the mines for most of his life. He was very knowledgeable and was able to tell me so much about life in the mines. I couldn't believe how much Mr. Farley remembered about living on Cabin Creek. We talked about the mine wars, daily happenings, and he was even able to help me with my specific topic, immigrants in the mines. I was especially moved when Mr. Farley talked about his near death experience working underground for the Carbon Fuel Coal Company and his childhood bout with polio that had left him with a permanent limp. He had been through so much and somehow still found the strength to talk to me about it all. I truly had a positive interview experience, and I hope Mr. Farley and the other interviewees know how much their time and information was appreciated.

Interview Reflection – Mr. Owen Stout
Eli Smith

I was a little disappointed that Paul Simmons was feeling under the weather and couldn't make it to the interview. My grandma said he was a friend of the family and even went to my grandfather's funeral, who died recently; I could have already met him and not realized it. It turned out fine though, and I'd like to thank Owen Stout for stepping in for me to interview. I got a different perspective of the whole coal camp scene. Instead of interviewing someone who worked in the mines their whole life, I got the opportunity to listen to the stories from the view of someone who just grew up in the camps and didn't have to work for the company. I learned a lot of interesting things that I never knew about this area of West Virginia. For instance, I didn't know Cabin Creek use to be as big as it was, because today it is just a little creek that you don't hear much about. So all in all, I'm glad that I got to participate in this interviewing project.

Interview Reflection – Mrs. Boots Coleman
Kevin Osborne

My interview with Mrs. Boots Coleman turned out to be a great learning experience for me. She taught me a lot about life in general, and it gave me a greater understanding and appreciation of what I have today. Her stories were very interesting, especially the part about Bible smuggling in China. She also taught me about freedom of religion and speech. It wasn't anything back then like it is today in terms of prejudice against one religion. Everybody had their own thing to do, and they did it without anybody asking questions. Mrs. Coleman was a very good person and didn't hesitate to answer any of my questions, no matter how personal or unnecessary they were. I really enjoyed my interview and I look forward to seeing Mrs. Coleman again.

Interview Reflection – Mr. David Crowder
Brittany Crowder

On April 11, 2005, I interviewed David Crowder. The experiences that Mr. Crowder shared that day were not only interesting but held great significance. This interview enabled me to connect with the history of West Virginia coal mines. Mr. Crowder's interview aided me in the realization that we are a lucky generation who essentially has an easy going life.

My interview with Mr. Crowder put life in that era in a new light. People had a hard life, but were happy. The time I shared with Mr. Crowder gave me the realization that happiness and contentment is one of the most important factors in classifying a life successful and also long as a person is happy nothing else should matter. My time spent with Mr. Crowder was truly enjoyable and extremely helpful.

Interview Reflection – Mr. Keith Stanley
Dustin Hopkins

I really enjoyed my interview with Keith Stanley. He is a very interesting person and had a lot of information that was useful to me in writing my report. He was knowledgeable on the subject of music and was able to tell me the different instruments used back then. Mr. Stanley used to play the mandolin, the guitar, and some piano. Plus he played in a few band throughout his lifetime. I was really nervous during the interview, mainly because I have only interviewed one or two people before and normally I'm edgy around new people. Even though I was nervous I still managed to extract some good stories and important information, both of which vastly added to my knowledge of local music history.

Interview Reflection – Mr. and Mrs. Davis

Amy Crowder

On April 13, 2005, I interviewed Charles Davis and his wife Linda. It was an interesting experience for me because I learned many things about the coal mines I did not know. Since my grandfather worked in the coal mines for many years, I could relate to Mr. Davis.

He told me what it was like in the coal mines and how they cleaned the coal. I thought that was neat. Also, he told me what life was like up Cabin Creek back in the mid 1900's. The only type of job that was available there was coal mining. He explained what the company stores were like and how they operated. Some of the things he told me were shocking because life back then has changed dramatically compared to now. You have more opportunities to do what you want in life, unlike back then.

Even though my grandfather was a coal miner, I didn't know what all he went through or what life was like for him until I interviewed Mr. Davis and his wife. Now, I can understand my grandfather's background a little better.

Interview Reflection – Mrs. Judy Thomas

Rachel Bennett

I really enjoyed my interview with Judy Thomas. Mrs. Thomas provided me with some very interesting stories and information about her life while she was growing up, but I was kind of disappointed because I had thought that her husband had actually worked down in the mines. Even though she didn't provide me with all of the information I was hoping for, she still made things very interesting because she shared things with us about Cabin Creek that we never knew. Ashley and I also discovered that we know some of Mrs. Thomas's family and close friends. Who I never thought that she would know. So, overall I would say that the interview was wonderful and provided us with some very interesting information.