

Oral History Interview Transcript

Course Title: Energy in World Civilizations

Institution: University of Chicago

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Interviewer: Janaya Harris

Interviewee: Patrick Davis

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Interviewer

OK. So, let's see. My first question is just, what do you remember about energy use like in your childhood home, like when you were a kid in regards to heating and cooling or like cooking and appliances or anything like that?

Interviewee

We were gas. It was a gas household. We did not have. Like central air, we didn't have AC, so it was gas heat, gas stove. That was it, really. The AC thing didn't happen until I think we were all out of the house.

So yeah, I know that my, I mean, my dad was pretty tight with that as far as going in and out of the house. But yeah, it was all gas. I don't know what more details you need from it or what.

Yeah, I mean it's. Yeah, just gas. I imagine it was expensive.

Interviewer

Yeah. My next question or kind of like a follow up question, I guess, to that was like do you remember any kind of differences that stuck out to you with the way that like your parents kind of interacted with the stuff that used energy in your house, if that makes sense.

Interviewee

That how they interacted with what?

Interviewer

Like the stuff that kind of used energy in your house. And I know you said it was all gas, so. Like I don't know how much of a difference there would be.

Interviewee

I guess I'll guess that's the heating, cooking was gas and electric for washer, dryer and running other things but. I think it was all about ... I mean they're pretty tight ... I guess a little bit about conservation, you know, not wasting any of the resources that we did have. Pretty tight on not let us just run the water. Or you know, "shut the fridge," stuff like that.

Interviewer

Yeah, that's good. It's OK. I know some of these first questions. Like we did practice interviews and they weren't, like, incredibly easy for me to answer on the spot either.

Interviewee

Yeah, if you need more details, if there's something you can think of, I mean definitely ask me. If you there's something else or more you want to know.

Interviewer

Yeah. So, the next question. What are some of the most visible forms of energy use and/or production in your hometown. So, like Toledo or in the different places you've lived in your life?

Interviewee

So, the question is about like electrical production? Or like energy production in general?

Interviewer

It doesn't necessarily have to be about production. It could be about like what kind of energy you see people use the most.

Interviewee

Oh. It's a fair question to think about. So, Toledo was both coal, when I was growing up, it was coal powered electricity and then there would have been nuclear with Davis – Besse.

I don't know how much of that, how much Davis – Bessie provided to the area. Now, having lived in Columbus for what, going on 20 odd years, from when I moved here, I imagine it would have all been like coal-fired electricity to considerably more ... So wind farms, and then I know, even near me on the way home, if I take a certain way, there's actually a very large like solar field for solar power. And I imagine, to some degree I can't say for sure, that there's a degree of hydroelectric, because we do have a large, a pretty large dam, up north of here, so whatever they get from there?

Interviewer

Let's see, you mentioned the nuclear power plant. This is kind of something I was curious about when I was doing research on that. I didn't know that there were any like, accidents that had happened there. Do you remember any of them? All of them happened, or the majority happened like before I was born. But do you remember any?

Interviewee

To be honest, no, I don't remember anything, major; I think that something did happen. But because it's not even operational anywhere, I don't think, is it? I don't think that it is. To be 100%, I don't know that it's operational anymore. Yeah, I don't remember anything of significance; no like 3 Mile Island, Chernobyl stuff happening at all, so nothing I recall.

Interviewer

What do you remember about those.

Interviewee

About what?

Interviewer

About the other accidents. Like, even if you were like really young or?

Interviewee

I mean that was something I knew of more after the fact. And then Chernobyl, what was that, 86? That was a big deal. Yeah, the significance of that, I mean, it took a while to for that to really, for the impact of that to really hit. I do remember, I mean, I don't know if you guys talked about the Fukushima accident.

Interviewer

Oh, yeah.

Interviewee

I do remember that very well. That was... I remember even taking, like iodine pills, because supposedly the cloud was supposed to move this way through like, I don't know how the air currents worked. Yeah, I remember that was a pretty big deal.

Interviewer

Do you remember how you felt or like what you thought about those, either of those, when they happened?

Interviewee

Oh, you know what, I don't think most people, I mean, we know, like, nuclear bombs and stuff like that. But as far as nuclear energy goes, I think most people, until most recently, don't really, didn't really understand the impact, or dangers that could happen with those. I think that by and large, they're still very safe forms of energy. But yeah. And it's a very recent thing to me, to realize like, how bad all those things actually were when they had happened. Like in hindsight, it's like mind blowing. Yeah, that people survived and that there's still like an area around them like so. Yeah, that's all.

I hope this is all helpful in some way.

Interviewer

Yeah. No, that's like, so helpful. The point of it is to get like just how you've experienced like energy or how you think about it also? So, I guess that's kind of it's all like related.

Yeah. Let's see. This is kind of jumping topics, but have any of like the jobs you've held in your life kind of given you some different insight or different opinions on like the types of energy we use or like energy in general? Have any of them been related to that or energy-intensive? That was a lot. Sorry.

Interviewee

No, there's nothing that you know that I've done that I think has made me think about that at all. No, nothing, I don't have an answer for you on that one.

Interviewer

That's a-okay. So, we talked about the kind of energy that you saw and used when you were a kid, but like what kind of energy? Or like, what about now? Like what kinds of energy are you using now?

Interviewee

Yeah, I think, that's a fair question. I would say I don't know how our energy comes in, I don't know, because I only recently learned about that solar field over, about 10 minutes from here, I only recently learned about it, and it's a pretty big field and they're still building, you know, more, which used to be, I think that it used to be somebody's farm and sold the land. I don't know how that works into my daily life. I think that the energy company we have probably piggybacks, so I'm assuming they piggyback off of like the large, which is AEP here. Yeah. So, our power comes from a third party, which they just get from, I don't know, it's a wacky system. But yeah s we're getting power from AEP, but it comes from a third party

and they charge differently, I don't know. But, still I'd imagine coal power? I don't know that's a tough... You got me thinking about it. Probably, I should probably know more about where the electricity comes from.

Interviewer

Do you still use gas?

Interviewee

No, the house we're in now, it's all electric.

Interviewer

Let's see. So, when you said like you started thinking about it, is there a reason why you said like maybe you should know more?

Interviewee

You know, it's something we don't think about, but I think that it's something that I like to know, like, "you know what, I never thought about that," and you've got me thinking about it and, I do like to know those things, you know? I know where, I know where our water comes from. It's from a well. But how the electricity works? I think that, knowledge of that I guess, to have a better understanding; I mean, we do our best to conserve energy still. Lights off and things aren't, you know, on all the time or, you know, LED bulbs.

But I think just me personally, my mind was like, "yeah, I would like to know that." I'd like to know how our energy is produced here in Columbus, or this area the southern... 'Cause we're not Columbus proper anymore, so, I'll be curious to know. I guess just my curiosity and desire to know those things have me research that.

Interviewer

This doesn't necessarily have to be about energy, but are there any kind of environmental issues that like you care about a lot or like, that you see the people around you care about a lot. I know this is kind of off topic.

Interviewee

Yeah, because that's all. It's all related to the energy and how we produce energy, tax the environment. I think a lot. A lot concerns me right on multiple levels, I mean, like immediately here, as far as globally. And now, at times, it seems like doing the thing that is the right thing doesn't seem like it's doing anything, whether it's recycling, you know, things that you learned, you know, you're like, oh, recycling, so it's cool, we're going to do this and then you learn like, you know, that not everything's recycled and the people are flat out lying to you about it. But, then you pare down, you pared down to what actually gets, you know gets recycled. Even though they're saying all these things, you know, not all those things get recycled or, yeah, but even how you use energy affects the environment, so I mean, yeah, I sound like a nerd from everything from, you know, the rainforest, to my water table here right under my feet concerns me and you do the best you can. There's no perfect thing to do. Yeah, I don't. I hope that's...

Interviewer

That's good. That was helpful.

Interviewee

Without running on some tangent, you know.

Interviewer

Honestly, you have plenty of time if you do want to go on a tangent. Yeah.

Let's see. You mentioned it can feel kind of like hopeless or kind of like pointless to do the right thing when it comes to some environmental issues. Is there something that kind of keeps you motivated and/or like hopeful, like wanting to do the right thing?

Interviewee

I think in a lot of instances, it is a very... you know, especially when everything is so consumer based, it's very difficult and, I think it's just, you know, part of it is just doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do. That you're doing, the best thing that you can do, it's just, like I said earlier, there's no perfect answer and there's, not everything's going to... I don't know how to... Yeah, it's just really coming down to like, yeah, that's the right thing to do. Just, you know, recycling what you can, conserving water where you can. Monitoring my water table. But even when I lived, you know, when I had city water, I was still very aware. I would actually still get the reports. I still wanted to know what was in my water. But. Yeah, I think it's, I know, I think it's a silly answer, but it's just because it's just the right thing to do in spite of what everybody else might be doing. You know, when you're within yourself, you're like, "yeah, this is, this is just the right thing." But, yeah, I don't know how to expand on that. Because I guess, I mean it's just like I remember since years ago just, my journey of, whether it's being vegetarian or recycling, you know. I was running around with pretty thick rose-colored glasses as to what I was doing, my impact and, when you learned about the realities of that, you know, like how sometimes it feels like nothing good is happening, but, I think that we see that it I, there is, there are things changing and you don't want to be hopeless or be like a nihilist or anything like that. You feel that there's, you know, a change that can happen. So you do the right thing. If that makes sense?

Interviewer

Yeah, definitely. Is there any experience or like moment that kind of sticks out to you about, you said you had like rose-colored glasses on, like about when those maybe those came off, you know?

Interviewee

Honestly, I mean, even for my age, everything is, a lot of it is, probably within the last, like 10 years, I think that I, you know. Prior to that, I... There was a bubble I lived in which I don't feel that I live in anymore. And, there's that kind of realization that now it's ... It's very difficult because it sounds like I'm so negative or like but it's not, or hopeless, but it's not that it's just that the things I thought I was doing right, people were, people are still continually and actively working against, people with much more money than say, us, than we have. And, yeah, I guess. It's like, it's a very... what I thought wasn't an uphill battle, what I thought was like, "oh, we're actually getting somewhere." And then you realize, "oh, we're not getting somewhere for people with much more money or actively working against those things." And so. Something that's like kind of a steady climb. It's had most bouts feel a little steeper now, but I don't think it feels insurmountable.

I feel very hopeful, especially for your generation, the younger kids that, they are fed up and they're not going to, you know, they're not going to not going to put up with it anymore. They want to see those changes and. I really do have hope, that that'll happen.

Interviewer

Let's see. I know this might not be incredibly easy to answer, but do you think like the consumerism you mentioned and also like the influence of these of wealthier people has, do you think you've seen that increase throughout your life or do you think you've become just become like more aware of it or?

Interviewee

A little bit of both, I think is, would be the answer there. I think it's definitely increased. I believe that this as a system, it's always kind of been there to a degree, but, yeah, I think more so now you see that...

Yeah, I think, I don't know, that's consumerism, but the people with the money are taking more money and it's not beneficial to anybody. I mean, it's not beneficial to the environment, because of the energy put into these, I guess it'd be, wasteful consumer goods. I don't know that the production of these things, the energy producing these things. Yeah. I mean, high school-ish, I became very aware of the powers that be. And then, I'm gonna say really actually, in the last 10 years, there's definitely been a significant shift, to those with the money. And that sounds crazy, but, you know, having a greater effect negatively on pretty much everything. So yeah, I don't know. I don't know how to answer that.

Interviewer

It's OK, I think you did.

One of the things that really kind of like interested me that we talked about in this class was like the change or some of a change in the way that food is produced and also like thought about. I think that's what I was forgetting earlier, like food as an energy source, do you think you've seen differences in like food in general or like attitudes toward food throughout your life.

Interviewee

That's a pretty broad question. What do you like, is there something specific?

Interviewer

We kind of had a broad discussion about it, but one of the things that we talked about, I think the stuff that we talked about in regards to food was actually like from before you were born, but we talked about the kind of shift towards like mass produced foods, that I guess continued like into your life, but then we

Interviewee

Are you talking about processed foods or are you talking about just a Big Egg, like everything from like chicken production and beef production, are you talking like just processed foods. Yes, I think...

Interviewer

Both, like we talked, I guess we mostly talked about like industrial agriculture, so I guess like. The second thing you were talking about.

Interviewee

Oh, my brain. So, the second thing I talked about was just processed foods, or?

Interviewer

It might have been the first. It was the first. Sorry

Interviewee

Or are we talking just like produce production, like corn or like, you know, meat production like pork, chicken, stuff like that?

Interviewer

Stuff like that, yeah.

Interviewee

And the question was, what have I had seen change or?

Interviewer

Or how you've thought about it. Any comments on that.

Interviewee

Early on especially, as I became, you know, when I was vegetarian, or eating better I was very aware of the foods that I was taking in. And a lot of stuff that I was, you know, buying or dealing with was actually like smaller companies the independent companies. But there was definitely shifts. And 15 years ago, where, these larger companies realizes that they can make money out of these things. And even to this day, it's really hard to find small companies that do anything.

Yeah, I mean, I've seen, you know, everything from chicken production. It's like what? There's like two companies that, they basically do everything that bought everything up. Beef's not dissimilar. Yeah, I don't. I don't know how to answer. That.

Interviewer

That's OK.

Interviewee

Like what changes.

Yeah I don't know how to answer. I mean definitely, I've seen like... I don't know how to answer I'm kind of stuck right there.

Interviewer

That's OK. That's OK. If you don't want to like answer this it's a-okay, but can I ask you why you like considered being a vegetarian or were vegetarian for an amount of time?

Interviewee

Very early on, it was, dabbled in high school and then like took in just after graduation, basically. But it was, for me, it was an ethical choice. And I continued and I was very serious about it for a very long time. But as my views on things changed as far as where things are coming from and knowing where they're coming from, but also, not directly related, I guess, that's the, I don't know like the word that I would be looking for because for me. It's not like... And I wouldn't say like spiritual, but. I feel that some of the like belief systems that I've studied especially like Eastern belief systems, dharmic belief systems, but the idea of that.

But yeah, it was originally, ethically, and I was really serious about it for a long time and then, the more read on things, more I realized it was, I felt it was more gracious if somebody was making me some food, that I would still accepted, especially if they took the time and effort to do that, despite what it was, does that make sense?

Interviewer

Yeah, it does. Yeah.

Interviewee

To have gratitude and you know, to the fact that somebody made a meal so, despite, whatever belief system, I felt that the idea of gratitude was a bigger thing. Again, let's say somebody makes your meal. You know? Like you know that they did it, I don't know. So it came from a gratitude area. I still practice it when I can, but knowing someone was doing something for me. And I wasn't going to allow, I don't know, ethereal belief that I was right and this had to be this way. Yeah, if that makes sense.

Interviewer

Yeah. No, it definitely does, yeah.

Interviewee

If you need clarification on any of my ramblings, feel free to ask.

Interviewer

I do have a question. You talked about how I guess around the time like you were in high school, if I'm remembering what you said correctly, like you became like... Do you remember when you became more aware of like how people's actions and how we do things, like how it has an impact on the world?

Interviewee

What raised my awareness to these things?

Interviewer

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee

Oddly enough, music. Yeah, there's a lot of the, you know, early. Punk bands or hardcore bands, Straight Edge bands all had some angle on whether it wasn't drinking or vegetarianism, and then a couple other bands, you know, that's brought out from there. There's a couple other bands and delve more into issues dealing with everything from: Vegetarianism. Feminism. LGBTQ. I mean, like, so, I became very aware. Like, just at the end of high school and out of high school, and then you know, built from there.

That's really, oddly enough, I mean it was the music and the people that I hung out with. And then the information available to a lot of shows that made me aware of those. Turned me on to those things and then where I could educate myself more. Yeah. If that works, is that a good answer?

Interviewer

Yeah. Yeah, that is. A really good answer.

Interviewee

It is strictly is the music scene and the band that I knew people I knew had listened to that opened me up to these things.

Interviewer

Yeah. No, I think that's like that's a really interesting answer, like, not the answer I was expecting. But you know like. What kind of bands or like do you what or like shows? I think you mentioned also?

Interviewee

Well, there have been. Again, a lot of the. Especially the straight edge hardcore bands. Would have had information. Early on, bands like Minor Threats, you know the bands like Youth of Today, Shelter, those are some of the early bands and then moved into even some like more than like electronic industrial, there was a band called Consolidated that really was like hard, very good. Their shows where they had booths for pretty much everybody, from PETA to, you know, people you know from LGBTQ booths, I mean pretty much everything. There's always at least a half a dozen, you know at their shows, but then they also always open the mic to people to talk and ask them questions and. Yeah. So, off the top of my head, those are the things that, you know.

Interviewer

Yeah, that was great. So, you also mentioned, it was the people around you that you hung out with, who helped kind of, I don't know, open your eyes to that. Do you think it was like a common thing to become aware of, if that makes sense?

Interviewee

No, because it was. No, I mean I was, for a very long time, considered an oddball or people were very aggressive when they found out that you're vegetarian or like, now you know it's not, people don't really bat an eye, but I mean people physically get angry at me when they find out that it wouldn't eat meat, like what are you mad at? Like I mean like it was? Yeah. No. So the answer to your question is, no, I don't think it was easier because you're still considered like an outsider, especially at that point. Late 80s, early 90s, you're still, you know. Yeah, so now I don't think it was easy because there was still a lot of pushback against that because it wasn't the norm. Yeah. I think it's easier now, I think. I think you get, to some degree, about some of those things, I'm not going to say it's easy now because it's not, but people's awareness of them is greater, I guess.

Interviewer

Right, yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. OK. I think I'm out of questions. Is there anything that like you were? Is there anything you were like kind of coming into this expecting to talk about or anything like you've thought about that I haven't asked about that you think is like kind of important or that you want to talk about.

Interviewee

No, because I wasn't sure. I wasn't like, you know.

Interviewer

Yeah, that's fair.

Interviewee

Your mom had mentioned about it, and then you said what it was, I was like. Yeah, I had no preconceived ideas about like what I mean. I didn't even know how I could help you. "I'll try to help her to help the best I can," but I had no idea about what you would be asking me or like what to even think about. So yeah, I don't have anything.

Interviewer

Yeah. No, that's OK.

Interviewee

Good conversation.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Interviewee

I guess you learned some things about me.

Interviewer

Yeah. Thank you again for this it was really helpful.