

James Forrester

Professor Nam

SOC 201

29 April 2013

Interview Transcript

Anything stated by the interviewer, James Forrester is highlighted in light blue.

Anything stated by the interviewee is left un-highlighted.

My name is James Forrester. I am a CI student. As a class project, I and my classmates are collecting the oral histories of those in Ventura County who are affected by the current economic recession. By signing the consent form that I have provided you with earlier, you have agreed to participate in this research and/or you have agreed the audio-recording of this interview to be archived at the CI Bloome Library. I would like to assure you that whenever you feel uncomfortable with the interview, you can take a break or you can decide to withdraw your participation in this interview.

Ok

First things first, just tell me a little bit about yourself. Where were you born, how did you end up out here, previous jobs before this?

Well I was born in Pasadena, in January of 1984 and my family was living in Covina at the time. That was where I grew up and spent my entire childhood. Growing up, I didn't think we were rich or poor. My parents divorced when I was six, so I was in the two household situations there

for my entire childhood. But looking back on that, I would say that we were middle to lower middle class. We never really struggled too much but maybe that was just my parents had it well. I played sports all throughout childhood and didn't really take school too seriously because it was easy. Especially elementary and middle school, I don't remember ever stressing out school, really even through high school. Probably because of that my SAT scores were never that great and my GPA in high school was good, but it wasn't great. So I never really took the idea of going to college too seriously. It was something I thought I would do, but never really... When I was 16-17, when you are supposed to be worrying about college, I wasn't. That is why I ended up at Citrus College which is a community college in Azusa. Got my AA in English there and then I transferred from there to CSUCI out of that and that's kind of how I came to be in the area originally.

So you have just been here and loved it ever since?

Yeah so the first time I set foot on the campus I fell in love with it. it was small enough to where I felt like I could have personalized attention as far as my education is concerned. I didn't want to go to these bigger schools like Cal State Fullerton or Cal Poly Pomona where you are just a number.

Yeah, this school kind of just fit your background the most.

It did and I felt like because it was new, I really cherish the idea of being a part of something from the beginning and growing with it.

When did you come here exactly?

I came here in the fall of 2005.

Ok so it had only been open for about 3 years.

Yeah about 3 or 4 years and I remember I was the second year they have Anacapa Village dorms. Apparently the first year it was really fun and the second year they cracked down on it so the people who had lived there the year before said, “Yeah you should have been here last, it was all anarchy!” So yeah, I arrived in 2005, graduated in 2007 with my BA in English, and then left the area to move to South Korea. I taught English there for a year and a half. After Korea I moved up to Humboldt to get my masters and to teach composition and rhetoric which I currently teach here. So yeah, Korea was a year and a half, Humboldt was 2 years and then I came back. Did the whole kind of boomerang.

Kind of a loop. That’s pretty cool. Tell me about your family. Mom, dad, brothers, sisters?

I have an older sister, her name is Kelly. She is, I think, 3 and half years older than me... 3 to 3 and half years older than me. She is very tough and very independent woman. She made some life decisions early in life that kind of set up the trajectory of her life. She got pregnant at 14, had my nephew at 15, and that obviously put her on a different life path than most teenagers. She still is; her life is a result of that whole process. My nephew Shane is 16 now and it is just crazy to think he is such a part of the family now that, it’s weird to think that if that whole episode didn’t happen; where her life would be and her relationship with her family. Everything just kind of changed when that happened. She was always tough and independent and kind of stubborn before that, but that reinforced all of those qualities in her. She really had to knuckle up and be a provider and be a good mother and also be a teenager and young woman and see all my friends and can’t do what I want to do because of all this. It’s been an interesting process. She got married and then had my niece two years ago. It’s interesting that that we are a little bit older

because being an uncle; I became an uncle at 12 or 13 so I didn't know what that meant at the time. But now to kind of see them growing up, it's cool and it changes the way that I see my nephew too even though he is way older. It's like "I didn't know what I was doing as an uncle with you, but that I see Riley I kind of..."

So with age you have gained...

Yeah! Like my sister is, a 13, 14, 15 isn't prepared to be an uncle, what am I suppose to do here. Is this gonna be like a big brother type thing or yeah. That's my sister's situation. My brother is younger than me, a couple years younger than me. He and I were always close growing up because of the divorce. We went back and forth with each other to the houses and my sister, again because of her situation, was always doing her own thing.

Yeah.

So my brother and I became really close. Played sports, played video games, shared a room for years. Even till this day we have a close connection, we have defiantly grown apart I think because he is more of a home body. He hasn't really ventured out to much from Covina. I was always kind of...

Born to get out of here?

Black sheep, wanna see the world type of son. And that affected out relationship because I wasn't there. He was doing his thing and I was living my life somewhere else. We are still pretty close, but as we get older...

It's just happens

The dynamics change, yeah, it's a natural occurrence. But yeah he has his masters in marriage and family therapy and is working for a family therapy agency down in Long Beach. He is the baby of the family so he takes things; he is way more serious, this kind of birth order theory. Oldest does this, middle does this, and youngest does that. It would be interesting to see.

I have thought about that before

How that applies to us, are you a, you're a?

I have one older sister and so my theory was that the oldest is the smarter and usually hardcore.

As its gets younger, it's don't care that much about schooling and just things like that and then eventually, it all eventually starts to click.

Yeah again I think there are probably things that they can probably, if you look at the birth order books...

I'm sure there is something.

Things that apply to us and things that don't.

Yeah, getting back on topic, what has the recent economic recession that has been happened for the past 10 years, what has it been like for you, your family, your friends, is there anyone in particular that has really lost a lot or what has it been like?

I think just the general day to day expenses. I think that is where I have seen it the most. I mean obviously trying to go to school during the economic crisis was difficult. I mean I was finishing up here at CI right around the year the tuition increases were really ratcheting up. I think that on a national level I didn't really see too many people affected by the housing bubble or stock market or anything like that. But I think that in the just local state level I saw a lot of people

struggling to pay for school. And like I said, just the general cost of living, you know, gasoline goes up and groceries go up. It's expensive to just get by. That's kind of where I saw it. I was in Korea for all of 2009 and half of 2010 and that was a really bad year for the CSU system. That was when the furloughs kind of started. One of my colleagues was let go, then eventually brought back but it was just a scary time for students and educators alike. That is kind of where I have noticed the biggest impact and obviously I am biased cause of my profession. Perhaps I just wasn't paying attention all too much to the other things and again I think you look to your family and think are we affected? I didn't know anybody who lost a house or lost a job because of the rescission. In my family I guess, but that's more of a peripheral...people struggling to pay for school, people struggling to pay for groceries and things like that.

Yeah I defiantly see that even with my experiences and I know that I much younger than you but still things like that were it is just...I'm oblivious to the negative things, but from what I can see it is things like that. So I defiantly understand that. Do you think that because of all of these things, weather it is your health or housing or food insecurity, with you or even your family, do you think your life has changed much due to the economy? Or would you say that the past ten years have just been a little down pour, but not really that big of a deal?

Well, it's tough to answer for my family; we are all pretty privileged to be where we are at. I don't think we have struggled as much as other families overall. I think it could have been a lot worse and it was kind of comfort type things like, 'oh we can't go on this second vacation; oh we can't do this.' That is where I think we have encountered it the most. As far as my health, thankfully we haven't, there hasn't been any major illness in our family. Again we haven't really, I'm sure we have been affected, but it wasn't like a layoff or a foreclosure situation.

Well that's good!

Yeah.

You're pretty well up to date on the whole economic recession and you know a lot about it based on your position. Would there be anything that you necessarily blame for it? Would you blame just the economy in general or the government? What do you think?

I would say obviously the whole kind of lending spree that these banks got into, giving people these interest rates that they couldn't afford. There is this sort of sense of entitlement that I think most Americans have: I need this size house or I'm entitled to whatever. I think that the greed of the market, I don't ever expect the market to have a conscience so, the capitalist model of keep expanding, expand, expand, expand until you explode or eat yourself to death. That is what we see with these bubbles. That's what the housing bubble was and that kind of dragged the rest of it down. We still kind of see some of the residual affects going on across the world and even here in America. All of these international economies are so intertwined now that...

If one falls...

Yeah, we are all ships in a bay and we are all tied together and if one ship sinks it's going to drag the other ships down with it as well. Again I think it was people's sense of entitlement, and irresponsible on both ends of it and I don't think that the government did enough to ensure that the banks were being responsible. Then when the time came to bail them out or to have a reckoning, the bank were defiantly let off the hook.

Right, going back to the idea that you had with the whole Manifest Destiny thing, what do you think of the American Dream today? A lot of people say the American Dream is dead; it's been

dead for a while, what is your personal opinion on that? Do think it is possible to come to the country with an American Dream and fulfill what it is or do you think it is kind of an old age thing?

I think it is both. I think it is dead in some respects in that it never really was it purported to be. There have always been opportunities here, but if you look historically it was if you were a white male there are opportunities. If you own land. It has always been just a select few. So with the economic inequalities in this country it is becoming increasingly more difficult to climb that latter. If you come to this country with nothing but a strong work ethic and the clothes on your back, I don't think it is impossible for you to make something of yourself, but it is certainly extremely difficult. I think that it is more of the American Illusion as opposed to the American Dream. Our grandparents generation, there is this [mentality] that if you pull yourself up by your bootstraps and you work hard, there will be something there for you. That's not the case anymore. You have to have some connections and you have to get lucky to a certain extent. And with the unsustainable system that we have here, unsustainable economic system, there is no way to ensure that everybody will have the same opportunities. I think that that's not true, that's fantasy.

It's almost impossible

Yeah it is, and again it's not impossible mathematically for somebody to come here and like, "I opened up a convenient store or I opened up a fruit stand or I opened up a small business or something else" and you can make it work, but I think that the likelihood of that happening is small.

It's like how in American capitalism there has to be people on the bottom for it to work.

Right, yeah, and I think that as I said, the inequality of wealth distribution...fewer and fewer people own more and more of the wealth.

99%.

Yeah and that's what the whole Occupy movement was about. Some people thought as a redistribution of wealth, others just wanted to say that some people need to be held accountable. It makes it difficult for the American Dream to become a reality when things like the housing bubble kind of happen and people aren't held accountable when they need to be held accountable.

Makes sense. Going back to the question I asked you early about health and what not, do you believe that it is possible that the economy in a way is making us fat? As an American society based off of, going back to advertising that we covered in your class, cheap foods or salty foods or cravings...there are articles saying that when you hear bad news about the economy, salty foods are what you crave. So do you believe that these types of media advertisements or these actual companies are making America fat and are therefore hurting us health wise and also hurting the economy?

Well yeah, I think you can look at a number of different studies that have linked obesity rates with incomes. If you only have \$20-\$30 to feed your family with per week, well are you gonna go and buy groceries with that, or... \$20-\$30 doesn't go very far at the grocery store, but \$20-\$30 can go pretty far at McDonalds; you go to the value menu. I think that getting the most for has little input, that is what has become the driving force that is behind the American economy and just the American way of looking at consumption. It is this idea of value that I have: I have

‘x’ amount to spend, how can I get the most – not quality, but quantity? It is a quality vs. quantity issue, absolutely.

Do you think that if the economy, if the economic downfall would have never happened, do you think that obesity rates wouldn't be as high as they are today or do you think that has kind of just been an American...?

Perhaps, it's tough to say. Again if you look at the correlation between economic disparity and obesity rates, I think that you might kind of draw that conclusion but, there are tons of fat rich people.

In the olden days, and I'm talking really before us, being fat was a sign of wealth and that was a good thing. But for some reason now, it's obviously the other way around.

Right, right, right. I don't think; I wouldn't encourage anyone to be fat, and I don't think that is what you were saying either.

Right, no.

But I think that there is obviously more factors that contribute to it: a sanitary lifestyle, but I think that if you look at the choric intake of people, and they have to survive, I can order or spend \$3-\$4 on the value menu today and that's what I eat. And that's just not viable to get all of the nutritional intake that you need from \$3-\$4 a day. So it's difficult. Perusable items like fruits and vegetables cost money and they go bad, you have to go to the store every day, there is a whole list of things that contribute to it, but I think to answer your question there is a direct correlation between wealth and inequality and obesity. I think that had the economic recession not taken place perhaps there'd be a slightly better rate of obesity in this country.

But not by much?

No I don't think by much because there are a lot of factors that go into it and so that by itself, I don't think would influence it greatly. That's just my opinion.

Yeah I do agree with you and I do think that this country was headed down this obesity road long before the economic recession even took place, but still affects it as well. What would be your, just kind of getting to the end of this here, what would be your hope for the future when it comes to either you or the country or... what would be your best hope?

When I think of the ideal America I think of it as living up to its potential and not being hypocritical or exclusionary and that is how it purports itself. Give us your huddled masses. The idea of sailing from whatever the old country is, you know whatever problems you had going on there and you sail into Ellis Island and you see the Statue of Liberty and it's like: 'alright, I'm gonna make it, I'm gonna make something of myself here.' I ideally would like to see a little bit more done on social services. I am a little bit more liberal leaning in that regards. I don't think that it is a bad idea to have public health care. If you look at the countries that do it well, and it is not a drain on their economy. It helps; it is for the greater good. I think for California and the CSU system, I'd like to see continued increase in investment from the state. I think the last few years we have gotten away from that. Hopefully with the new Chancellor and Jerry Brown seems to be on board with getting the CSU back to where it was intended to be. There is this ideal of what we think this should be and what we are saying this should be, and then there is the day to day reality...

Of what actually happens.

Yeah, of what actually happens. So the problems for the country are going to, I believe, get worse as long as a small percentage of the population owns a large portion of the wealth; and that's just if you look at any kind of historical situation and that is where societies collapse in on themselves. So if that trend continues, I don't think that it is a very positive outlook for the nation. And perhaps it may need to bottom out, then there may have to be some drastic social revolution that needs to take place for that to kind of figure itself out totally, but I hope it doesn't come to that.

Right.

But the upper upper class, money pulls the strings so...

It's all about the money.

Yeah I think that as long as we catter to the rich and kind of look at the poor as leaches off the system; I think that continued perspective will not go well for this country.

That makes a lot of sense. Is there anything else that you would like to add overall in general?

No, just that as a product of the CSU system, I feel like that it is a fantastic service, I am happy to be an alum, I'm proud to be a current faculty member of it and I hope to continue to see it grow and flourish and serve the state in the way that it was meant to and be viewed as a public good and to not be view as again this drain on the economy.

Right, teachers don't always get a lot of respect...

We don't and I'm ok with that, it doesn't weigh on me from day to day but it's where you're at. Again I have been where you have been. That's where the position I'm in now...how many students are going to be priced out of education if we continue to kind of put more and more of

the burden on the students? 'Well, take out more students loans' [what the system will say], well that bubble is going to burst soon. It's all about priorities and perspectives and I think that if we don't have our priorities in the right places then things will continue to be problematic.

Well said. That concludes my interview. Thank you for everything. A lot of useful information here.

My pleasure.

Yeah, thank you very much. I will see you in class.