

12-8-2010

Interview with Brendan Phillips, Sisters of the Road, 2010 (audio)

Brendan Phillips

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PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW INDEX

INTERVIEWEE: Brendan Philips

Interviewer: Brandon Green

Date: Dec 8, 2010

Location of Interview: Sisters of the Road Café, Portland

Research Assistant: N/A

Interview Series: SUSTAINING NORTHWEST LANDSCAPES & COMMUNITIES

Recording Equipment: DIGITAL RECORDER (WINDOWS MEDIA AUDIO FILE) WITH AN
EXTERNAL, OMNIDIRECTIONAL MICROPHONE

Time Notes

00:20	How long have you lived in Portland? – Two years
00:30	What brought you here (Portland)? – Change of scenery
00:45	Education? – Evergreen College
1:00	How did you get involved in this work? - Field of study, area of interest
2:00	Previous work? – Youth art, organizing events
2:40	Tent city. Got interested in housing and human rights.
3:30	How do you pursue human rights? – Systemic change program

4:00	Health, shelters, work with other organizations.
4:40	“Housing is the solution to homelessness”
5:00	Work with other organizations to chart the relation of government and homelessness
6:00	Slashing of funding for housing projects and programs correlates with homelessness
7:00	“Work we do is not reformative work... is revolutionary work.” Human rights.
8:00	Challenge to the idea of capitalism providing for everyone.
8:30	Growth not sustainable
9:00	Challenge to get people to view fundamental rights
9:30	Economic human rights: healthcare, housing
10:00	Work with many other groups that share even partial agreement
10:40	Please define a community organizing model – MLK, theories, narrative of the people
11:30	Give them the tools. Issue based narratives versus people’s narratives.
12:00	Truth of people’s experience
12:50	Diverse perspectives boil down to the same issues.
13:30	Use stories to create messages that resonate with people.
14:30	How do you get their stories? - Voices from the street, other means, publishing.
15:30	“Numbers tell such a limited story.” Partnership with allies for technology and media.
16:30	“We need to start reclaiming the media and the message.” Big priority.
17:30	Empowered Media Voices program to compete with other stakeholder’s messages.
18:00	The café work every day, give people the chance to work, and slowly teach.
18:30	Has technology helped you with the media? – It is hard to say.
19:00	EVM’s success is empowering the people—first goal to make it ongoing and accepted
20:00	Our system isolates people. About community.

21:00	Definition of sustainability? – Not an official one, but the organization is sustainable.
21:30	Food justice path in the café, uses as much locally grown food as possible.
22:30	Sustainability has a lot of meanings to a lot of people – community sustainability
23:30	What are economic human rights? – Create value to the work you do
25:00	Everyone enters the market at a different place. Diversity.
25:45	Economic human rights is a baseline of provision and starting place.
26:00	Food, housing, healthcare; political rights, right to a living. Fundamental human rights.
28:00	People overcome adversity all the time, but many people don't.
28:00	What is a safe housing that everyone is entitled to? - Housing is a starting point.
28:30	Bigger issue is about community. “Home is more than four walls and a roof.”
29:45	Give control back to community.
31:00	Focus on property rights is removed from the human interest.
32:00	Interplay between private property and usefulness to society.
33:00	Perception of housing projects as squalor, not correct stereotype.
33:45	Do you advocate in that area? - Yes, WRAP does work in that area.
34:45	Any other strategies on housing? - Work with allies like Oregon CAT
35:50	What other allies do you work with? - Day labor groups, street roots, many groups.
37:00	All groups share a understanding that problems are inherent to the system.
37:30	What is a typical day like here? - Very dynamic. Lots of frustration.
38:30	Networking with organizations and coalitions. Develop relationships.
39:00	Persistent challenges? - Too many to name. Big questions about reform.
40:00	Balance the needs of the café against systemic change work.
40:30	Mental illness.

41:30	Myths about homelessness.
42:00	How staff works. Get community involved.
42:30	Proudest achievements? – Film festival. Leadership retreat. Community organizing.
43:20	Rally for public housing with allies in San Francisco.
43:30	Showing we are acting to change things.
43:45	Any plans for the future? - Challenge the media.
44:00	New message, new narrative.
44:30	Any comments? – Thank you for the opportunity. Hope it helps.
45:00	Time capsule: empowered media voices.