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Writing Capstone
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Motivations:

Humans of Farmington, Missouri

For my remix project, I remixed a piece about my relationship with my grandpa into a piece that mimicked the style of Humans of New York, and focused more on my grandpa's town, rather than my relationship with the town or the family I have there. In my previous piece, I describe Farmington.

Farmington, Missouri is my view at classic small-town America. There are high-school football games on Friday nights, where graduates of the high-school come to live vicariously through their children by watching them play in the same stadium they originally did, where the old men in town meet at McDonalds every weekday morning at 6am for coffee, and the women's table is one booth over, where family is valued above all else, where education is rudimentary and where people are born, live, and die. People don't leave Farmington. Out of four uncles, four aunts, fourteen cousins, and an endless count of second cousins and extended family members, no one has left Farmington except for my mom.

The town of Farmington is around 12,000 people, and I've always wondered about the people in the community that I'm not related to. Did they have the same traditions? Had they grown up there as well? Are they content with staying, or would they like to leave? Also being drawn to the stories in Humans of New York, HONY, my whole life has made me consider interviewing and writing about people from the different communities that have raised me, one of which being Farmington. I like HONY because they portray such intimate, relatable stories that all humans share, but are also concise and digestible. One would not have to live in New York to understand that this city is the most diverse in the world, but in spite of that the creator of HONY Brian Stanton shows us through his photographs and short interviews that there are

innately human, with the same problems and joys that connect all of us. We are more similar than we are different.

In the spirit of Humans of New York, I asked some of my family members to connect me with their friends from town so that I could interview them and focus on stories of others living in Farmington to remind myself how I can be connected to this town that I visit throughout the year, which is familial but not home.

First Three Interview Drafts:

I just got my apartment for next year, and I'm excited about that, so I don't have to live in the dorms anymore because I transferred here. This is my first year at Missouri State. I have my finals coming up next week, and they're in World Religion, Gender of Society, Psychology and Sociology. I have a nonfiction writing class also. I like psychology because it talks about how the human brain thinks and I like knowing what's going on in people's heads. My goal is to get my doctorate in psychology and open up my own practice where I help people going through anxiety and depression. I want to have my own practice where dogs can come in and help settle down patients' anxiety before they come talk to me. I miss my dogs from home, and since coming to school I've noticed that without them I've been feeling depressed, but when I see animals around campus I feel happy, and I feel like animals can put people in a better mood and can help people get out of depression and they help with the negative things in life. I had 4 dogs, and since I came to school, I can't have dogs in the dorms and when I see dogs out it makes me happy.

Gosh, I feel like there's nothing to do in Farmington. For memorial weekend, we always have the family come up to hang out, and one year we got a big waterslide thing and we kept flying into the woods and we had to put tarps down. My whole family was there, aunts, uncles and cousins. It's been a big change, because Farmington is so small and Springfield is so huge. In Springfield you just keep driving and there's always more Springfield. I used to fall asleep in the quiet, and now I'm always falling asleep to sirens and stuff. Also I'd like to bring my dogs here, but I don't know where I'd put them. There's more land in Farmington and more space. I like it here, but I don't see this as a place where I'd settle down. I don't want to live in Farmington. My goal is to live in Alabama. It's more about where I'm needed at this point. There might be so many practices in Alabama that there's no need for me to live there. Alabama has been my favorite state since I was little. We always travel there, ever since I was little. It seems like Farmington there, but I know everyone in Farmington already, and I want a fresh start somewhere in Alabama. It's also sunny there all the time, and I feel like it would be a good place for me to start working with people with depression. Yeah, everyone knows each other in Farmington, and I'm just ready to get out.

I went to Alabama for Spring Break with some of my friends, and I just had a lot of anxiety during the trip from being that far away from home and my dogs. I just knew I couldn't do it. I mean, I'm three hours away right now, and I just knew I couldn't do more. I already miss my dogs so much. I have friends that live like five hours or more away from home, and I don't know how they do it. I feel like a lot of people, especially in college, relate to anxiety, depression, and I feel like a lot of people can relate to that, because we just want to get good grades. And it's really hard because a lot of people are sleep deprived. I've had anxiety for a long

time, since sophomore year of high school. Depression, everyone has it, it's just that some people have it more. I've had friends and family members that have lost people from depression and suicide. When I took psychology and sociology classes, I've understood more about what others are going through. I've always wanted to help people out. I feel like once I took these classes that I'd be able to help anyone going through a rough time. I just want to help. My classes really helped me identify how I could help, because I'd heard of other people taking the same path and making a difference. My family is my first, and then I have my friends. My family is my number one support group. Yes, my mom was a little iffy because it's hard to start your own practice and everything, and my dad doesn't really care. My greatest fear is probably disappointing the people that believe in me. I'm scared that I'll disappoint my family. I'm afraid that if I don't do that well and become successful my family will be disappointed, because they've worked their butts off to get me here and I don't want to disappoint them in that way.

Initial Reflection on the Drafts:

Working on this project was really encouraging, because I've wanted to do something similar to this style of writing for a long time, but haven't had the time to work on it. I did run into many challenges with the interview after the fact. I had all of the questions set up that I wanted to ask, but since I was doing a phone call interview, I didn't have a device to record the conversation on. This left me to taking notes as quickly as I could, and I would say this stifled the effectiveness of the conversation flow that I was looking to achieve. I think when I do this again I'll make sure to have a recording device so that I can maintain the integrity of the other person's comments.

Because my notes were as close to direct quotes as possible, I had a lot of questions surrounding the methods used by Brandon Stanton, the creator of Humans of New York (HONY). I researched HONY's about page, but didn't find anything on the methods behind the interviews and captions to the photos. According to the site, the project originated as a photography project with the goal of photographing 10,000 New Yorkers on the streets, and Stanton organically started interviewing his subjects and including quotes from them and short stories about their lives alongside their photos.

I don't know to what degree Stanton edits the interviews, or if he does at all. It's certainly difficult to get people to talk in paragraphs, especially to a stranger, and upon examining some of the stories included with the photos, one could image it being stitched together by Stanton with Stanton's questions and dialogue removed. I'd imagine that he does use some kind of recorder for the conversations, which would allow him to more easily maintain the integrity of the person's voice, but to what degree does he patch their dialogue together to make it more cohesive for the reader. For example, when I was interviewing someone from Farmington, I

asked her how long she'd lived there, and she replied, "whole life, but moved to Springfield for school as a transfer student." Now for the audience, they don't know what she means by "whole life," and as the writer, can I alter it to say, "I've lived in Farmington my whole life" or would that be a violation of using quotes, because those exact words didn't come out of her mouth.

Another example where some of her speech would have been clearer to the audience if I'd altered it was here: "Yes, my mom was a little iffy because it's hard to start your own practice and everything, and my dad doesn't really care." For this question, she was asked if her parents support her goals of opening a practice as a psychology counselor, but she just notes that her mom was iffy, not what she was iffy about. As the writer, I could put in brackets after iffy stating, [about pursuing psychology], but Stanton doesn't use that brackets or anything in his written interviews. I feel like I'm walking a line between understanding what they meant to say, taking the best notes possible of what they actually said, and leveraging the two to create the most clear interview for the audience. I find that it is often true that people have a hard time saying what they mean, and this interview stood true to that observation.

Perhaps it is my interviewing skills that didn't allow for paragraphs of supposed dialogue that Stanton portrays with his images. Possibly, my lack of recording device halted the conversation so much, that she didn't want to overwhelm me with her speech because she could hear my fingers vigorously typing in the background. Another element is the fact that the interview took place over the phone rather than in person. Maybe if she could have looked into my eyes, she would have told me more and been more open and honest. The conversation itself surely would have had a greater level of depth and flow if we had engaged in this conversation more organically. Perhaps not. I can't be sure until I do this project again, or interview another subject.