

The following oral history memoir is the result of 1 videorecorded session of an interview with Erin Anderson by Cynthia Tobar on August 30, 2014 in New York City. This interview is part of "Cities for People, Not for Profit": Gentrification and Housing Activism in Bushwick. Erin Anderson has reviewed the transcript and has made minor corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind that she or he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

**Erin Anderson**

[Start of recorded material - 00:00:00]

Interviewer: It is Saturday, August 30, 2014. We're here at the lot for the Appalach-Wick art event. Can you state your name and occupation, please?

Erin: Yeah. My name is Erin Anderson. Currently, I'm a studio coordinator.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Erin: The company I work for is a Brooklyn-based sound stage company. We have five stages. I help to book the stages. We offer recording space for television film, music videos, webisodes, that type of thing.

Interviewer: Have you ever lived in Bushwick and if you have, for how long?

Erin: When I first moved to New York, I lived in Bushwick. I lived there for, I think, just a year actually. Then, I ended up moving to a different neighborhood.

Interviewer: Can you, as an observer of life in Bushwick at the time that you lived there, describe to me what the living conditions were like for you in the neighborhood and what brought you to Bushwick in the beginning and any thoughts you want to share?

Erin: Yeah, absolutely. When I first moved to Bushwick, I didn't move to Bushwick specifically to be in Bushwick. I moved from Montana to New York. I never had been to New York. I just so happened that I had a friend that was moving here at the same time and another friend who had a boyfriend who had two rooms available in a loft, essentially, that were affordable. We moved in right away. We were there for a year until our rent was raised quite a bit, and we couldn't afford to live there anymore.

Interviewer: What brought you to be in Bushwick and working in Bushwick and working in Bushwick as an artist? Can you share any thoughts on that?

Erin: I feel like everything that has come for me being in Bushwick work, I can associate with this. Just the people I know has all, I guess, been by chance more so than anything. When I first moved here, I didn't have a job. I interned.

I was working in Manhattan, and I was just interning anywhere that I could get just meeting people.

When I moved to New York, I really wanted to experience New York. I didn't want to spend all of my time always working. It just so happened that I happened to find a place that is just a few blocks, actually, from here for work. I've been there for over two years, at this point. Then everyone else I've met through there or just by happen stance. Any opportunity I've had has just been, I guess, meeting people just randomly and hitting it off with people.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about the kind of art that you do and a little bit about that and what you hope to get accomplished here at the lot today?

Erin: Really, I spent much of my childhood drawing caricatures, specifically cartoons and caricatures. Some young girls keep diaries that I drew all the time. Then, there kind of came to a point in high school, at some point, where I stopped drawing almost completely. All I drew were like cartoon jellyfish for about ten years.

Here a year or so ago, I started drawing the saints. The saints I draw have wild hair, big lips, big eyelashes. I draw them. I make pattern libraries, and I fill them in with wild patterns and wild colors. I draw saints in the sense that I would have wanted to see the saint that I was confirmed under and that look. I would like to think Saint Bridget was wild-looking.

Interviewer: Tell me what you hope to accomplish at the lot while you're here.

Erin: I think this, for me, is a good reason to continue to work, just to continue to draw, continue exploring what I'm doing with the saints more than anything. The saints that I'm doing, it's really kind of sidelined my work right now. It's just kind of like something I really enjoy doing. I find it therapeutic. Here at the lot, I think more, like I said, is just to continue working on those and actually just meeting people. I really like the people experience.

One thing I've experienced a lot here is having these random conversations with people that I may otherwise never have met and never had the opportunity to talk about. Doing something like saints really brings out interesting conversation with people of strong feelings about it. I draw saints probably because I was raised Catholic, and I'm named after a saint myself.

It's less about Catholicism to me and more about this fantastical history of these people who may or may not have existed and that these people who may or may not have existed, how they've moved generations and countless people whether spiritually, whether to take action or whatever. It brings out interesting conversations every weekend.

Interviewer: What have been your interactions at the local community when you were in Bushwick either for work with your art or as a former resident? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Erin: I'd say the vast majority of my experience has been very positive. I come from a rural town where you say, "Hello," to people. You give people the benefit of the doubt. I really tried to maintain that in New York, although, I know that's not necessarily the attitude people think of New Yorkers having.

What I have found is saying, "Hello," to people and treating them with just common courtesy, you get that back. My experiences have been exceptionally positive. I talk to these people all the time. Yeah. I would say most of it, especially with people who were born and raised in Bushwick, has been great. There's been a few odd experiences, but I think that comes from just life being in a city where lots of people are living.

Interviewer: What do you think about these issues about affordable housing in Bushwick? Can you tell me a little bit about that and where you're currently living now?

Erin: We ended up getting priced out of the place that we were looking at or what we were staying at. We were living in an old tea factory that had been converted into lofts. I guess previously to being taken with new ownership and being made into housing, it was a crack den. It was a tea factory. Then, it was a crack den. Then, it became house. We had lots of space.

We had three bedrooms. The bedrooms had all been built by the previous tenants. Our rent ended up getting raised dramatically. It was no longer affordable, and it was no longer worth what they were asking. The fact that people were spray painting hallways all the time and cats are being let in to relieve themselves in the hallways and on our front step. Door handles were being knocked off. Just all these things are happening and they raised the rent.

It was just really no longer worth it for me to live and pay that kind of rent. When we checked out of the place, the super told us that they were going to demolish the three bedrooms. They were going to build six bedrooms that met the minimum size requirements dictated by New York State for what a rentable bedroom can be.

Now, this place has six bedrooms but only one bathroom still and no kitchen. I guess a stand-in kitchen is what they told us it was going to be. I imagined they raised the rent, one, so we would leave and then they could probably collect much more rent by renting out to six people. We ended up moving into Bedstein almost two years ago, at this point, we've been there.

Interviewer: What have been the lessons that you've learned from that experience as a tenant in Bushwick? What would you have liked to have seen? Any thoughts and reflections on that?

Erin: I don't know if I had any specific lessons. For me, being from Montana, I am a fifth-generation Montanan and a family farm is farmer ranching. I feel like what's happening in Bushwick into Brooklyn is what's happening in Montana. Montana is an export state which means export states just have less money than import states do. The cost of living in Montana previous to the oil boom that they're experiencing has been quite low.

Actually probably since I can remember, there have always been concerns about estate [unintelligible 00:09:32] especially from California. They buy land. They build huge hunting lodges, and property taxes go up. Suddenly, you have people who had land in their family for generations that no longer can afford the property taxes. It creates resentment for those people that have to sell the land that somebody previously in their family had had, a family had been on for years. I can relate to the gentrification concern, definitely.

That's what's happening in Montana and has been for years. I just feel like I moved from one version of ... and we didn't call it 'gentrification' but just one version of another group of people coming in and prices going up and the people who have serious cultural roots there can no longer stay there or the families can't own their homes and the land. That, for me, has just been ... that's just an interesting situation to be in, for me.

Interviewer: How does it affect your plans for being a long-term resident in New York City not just as a regular resident but then also as an artist what you would think your future here in the city would be like?

Erin: Knock on wood, since we have lived where we lived, we rent from a person, our rent hasn't been raised. I, frankly, can't afford much more than we're paying. With that said, I don't know what I can afford unless I just continue to move deeper in. I don't know. It's weird for me. I don't make a whole lot. I don't come from a family that has a whole lot. Really what I make is what has to make it fit. Either it's continue to just move around until I find something. Maybe it's having to leave. Maybe I can't afford the city if it continues to grow like it is, I mean the rents to be raised like it is. It's a lot of up-in-the-air things. I don't know if I really have an answer to that.

Interviewer: How would you characterize this theme in Appalach-Wick on community and community amongst artists but then how that theme of community extends to local residents, long-term residents and these themes of displacement and being priced out and having to take on a pneumatic lifestyle in order to find something that fits within your budget and how we can use these ideas of community to somehow ... I mean do you believe that there's hope if people

get together that they can have a say in changing these aspects or whether we're all being reactionary? What are your thoughts on that?

Erin: It's interesting. I really think that there is a chance for community, but I think it has to stem from the individual. I think there can be movements but, again, it has to come from the individual like literally walking down the street and saying, "Hello," to people, I think, is the biggest things. I think when you have a certain group of people that have been existing in one spot for generations and then you have a new group of people that are coming in or making their way in and no one is bridging the gap, no one is willing to say, "Hey," or show up at the block party or whatever or just make those basic neighborly things, I don't think it will ... I think it will just continue.

For me, it's really an individual thing. It has to be an individual reaching out to other individuals. That's what I found in the neighborhood I'm living in now. If you reach out to people, people are willing to reach out to you. I think these type of art movements are great, but I think it really also has to come down to the individual, just individual actions.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. I think we're done. Any concluding remarks or final thoughts before we wrap up?

Erin: Nothing that comes to mind.

Interviewer: Thank you so much.

Erin: No problem.

[End of recorded material - 00:13:58]