

# Kenyon College

## Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

---

Stories of Knox County Interviews

Stories of Knox County

---

3-23-2017

## Tyra Brown

Tyra Brown

Mary Grace Detmer  
*Kenyon College*

Hannah Klubeck  
*Kenyon College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digital.kenyon.edu/sokc\\_interviews](https://digital.kenyon.edu/sokc_interviews)



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brown, Tyra; Detmer, Mary Grace; and Klubeck, Hannah, "Tyra Brown" (2017). *Stories of Knox County Interviews*. Paper 5.  
[https://digital.kenyon.edu/sokc\\_interviews/5](https://digital.kenyon.edu/sokc_interviews/5)

This Audio is brought to you for free and open access by the Stories of Knox County at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Stories of Knox County Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [noltj@kenyon.edu](mailto:noltj@kenyon.edu).

KENYON COLLEGE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Stories of Knox County

Tyra Brown  
Interviewed by  
Mary Grace Detmer and Hannah Klubeck  
On  
March 23, 2017

Kenyon College  
Oral History Project  
Stories of Knox County

Interviewee: Tyra Brown  
Interviewer: Mary Grace Detmer and Hannah Klubeck  
March 23, 2017

Mary Grace Detmer: This is Mary Grace Detmer and Hannah Klubeck with the Stories of Knox County Project interviewing *Tyra Brown* on her experiences with life in Knox County. Today's date is *March 23rd 2017* and we are speaking in the Wright Center in Mount Vernon. Thank you for your willingness to participate. Could you please state your full name and birthdate?

Tyra Brown: Tyra Michelle Brown, I was born February 1st, 1995.

MGD: How long have you lived in Mount Vernon?

TB: I am twenty-two, so twenty-two years. Since I was two months old.

MGD: Do you work in Mount Vernon?

TB: I do. I work right up the road,. I am a community employment specialist at New Hope Industries. We work with adults with disabilities and mental illness and help them find jobs within the community and all kinds of employment related services. I went away to Bowling Green for School for a little bit.

MGD: Have you ever considered moving (from Mount Vernon)?

TB: Yes all the time (laughs).

MGD: How do you interact with your community beyond your work?

TB: I work at the domestic violence center as well, but I've spent a lot of time since high school volunteering there and kind of getting involved with events. I've done a little bit, not as much as I want to, of political action with the Knox County Democrats. Any cute little volunteer opportunities, not cute but like anything that I have the time for, as a parent I want to get involved in my kids school and get him involved with the local sports. He's six so it's that time.

MGD: What are your hobbies?

TB: I read a lot. I like to read, I crochet. I don't get out much, I'm very much a mom.

MGD: What do you like to read?

TB: I read everything, well not everything, I don't like fantasy a lot, which is funny because I have a fantasy book in my purse right now (laughs). I like a lot of historical fiction and suspense. I'm reading the last book of the magicians trilogy right now which is really good. My favorite book as a kid was A Tree Grows In Brooklyn. So really anything I can get my hands on I like to read.

MGD: Is your family still in Mount Vernon as well?

TB: Yeah most of them. My grandparents live really close to us, like a five minute drive. My aunt lives in Utica but right outside of Knox County. Most of my family is really local, they've kind of dispersed but my grandparents and my mom are all close.

MGD: So could you talk about your childhood and what family values were instilled in you?

TB: My childhood was traditional and boring but also like everyone has weird childhood stuff. I grew up here I was like one of three black people or people of any color in my elementary school. That was really hard I was like fat and black and super nerdy. I skipped a grade, so I skipped first grade, and they wanted me to skip another grade but I had such a hard time with the social development. I just wasn't there, so we kept me there. So I really struggled, I don't know, we had like a lot of...childhoods so heavy...that's such a big question. I got diagnosed with a lot of mental health stuff at that age it was like depression and ADHD and ADD and as I've gotten older it's like bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, kind of pinned stuff down like PTSD and stuff like that. I don't know childhood was just like I don't know my family is a very tight knit family so even with all this stuff I got access to mental health stuff because my family and my parents, my mom at least was very attentive and knows her kids. I have four siblings, I have an older step sister, our parents aren't together anymore, but she's still in our lives. I have three younger siblings and none of them are fully related to me they're all half siblings so we've kind of always had like a modge podge, I'm the only black person on my mom's side of the family so I don't know. They're very big and Italian and were very close and everybody knows everything about everybody else.

MGD: And you're still close with your siblings?

TB: I mean I guess (laughs). My older sister and I talk, she lives in Columbus now. I live at home still so maybe I'll be closer when we move out (laughs). It's really hard to live with teenagers. They're thirteen, she'll be fourteen in June, a fifteen year old, and a seventeen year old. Yeah the seventeen year old just got a car a couple of days ago so I haven't seen him a lot (laughs). Him and I are close. That's the one thing, we had a lot of heavy stuff happen in childhood and just kind of with our parents marriage and my dad turned out to be not a great guy. Were all kind of stuck together a little bit but we all kind of depend on each other, I guess that's my biggest family value, closeness and trust, I trust my family. We fight but yeah.

MG: Was it difficult to be the only person of color growing up in your family?

TB: Not really in my family. Hair is a big thing. My mom really did her best to figure out what to do with my hair. She wanted to let it be natural and I always wanted it straightened because it was really more of a problem in the community. Being at school and all the girls had straight hair or even curly hair but it was long and it was not kinky and curly. So that was the big issue in my house all the time was my hair. Really I didn't notice in my community. I noticed (my color) a lot more in the community. We had a couple of instances of just really mean kids, that was a big part of not having friends in elementary school, and just being really aware of being other. I spent a lot of time self hating and really struggling with wanting to be white or just not black, and I'm very light skin too so that's a totally different conversation, when it comes to colorism. But back then it was like I'm still the darkest kid in school but it got better in high school and stopped being such of an issue. Middle school is awkward for everybody, the forgotten years (laughs).

MGD: Do you feel that Mount Vernon and or Knox County has changed throughout your life here?

TB: Um, yeah. Visually it looks different. Even in the last five years there's been a lot of construction and destruction and fires, there's a lot of drugs right now. That's our big conversation in the community is substance abuse and a heroin epidemic really. People are dropping like flies, it was kind of a dirty little secret around town and now it's really in our face. It's probably the biggest change that everyone talks about besides the visuals, and it's (Mount Vernon) definitely a little more diverse. I'll like see black people and were like "Hey!"

MGD: Do you plan to stay in Mount Vernon for the foreseeable future?

TB: Within the next five years I'd like to be in Columbus at least, that's a step away before I'm like out of state! I'm gonna be in Mount Vernon for probably the next couple of years but it's not something I want long term.

MGD: When you said earlier you've thought about moving, if you could go anywhere, where would you go?

TB: Chicago actually used to be my dream city. My senior year I got really attached to it and was just like, "There's so much!" But it's so cold (laughs). But I need seasons. Most of high school it was California. I think Ohioans just go through a California is the best phase. Now I think, I went to Providence last fall to see some online friends, I saw a whole bunch of them, I went to Vermont and stuff. Everything's so close in New England and I like that so New England's where my head has been at lately. They keep having hurricanes which is really stressing me out (laughs).

MGD: How does Kenyon figure into your image of Knox County? Is it included or no?

TB: I mean when I think about Knox County I don't necessarily think about Kenyon. Gambier has the elementary school, they have Wigan Street, but even that kind of in my mind is totally different, it's Mount Vernon City School District but it's in a totally different city so. Kenyon has always kind of been there, we have a lot of views about Kenyon in Mount Vernon. It's always been pretty and it's kind of like you're always really far from home when you're like down the road.

MGD: What are peoples opinions of Kenyon?

TB: We play a game called Kenyon or Naz (laughs). It's a really fun past time and you can tell if someone's coming out of the antique store it's really a toss up, it depends on if they're wearing a beanie or not. That's a Naz student (laughs). Sometimes you can point at them and be like he's a Naz student and he wants to be a youth pastor. It's just that kind of other, I had some friends who went to Kenyon so that kind of changed a little bit. It was a lot of Kenyon kids are rich and they don't wear shoes and they don't know how to use a crosswalk (laughs). I think that's like colleges in general. That was the big annoyance. A lot of people in Knox County think Kenyon people look down on us so we in return look down on Kenyon. Oh they're too good for us and we're not gonna have that. Once I talked to my friends they were like, "It's a lot of people on scholarship." it's not all "Everybody's paid for, and everybody's parents pay for them, and it's all a bunch a liberals," you know. Bowling Green was very similar, it's a very liberal college in the middle of a very rural conservative community. Bowling Green is like Mount Vernon 2.0, their downtown looks like our downtown, with the buildings all stacked together, it was like, "Really? Did I make the right choice?" (laughs). I volunteered for the Obama campaign when I was there and it was really interesting to see that liberal and conservative clash, I got a lot of doors closed on me or people outright not answering doors. It's different and it's hard to figure out where you connect because a lot of people are like, "Oh, every nine months and then they're gone again" and what that does to a community and what that looks like.

MGD: Can you talk about the organization you started in Mount Vernon?

TB: Well I didn't really start it I kind of took it over. Well I helped. There was a Knox Pride community and I kind of heard about it and it was just a Facebook page and it still kind of is, we haven't really flushed it out. But it was something that there hasn't been a very prominent LGBTQ community and if there has been there was an alliance, like a GSA, with the adults sort of. In high school we had a principal for a really long time that flat out refused any proposals for a GSA for a long time. She was principal for a long time, and there was a lot of clashes with the student body over that. Now they have one, they got a new principal and he was like, "Whatever." I've never really connected and I don't necessarily feel safe being out. It was a cool thing to connect, I got involved because the girl who was running it kind of wasn't sure where to

go with it. She wasn't really running it to get a lot of traffic on the page, and kind of figuring out how to do that. I was helping her out and she wanted to do a pride parade in like a month, and I was like, "Have you ever planned a parade, do you have all the permits, do you have a route?" She was like, "I didn't know you had to have all that." I volunteered with the domestic violence shelter in high school and in the teen advisory council and one thing they did was Take Back the Night. That walk has to be organized so we got an inside peek on them organizing the walk and how you have to have stuff sectioned out because you're gonna stop traffic at some point. So that was kind of my introduction to having those things. I've watched other people plan pride events, Mansfield had their first pride event a few years ago that I went to, and it took a lot to get that together.

MGD: Have you guys had an event?

TB: No. It really hasn't taken off. I hung out with the girl in person a few times and she said some things that made me think maybe she wasn't, I don't wanna say as gay, but she was just like, "Well I just don't know, I'm normally only with girls when I'm drunk." I was just like, "why are you running a pride page?" We changed the name to Knox LGBTQ Community but it hasn't launched into what I want it to. It doesn't have a lot of activity and we need to revamp it and figure out the purpose of it.

MGD: Where has most of the work for the organization been?

TB: A lot of reaching out to people and just letting them know that it exists. If there was like a gay person in Knox County we typically found each other or they've dated each other (laughter). All the girls in Knox County have dated each other, I haven't dated any girls here recently. It's more been connecting people, like people will be like, "Oh I didn't know so and so liked that page." It's kind of been unintentional networking. I haven't done as much as I want to do with it. I would like events I would like to have picnics and meet and have a space, but with this election too it's been kind of scary to go in public and say we're gonna have a queer picnic (laughter).

Hannah Klubeck: How was it coming out with your sexuality and developing your understanding of sexuality?

TB: Well I grew up in the church. It was a pretty relaxed church, it was a great church. But there was a lot of attitudes about not necessarily like being gay is wrong but like my grandma literally told me that there was a homosexual agenda one time. I was just like I love my grandma and we've really worked through some stuff but there was a lot of like guilt as like I remember as an elementary school kid singing along to song lyrics and very intentionally changing pronouns. Like if a guy was singing to "he" so that no one would think I was into girls. So it was really a lot of personal stuff, and then I really developed a crush on like my best friend and I was like, I told a lot of people about it, my close friends, but I had a decent group at that time. Then when she didn't reciprocate it things got really blurred with us and it kind of changed the friendship for

a while, and when she didn't reciprocate it I kind of took it back, I was like "no!" Did you ever watch Degrassi? So Ashley dated Alex for a minute and then she never dated another girl again it was this weird like thing, and I was like, "Yeah it's just an Ashley situation" (laughs). I just remember being like it's an Ashley thing it's fine. Then I met this other girl, my first girlfriend, and I was like, we were really struggling with our relationship, we were on and off again, and she was struggling with being out and I was out to all my friends and that was who mattered. They all kind of didn't care, and I was struggling with that I tell my mom everything and she didn't know that I was dating a girl. She knew I was going to this girl's house every weekend but that's what friends do. I just told her, I was sitting on the couch and was just like, "Hey so we gotta talk." She was like, "what's up?" I was like, "So I'm bi," and she's like, "how do you know?" and I'm like, "I just know!" I wasn't gonna have like that conversation. She was just like, "okay, go do the dishes." It was very relaxed and I was fifteen, so that relationship was so crazy, so on and off again. All the silly lesbian stories you hear, it was that, but it was fourteen or fifteen and it was traumatic as a relationship, and first loves, and high school stuff. But my family since then, my family is pretty chill about it, nobody really cares. My ex-girlfriend a couple years ago went to thanksgiving dinner. It was (a big deal) for me but it wasn't. For me it was but for my family it was just like, "what's up!" That was the first time i'd ever been out with a girl in public in my community. People like knew me back then but they don't know me the way I've made myself a public face now. But I was nervous to hold her hand going into Tim Hortons, I wasn't sure, it was very much a panic. Like I'm the big out one and she was still in the closet at home, and I was like should we hold hands, is that ok? Where can we hold hands, where is that ok. What do we do if someone says something. That kind of surprised us both, but I haven't had too many issues and now I'm very like out, but I'm not out at work. I'm out to my immediate co workers in my department but like my supervisor doesn't know. I don't care if they find out, I don't think my job is in jeopardy but it doesn't really come up.

HK: Can you share one memory that sticks out with your time working with LGBTQ Knox County?

TB: There's a funny one. Both moderators, myself and this other girl, get the messages. This older man sent a message like it was a dating hookup site, and he was specifically looking he was like, "Do you know any hot young twinkles" or something like that and we were like, "What??" We sent each other a message like, "Did you see that?" She had to respond and was like, "This isn't a dating service." He was just like, "Ok." It was so funny.

HK: Do you think the page has helped you connect to the LGBTQ community?

TB: I don't think as much. My best friend, he was gay, well he is gay but were not friends anymore. I think that kind of helped and we would tell people about the page and that kind of helped connect more, and kind of having the page meant like we got invites to events like



Mansfield had their first pride and I wouldn't have heard about that if it wasn't for the page and people knowing I moderated the page.

HK: Did you find there was more people in the community than you thought? What does the community look like?

TB: Surprising. It's a lot of younger people. I kind of wish it were more of a group than a page, and I might kind of reach out to her and kind of switch that up. There's a lot more (queer people) than I thought. There have been some older people that have liked the page, and I see them and look to see who's interacting with the page. That was kind of surprising because you kind of got to think there's these older people in the community who haven't necessarily been out or maybe they're out and have been for twenty years but they haven't had a community to go to so that kind of, it's sad, but it's great that there's something there.

HK: Could you talk about your son?

TB: Oh my god yes, I could talk so much about my son. He is turning six in 19 days he told me today (laughter). He is precocious and annoying and the best thing that's ever happened to me. I was 16 when I had him, I got pregnant at fifteen, and then he was born in April I turned 16 in February. That was a struggle. I had kind of gotten with his dad to get back with my ex girlfriend, and then we were two months into the relationship and I got pregnant. I can't say it was unexpected we were just being stupid but I was a fifteen year old honors student, I had a plan for my life, and he kind of disrupted that whole plan. I still graduated with honors. I still did everything I wanted to do. It was hard. I mean really until the past two years I had a lot of resentment and struggle, I was kind of late to the party on like getting on board with loving my kid so much. I am really honest about that lately. It was really hard for me to be a good mom because I was like, "look at all the other things I could be doing." Now I'm like planning a birthday party and I'm so excited and every day he tells me about his day and he has some behavior issues at school so we're working on that and we check in and I go to meetings and I'm very involved in his day to day and we snuggle and it's the best to snuggle.

HK: Do you sleep in the same room?

TB: We do. We sleep in the same bed a lot because they tell you it's hard to break co sleeping and it is (laughter). We started not because it was convenient, but because we didn't have another option. He broke his crib at eighteen months because he got mad and was like shaking it and it broke and I didn't have the money to replace it, I was still in high school. I didn't have a job. His dad and I had broken up by then. He had to share a bed with me, it was kind of that simple. Now it's always been that way and it's feeling like it is always gonna be that way. He has his own bed, there's a lot of living arrangement changes happening. We're moving my moms best friend and her granddaughter into our home. She is getting hospice care and her granddaughter will be in my room so it is kind of heavy right now. We're in the same room and we go to bed together and

we have a routine, he does really well with routine. We have like our songs and our little things that we do. I love being a mom, my life revolves around being a mom, and that's new-ish for me to be really, he's not an age where he can do stuff so I want to do stuff with him and find cool new things for us to do.

HK: Do you think your childhood shaped the way you want to raise your son?

TB: Yeah, I'm a very anxious person. I have a lot of anxiety about a lot of things. I'm a worst case scenario thinker. My grandmother calls it catastrophic thinking. I'm always completely aware about how everyone in a room could die, like very stressed out. So I really think about a lot of negative things, I have a history of child sexual abuse. I'm very conscious of how I want to parent my son in terms of his body, and being safe with his body, being safe with others bodies, and mommy and Andrew don't have secrets. Stuff like that. I also want him to have the fun stuff, I remember magic mountain when I was a kid. I want him to travel, I didn't get to travel a lot. My first time ever flying was last fall to Rhode Island. I want him to have those experiences and that's kind of why I want to move, because I've been to Pennsylvania and Kentucky, and now Rhode Island and Vermont.

HK: You went there to visit friends?

TB: Online friends, yes.

HK: How did you meet them?

TB: Internet. I sound like Timmy Turner (laughter). Facebook's a big part of my life. I have been so busy with a full time job and working at the shelter part time that I am not on as much, but there's a lot of groups, that's kind of where the LGBTQ community comes in and black people. I don't know black people around here, I am my own black friend. That was my way to connect, through a queer selfie group that I also moderate and I haven't been on in like four months, those are all people I met on that group that I saw this fall. Mental health groups, there's a group for everything and I'm in all of them. That community has helped me and that's kind of how I've parented too, I don't want my son to find a community online, in his twenties, to not have something he can relate to.

HK: What is it like being a young single parent in Mount Vernon? Do you feel you receive equal opportunity?

TB: There's a lot of young single parents. I've been really lucky, obviously you talk about privilege there's all of these things, but there's also in my day to day I'm very lucky I went to a high school that had the GRADS program, I don't know what GRADS stands for but it's for pregnant and teenage parents in high school, moms and dads, to go through so they have a community, they have supports, they can have access to parenting classes, we did a hospital tour

and got told about when birthing classes were and we learned how to change a diaper. They helped sign up with the guidance office, I took a seven week maternity leave and they had the guidance counselors come in and gave me my school work and they stand taught me the material so that I could do my homework and pass the classes and my latin teacher came in and so getting through high school as a single parent was much easier I had a lot of supports. There were meetings you could go and just talking about the weird stuff that comes up like living with your parents and being a parent or figuring out being a parent is a big struggle. There's a lot of communities. There's a Facebook group, Knox County Mommies and you can ask questions because being a parent, no matter how old you are, it's like, "my kid has this weird thing, what did you do? Did your kid have this thing? There's a community for it here, but there's some judgement too just with young parents in general, but I kind of don't surround myself with that and I've been lucky enough to have good friends.

HK: What are your dreams and aspirations for your future and your sons future?

TB: I would like to go back and get my bachelors in social work. I went to film school, I love film, being a film critic would be great, I don't need to spend eighty thousand dollars to be a film critic. I wanted to do like event management, and I finally figured out all of the things I like to do can be done by helping people, and I'm in two social work jobs right now, so I'd like to go back and get my BSW and eventually an MSW, and then I was thinking Dr. Brown sounded really nice (laughs). That's definitely a thought there, I'd like to move out of state. I'd like to work for a lot of nonprofits. I want to find somewhere that I can make an impact, and I think that's important to show my son too, you can have something super hard handed to you and make something really great out of it. I want him to be as safe as possible for ever (laughs). It's time to get him into team sports and one of my friends was like we should get him in dirt track racing, and I was like, "No that's so dangerous!" Then I was thinking about all of the concussion rates and was just like, he's gonna do theatre. Then I was like a set could fall on him and then was back to the concussion thing (laughs). I just want him to be happy. That's what I want for my son.

Clara Roman-Odio: Part of your family is Italian. Can you speak about that racial mixture in your family. You laugh a lot and enjoy, how is that connected to your ancestry?

TB: I love telling people I'm Italian because one it surprises people and I live for that surprise. I'm always like, "yeah I'm Italian I know I look it" (laughs). It's a big family, my grandmother has three kids of her own and two stepchildren and it has never been like a stepchildren situation for us. They're all my aunts and they have a bunch of kids and my cousins and I are really close, there was a group of four of us that were like born in the same span of two years, so we grew up doing a lot of things together. We're still close, I'm helping one of them find a car right now. It is really tied to my value of family and friends and closeness. Because I grew up with a tight knit family we are huggers, I have an aunt that kisses people on the mouth which is very stressful

(laughs). We went to family reunions in Pittsburgh, we found out we weren't as poor as we thought we were, we were wine bearers or something. Everybody has a good sense of humor, we've had a lot of hard stuff happen, but through all of it we are all very close, and I know I say that a lot but my mom talks to my grandma like every other day. She lives down the road, she babysits my son. My mom has been to Vegas to visit one of her aunts and stay there. Family dinners are the best, we do family style dining, we will all sit at a big table, and we pass the food around and we make homemade ravioli for Christmas and homemade meatballs. December is big for me because of all of our family Christmas traditions. All of the family that can't be there, my grandma makes the phone call and we pass the phone around to everybody and everybody gets to talk to them even if you're like, "I haven't seen her since I was born, I don't know who this woman is!" (laughs). Those are the things I love about my family, we can all talk to each other and just say, "Hey I know we haven't talked in a long time, what's up, let's connect. Let's do something." Family is there for family.

HK: On the topic of revamping of Mount Vernon, do you see potential for good in these changes?

TB: I do see potential for good, it has been a lot all at once. There has been some pushback to that. I think it's great, this building was sitting here for a lot of time (The Wright Center). Some people were very angry that Kenyon was taking it over, because like the mail pouch logo, that's a big deal, it's one of the last in Ohio I get it. Also, it was just sitting there. I think seeing the colleges in the community more is going to help a lot, maybe that's a solution, we will see you guys and we can go into your space, and academia, it's a class thing too, the access to education can create a bitterness and resentment. We are a factory town. I think seeing people and being able to have events that the community can go to is a big deal, and it's doing something with these really old spaces, I'm a fan of it. Seeing Farley and Moore close, the owners were mean and they follow kids around because they think you're gonna steal something, and that's annoying, but it was a part of the community. I also watched Banana Joes get taken down, there's not a lot of bars anymore. Banana Joe's was a public eyesore and a terrible place to go but it was there! Watching Mazza's get torn down was really hard, my family is Italian, Mazza's was our Italian restaurant. My grandfather used to work in the kitchen at Mazza's, we were very close with that family, not now but we used to be you know? It was an integral part of the community so it has been hard to see things go and watch corporations go in, Farley and Moore was a hometown store, it's kind of hard to see those things go but I see a lot of opportunity to bring new ideas into the community, it is something new. Change is gonna happen, so let it happen.

HK: Is there an accomplishment you're most proud of?

TB: I've accomplished a lot. Graduating high school as a mom with honors was huge. Recently I wrote a grant for my company at New Hope, it was my first time writing a grant by myself, I had three days to do it. It was a good intro grant, it wasn't heavy or involved, and we got it. I am very

proud of myself, I'm having a lot of professional achievements right now. I'm taking over a summer program at my job it's in two counties, I'm helping out with the hiring of our summer help, I wrote the interview questions, I'm helping out with the interviews, I'm creating the training, I'm gonna be training them, I'll be helping supervise, I'm setting up all the job sites and I'll be with the kids. That's a very big deal for me, I've gotten very involved in the decision making process and I've been through all of it.

CRO: What kind of summer camp?

TB: It's called career exploration and it is for high school students fourteen to seventeen with disabilities that don't have work experience and aren't really sure what they want to do. It is a service we offer for our adults in one on one and the service is a group, we'll have sixteen kids in Knox County and four to eight in Lincoln County. We set up with different businesses and do a tour and they maybe can try job tasks and get to know what is available in their community. I got hired on last year right as it was about to start and they had some final touches to do before it got started, and my boss was like, "you did such a great job with that last year, you wanna take it on again?" I was like, "yeah!" And she was like, "here's all the things to take on." It's fun, working with teenagers is not something I thought I would enjoy and they try me but it is very interesting and it tests your patience. They're teenagers and they have different challenges and different needs. We have a lower functioning kid, he sniffed a lot, he was autistic, and a lower functioning kid started mimicking that, and now we have two people making this sniffing noise. How do you balance that? How do you balance your own annoyance with needing to be a leader in the situation and be the professional.

HK: How did you learn how to get others to cooperate?

TB: On the fly, having a large family helps. I'm a large talker, I'm aware that I'm loud, because my family is so big and getting heard in our household you have to speak above. There's gonna be eight people in my house! I have these younger siblings so I know how teenagers are like and how they want to be talked to. I'm not too far from being a teenager, I remember how I didn't want to be talked to and treated, you got to have fun. It gives you a chance to have fun and go out and do something. My mom also works for head start and I've gone through the conscious discipline training and conscious parenting that they do. Conscious discipline is an amazing program its how I choose to parent my son. Instead of spanking it's like choices and talking about brain states and early childhood development. I incorporated a lot of conscious discipline in dealing with the kids, and that helps. Head start language, it helps when you have some of the background with early childhood development because you can even use it on adults, and conscious discipline language you can use with adults. Using "I" language. Instead of, "you said this," saying, "this is what I felt like you said." That makes a world of difference when talking to people.

HK: What do you think Mount Vernon's most pressing social issue is?

TB: Our drug and substance abuse problem. I think we have a lot to go on a lot of things, the queer community and race are near and dear to my heart, but the biggest thing we have right now is drugs. My best friend, he used to be a heroin addict, and he is literally watching his friends die. He's not around that anymore but he's been hearing they're cutting the drugs with horse tranquilizers and things like that, so he's having a hard time because he doesn't talk to these people anymore but somebody was clean and they take (the drug) one more time and they die. We have to deal with that body count, we just had a police officer go to prison, or had a trial for dealing drugs, and trying to deal meth and stuff. We know it's real and present in our community, we are getting Narcan in the hospitals, but as a community our attitude towards drug addiction has to change from blame and stigma, we look down on The Freedom Center, which is our drug and alcohol treatment center. So until some of that changes we won't get through it but the community is taking steps, they're having meetings and conferences but they're not advertising them well. There's so much that we need to do, and I do think people are taking it seriously, I don't want to say that they're not, but they're maybe not taking the right approach. It's a class thing too, because when your son is rich and gets addicted to heroin your son gets rehab. When your son is poor and gets addicted to heroin he gets jail. He doesn't get treatment, how were punishing, we have the mental health court coming up. We are helping, we're taking steps, but there is a lot that needs to be done attitude wise.

HK: Is it prevalent in high school?

TB: It's really been since I've been out of high school that it has blown up but I also know the high school students aren't the ones dying of overdoses. High school students are still dealing pretty heavily in weed, as far as I know. Cocaine has kind of always been a thing around here, weirdly. How do people know where to find drugs? I'm just not a drug person. I am so naive to some of this stuff. It think it's a lot of the adults, my friend he's thirty-five, my mom her graduating class in the '80s. Those people, that age range is who is really dealing with it. It is younger, it is the twenties to fifties is really where we're seeing it but not a lot in high school. There's not a lot to do around here, we don't have good after school programs, we don't have a lot of good college prep or after high school stuff. So you're out of high school, so what are you going to do, and class access. It goes back to class a lot with our issues around here.

HK: What do you like about Mount Vernon?

TB: I like that I know Mount Vernon. Having my job, we get people all around the country and even in Delaware and Lincoln county and stuff like that, so getting my job as allowed me to explore towns I have never gone to, which is weird because Knox County is small and our towns are small. There are no towns in Ohio, there are cities, townships, and Dayton is a corporation. No towns in Ohio! Thank you, senior social studies teacher (laughs). I never really got out of

Mount Vernon, I mean maybe Howard a little bit, Gambier probably more. I spent my time between Gambier and Mount Vernon.

MGD: What would you do in Gambier?

TB: Summer camps. I did mime camp for four or five years, it was the best. I know I talk a lot so you wouldn't think it's the right fit, but it was very cool. Rick Waymer and Steven Chips ran that with Right Brain Productions in town so I've seen Fredericktown more with my volunteer stuff and Danville and other places, but I like that I know my city, I know the backroads, I know where to turn. The downtown being shut down is the most ridiculous thing ever but I know how to get around it and I know where my friends are I just like knowing it, I could drive through town with my eyes closed. I like our community. I like that I know people too. I like that there's the shelter and there's NAMI, which is mental health stuff and I like that there's our theatre community, our theatre community is huge, there's always good plays going on, and there's things out there, maybe more for adults than kids but there's stuff and people care a lot about those things, and it is very cool, especially to be in social work and see all of the stuff I didn't know about, and all the things that people really care about. I love hearing about people's passions.