

11.21.14  
India Greer  
Eng. 375  
Shaped Interview  
Faith and Action

### Kirk

Coming from inner city Chicago, I was surprised to see that there were no businesses to occupy the land here in Hopkins Park. Instead, there are only tall cornfields, wind, grass, dirt, open fields and broken pieces of the community that once held strong. There were no people to be found, as I glanced out the window of the moving van.

Pulling up to the new Hopkins Park (Pembroke) Library in the middle of what looked like nowhere, I spotted Jodi, one of the coordinators of Faith & Action. Already expecting me, she stood in front of the library with a welcoming smile. She introduced me to the people who would walk in periodically. The inside of the library was beautiful and it smelled of fresh paint, paper, and wood. The library looked like the job of professional construction workers. It was impressive to see how much effort Faith & Action volunteers put in to carry out the project of building the new library.

After a brief tour of the library, I took out my paper and recorder and sat on the comfortable couches in front of the library. Before I knew it, through the front doors came a tall heavy-set black man, with grayish facial hair, wearing glasses, a fitted cap on his head and a navy colored jogging suit. Surprised to see a new face, he walked toward us in the sitting area where Jodi introduced us to each other. As I shook his sun-dried hands, I could tell he was a hard outdoor worker. I thought about the saying, “rough hands symbolize hard work.”

He sat down on the small couch diagonal from the one we were sitting on. Without hesitation, as if I weren't a stranger to him, he encouraged me to ask him questions. My first question was about his family. He assured me that for a long time pulling concrete had been his family's way to earn a living, "*My family pulled concrete, that's how we survived,*" he said, "*My grandfather pulled concrete from down south and found jobs closer and closer. He found a job in Chicago, then he wanted to get us out of there.*" After a brief pause, he continued about his grandfather saying, "*He brought us here. He became the Reverend of the town....It's just me and my uncle now. Actually, I'm in my grandmother's house now; been here since 1958.*" Kirk also expressed why he wouldn't leave, saying, "*I think I have invested so much in my grandmother's house, I don't think I would be able to adapt.*" Sitting there, I could only think about the values of hard work that were instilled in the family and how he was the remaining part of that legacy.

Prompted by my curiosity about the community's safety today, he looked up while rubbing his chin and described the outside influences that factored into the community's problems. He said, "*It's actually a good place to raise your kids. Actually there are no gangs here. People don't know about it. People come from Chicago and turn them [youthful residents of Hopkins Park] on. You got a couple of them that think they're tough.*" However, this was just a small speck of the problems according to Kirk.

Kirk acknowledged the unfortunate violence but urgently expressed the need for jobs. He said, "*Now they're just starting to do shootings. There's not a lot of killings, with more jobs, you might have a murder every 20-30 years. Without jobs coming its more fighting.*"

At this point, I wanted to know who or what made up this community, as I didn't see people, stores, or schools. There was one gas station, houses here and there but barely any sense of connection between houses, an overgrown baseball field, a Martin Luther King Jr. Statue and the

unoccupied park it was apart of. Kirk again explained what he remembered. *“Actually, we had everything at one time. A lot of stores, two stores, we had a big library. That one was a big community center. It had a library, a gym, and everything.”* He paused, *“They burned it down.”* he said, but then corrected himself and said, *“Well it burned and the person who was the head of it, she took the insurance money herself and she bought another building for herself. So that money is not going into the community.”* He became louder, as he shared the problems that took place in his community. *“The same time it closed down was the same time crack was coming in, so it really destroyed the community. It was like a nightmare.”*

Kirk continued, *“We had like four gas stations and now we just got one.”* With a concerned look on his face, he slowly finished his thoughts *“and all the schools have closed cause of the lack of jobs. We need factories, some type of business; we need more businesses to create jobs. We now have No jobs.”*

With disappointment etched on his face, he then described another part of the community that was important to him. *“The Nestle plant, it actually closed down and they left. I don’t know what was particular about it, but they left.”*

During the brief silence that followed, I put my pen and paper down only to realize the reality of where we were sitting. After all of the joys and failures of the town, we were still somehow in this new library. I became more curious to know how the new library came to be.

When Kirk began again, he shared a glimpse of what the old library was like. *“That old library was an old house,”* he said, *“The mice had taken over.”* In my seat, I squirmed a little as I visualized an infestation of rodents and old stubborn wood falling apart from the inside out. It sounded as if he was describing a vacant attic. I pictured those old books once used by people, no

w being invaded by crawling bugs and dust. There was a huge difference between the two libraries. The new library had more space and it looked like a real library with fresh books, computers, and children's crayon drawings on the wall.

The pieces of the puzzle that Kirk had described to me were coming together. Faith & Action had carried out one of their first projects through building this library, providing the community with the resources that it needs. The library now offers a safe haven for families, education, and a loving community environment. Faith & Action has helped the community to take its first steps toward transforming Hopkins Park. I understood the power behind Faith & Action's commitment: Faith transformed into Action, as Kirk had witnessed in the transition from the old library to the new. He shared how Faith & Action's work has been a blessing to himself and the community. With a wide smile, he said, *"Everything is here and I can get more knowledge. Now I can learn!"* He added, *"Well, the kids now see that they do have a place to go. You can stay here, you can raise your family here. It seemed like everyone was disadvantaged without the library."* The new library has changed the lives of the community residents. This is only the beginning of the new hope that Faith & Action has invested here in Hopkins Park.