

**Sonic Memories: Stories from My Listening History**  
**By: Brooke Chambers**

**Side B**

Narration:

“Children are supposed to be seen and not heard,” my mom said to me. I asked her about this once, and she denied ever saying it. She scrunched her face up, dumbfounded I would confront her on this matter. She questioned me, wondering when and where I heard this phrase. I know she voiced this many times when I was a child, mostly in jest, but it still sticks with me. I know my mother never meant any harm from it. It’s only a saying that parents tell their kids when they want them to be quiet, so I tried let it go.

A few weeks after the exchange, I drove back to Ohio for the weekend to see my mother, and she questioned me about it again over dinner. She stated she didn’t know when she said that phrase to me, but later remembered that it’s what her dad used to tell her as a kid. She said she was astounded that she unknowingly passed on the same sentiment to her own children.

Now knowing my mother also had a sound-focused upbringing, I wanted to ask her more about what it was like growing up in her household. I prepared questions for my mother in advance to explore my grandparents’ domestic rules, but she primarily talked about what it was like during family gatherings and growing up on a farm.

Clip from interview with Mom:

Mom: *When I was growing up, I lived with my parents and my father’s parents, John and Opal. We lived on a farm in southern Clermont County. I would consider that southern Clermont County.*

Narration:

My family has lived in southern Clermont County for many generations. Clermont County is a rural part of the southern Ohio valley, and most of my family comes from low-income based homes. Because my mother was the youngest of four children, my grandfather worked a lot to feed, house, and clothe everyone. My grandfather was a drinker back in the day, and the pub was a place he would take the whole family after work. While my grandmother watched over the kids, my grandfather socialized and drank. Meanwhile, my mother and her siblings sat quietly and listened to music playing on the jukebox.

Clip from interview with Mom:

Mom: I mean as a young child, because my dad, ya know he drank alcohol, and we did go to a lot of different local taverns, he played a lot of pool. So, when my dad went, uhm, we would have to go along. And I mean we sat in a booth, ya know, we'd each get a coke and a bag of chips. Whatever kind of, ya know, soda that you wanted, and a bag of chips. And you would sit there because children were to be seen and not heard. Ya know? You'd sit in that booth and you'd eat your chips and you'd listen to whatever was on the jukebox. Ya know, at that time.

Narration:

As my mom recounts times she had to be quiet as a kid, I realized that the deep-rooted notion “children should be seen and not heard” has a long lineage within my family. Like many other families living near southern Appalachia, my mother grew up in a poor, working-class household. Her parents worked all day and when they clocked out, they wanted to relax. And if you wanted to respect your parents, then you shut up and tried to be quiet. Jonathan Stone points out that sound and voice is linked with “embodied identity” and power (n.p). In his analysis of Lomax Prison recordings, he illustrates the connection between sound, voice, social power, and agency. These relations help me see that for the most part, my parents and my parents’ parents can’t control the noise happening in their mostly blue-collar jobs. Thus, their desire for it to be quiet at home seems less unreasonable.

However, as my mother and I show through our stories, sensitive listening skills are required to maintain quietness. I believe knowing when to keep quiet, listen, and manage sonic production can be linked to my family’s cultural and geographical background. Krista Ratcliffe examines how cultural biases influence listening. Ratcliffe explains, “rhetorical listening may be employed to hear discursive intersections of any cultural category (age and class, nationality and history, religion and politics) and any cultural position” (196). Ratcliffe is essentially saying that you can hear cultural features in someone’s voice. It can be said, then, that if one can hear cultural categories and positions, then cultural background influences how a person listens.

Clip from Mom’s interview:

Mom: And then you’d shine a light real quick and then you’d hit them with the gig.

Brooke: What’s a gig?

Mom: A gig is almost like a pitchfork

Brooke: Oh

Mom: But it's a little smaller

Narration:

As I pressed my mother for details about her childhood on my family's farm, she began discussing the process of going frog gigging. A gig, as my mom previously described, is the mechanism she used to hunt frogs. Hunting is a well-established tradition in rural Ohio, and my family has been doing it for as long as I can remember. My dad jokes that I am too squeamish to do any real hunting, but I have grown up listening for turkeys in our backyard and running to my dad if I spotted one.

Clip from interview with Mom:

Mom: "Well I guess the first part I need to tell you is what we would do on the weekends. My family we grew up, like I said, on a farm, and we would either, we would either go like frog giggin'. And that's where, you know, you'd go around the lake, cause we had a pond on our house, on our property there was a pond, and we would go frog giggin', and that was like a big thing. And then we would all fry up, ya know, fry up the frog legs. We'd eat dinner. Ya know, late at night. Cause you didn't go frog giggin' until after it got dark.

Brooke: So you had to go out at night.

Mom: You had to go out at nighttime. That's when you go frog giggin', at nighttime with a flashlight and a frog gig. You had to listen to the frogs so you'd know where they were. You had to be real quiet, because otherwise the frogs would jump into the pond. So, you had to listen for the frogs and you never hit the hind legs because that's what you're gonna eat, so you'd want to hit the middle of the body. And then you'd put them in your burlap sack and we would take them back to the house, and we'd clean them, and then we'd eat frog legs. You know you either raised your own food or went out and killed your own food, meaning meat, vegetables, whatever it was.

Me: Right

Mom: You know hunting was a big part of my life.

Narration:

After conducting my mother's interview, I realized how much listening is involved in hunting. My family hunts every season, and they often eat the meat provided from the animals they catch. Hunting allows my family to live off the land as much as they can. This practice requires disciplined and extraordinary listening to catch prey.

In Side A of this piece, you heard my take on my family's rules. My sister and I struggled with my parents' request to be quiet, yet we found ways to go around it. By paying attention to the soundscape of my home and the way my body moved through it, I was able to stay quiet. This practice of listening helped me better tune into the sound around

me and realize the power I have to intervene (Fargo Ahern). Side B reveals my mother's childhood stories, which happen to be very similar to my own. As I examine my mother's stories, I see my working-class upbringing and an emphasis on my geographical location within rural Ohio. Moreover, my mother's interview illustrates how sound and listening practices function on a cultural level. I embody my family's history through my research. I do not have the same experiences as my mother, but her history is taught and lived through me everyday.