

Mark Fields

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

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Mark Fields (b. 1975, Columbus, Ohio) is a resident of Columbus, OH and *Fallout 76* gamer. He was inspired to visit West Virginia with his son, both prior to the game's release. After the game's release, Fields, his girlfriend, and son made another trip to West Virginia to experience the Fasnacht celebration in the Randolph County Swiss community of Helvetia, which is featured in *Fallout 76*.

This interview is part of a series of interviews conducted with *Fallout 76* gamers, some of whom are from West Virginia, and some of whom were inspired to visit West Virginia because of the game.

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EH: Emily Hilliard

MF: Mark Fields

00:00

EH: Questions before we start?

MF: No, I guess I heard that you're doing this as--I guess that's a question, what are you collecting information for and how is it..

EH: So it's for a book chapter, the book is on contemporary community-based WV folklore and this will probably be the last chapter looking at how folklore will be shared and is shared now in digital forms and in to the future and how those digital forms map on to real life experiences.

MF: Oh, okay.

EH: Yeah, so why don't you start by introducing yourself and say your name, where you were born and what year you were born.

MF: Yeah, my name is Mark Fields, I was born in Columbus, OH and I've been a resident of Columbus, OH, I was born in 1975.

EH: Great. How did you start playing Fallout 76?

MF: My son had been playing some of the Fallout series and had been talking about it kind of nonstop (laughs). That's what kids do when they're excited about things. So when I saw Fallout 76 was coming out, I felt that would be a good way for he and I to have something to share I guess. And I kinda liked the fact it was set in WV and I thought that was interesting also in the sense that it was an online multi-player game as well.

EH: Right. Had you spent time in WV before you visited after playing the game?

MF: I had driven through it once or twice. There was one time I was driving from OH to VA and I'm pretty sure at the time I had thought that, I think its Route 60 was a shortcut, so I drove Route 60, I think that's the one that passes Charleston and that was probably in the early aughts I think. So yeah, as far as experience in WV before, last summer when we went on a brief tour that was most of what I had. Was just that little scenic drive, impromptu. And just through the exits largely. I had been to Morgantown for a concert once, but...

EH: Yeah, what would you say your impression was of WV prior to playing?

MF: My impression prior to playing, I guess again, the drive was interesting 'cause driving through Appalachia, all of the turns and up and down--I kinda enjoyed that driving but again I didn't really spend a lot of time out of the car. The concert I went to in WV in Morgantown, it was just kind of--I don't know that there was any kind of truly unique experience there either, outside of the concert.

EH: And then when you made these trips, how did your experience in the game map on to the actual places?

MF: Well having, it was kind of interesting as far as, 'cause in the game there's Green Bank observatory is there and I hadn't seen it so much or been as aware of it. I had known about Mothman but I didn't know

that there were so many other cryptids, like folklore, and it was kind of interesting that they put so much in and it was really funny because there's one called the Sheepsquatch that they use in the game and I thought they had just added it as a joke sort of, but then I found out there's actually folklore about a Sheepsquatch. So it was really interesting to see both the Mothman, Sheepsquatch, and then I think there's the Flatwoods Monster and the Grafton Monster in the game. And I had always heard about the Mothman and so forth and I was familiar with that. But in the game there's a little town, or Point Pleasant is in the game and they have the Mothman Museum as well as the statue and you can in the game, get the statue so you can build it in your camp. I thought the statue was great so I had done that. And so that was one of the places we went to was Point Pleasant, to visit the museum and see that statue in person.

And another was Hillbilly Hotdogs is also in the game as Hillfolk Hotdogs. And I thought that was kind of funny and it was interesting to find. 'Cause in the game it's not really even that big of a point of the storyline at all so it was neat to see something that was represented there. So I think one of the big things and kind of how I found out about this and prompted this conversation today was Helvetia, though. I, they had had a brief event just for a very short period last spring, which was the Fasnacht event in the game, and one of the interesting things is to collect different masks or costumes for your character, so they were doing Fasnacht masks as part of that event and I got really excited about those. But it was interesting in the game how they have the Hutte house and the post office and stuff and it was, you know, it was very unique and so when we were driving through WV that was one of the places I thought I might want to stop. And we had stayed at I think it's Holly Hill Campground?

EH: Oh yeah.

MF: And we had tried to go from there to Helvetia but I wasn't as aware at how crippled GPS was.

EH: Right.

MF: And ended up on an old logging road and was driving a Subaru Impreza and I had to turn around when I hit a creek because (laughs) I wasn't gonna make it. But yeah so the next day we actually got to go and visit, made it around through Pickens and we visited there and we actually got to eat at the restaurant, toured the, you know in the General Store they had all the masks up and it was kinda neat to see. And so it was really interesting to see that place because it is really I don't know how to put it...but it did create this weird connection, having been through that little town in the game and having learned about a little bit of the history through the game, because they even have the sign in the game that they have in the town. So it was really cute and so this February me and my son and girlfriend decided to go and visit and take part in the festival.

09:46

EH: What did you make of Fasnacht in real life?

MF: It was great! I liked it a lot. In Ohio we have different festivals and (laughs) I think the closest thing I can compare it to is there's this small town called Bradford here and I think they call it the Pumpkin Show. But it's, we also have a larger town/city called Circleville and every year they have a pumpkin show but they have pumpkins that are like 1,300 lbs. in their show and just tons and tons of booths and things selling pumpkin foods--pumpkin chili and pizza and all these weird things. But the Bradford Pumpkin Show, it doesn't have--it has some of the standard state fair contests, but the real attraction of it is that every night they have a parade and after the parade, they open up these box trucks and sell confetti by the bag and then the people in the town kind of spend the next you know, half hour or hour throwing confetti at each other.

EH: Oh wow.

MF: And so as far as like an interesting festival in Ohio, I think that's the only thing I've been to that I can kind of compare what they're doing there. As far as like the spirit of it you know. So I really like the donning of masks and the parade and the sense of community that they have there. And it was great--it was kind of crowded so I didn't get to dance much or...but I got to see quite a bit of it.

EH: Didn't get to what?

MF: Didn't get to dance too much.

EH: Oh okay, yeah.

MF: But I think next year if I get back I'll try to make it in there a little more. (laughs) but yeah it was really interesting.

EH: What do you think that they got right in the game and also maybe got wrong about WV and how it's represented?

MF: As far as how it's represented, I don't know. I think that in the game the landscape is beautiful in a lot of ways, cause they do like the hills and the, you know. It's very condensed and I know that in the game you know, everything is kind of destroyed. And there are certain areas, like I, when we went in August it was too early for the Cranberry Bog to be as exciting, but I kind of wanted to see what that was like in real life. But you know in the game it's a little, a bit of a mess. Same with some of the other regions. But yeah I mean, learning about areas like the Cranberry Bog and being able to go and see pictures of it and how it is now, just different places like that. So as far as that goes it's hard to say I guess. Everything is condensed in the game and that was one of the things about the town of Helvetia is that it was so small. Pretty much most of the buildings in that town are represented in the game.

EH: Right, right.

MF: But as far as that goes, the event for Fasnacht is again it was really nice but the idea was the robots are trying to keep up the spirit in the parade. So I don't know if that was too meandering to answer your question or if I got the... (laughs)

14:29

EH: How has the game informed your understanding of WV history, culture, or folklore?

MF: Yeah again, the cryptids. That was interesting. And as well as, I mean largely Fasnacht was most of it. I don't know that there's too much else. They do tie in mining and some storylines with labor, which I knew that about. With the company stores and labor movement, a bit. So in one of the aspects of the game is bringing robots to do the work and so they did kind of tie that in a little bit as well. So outside of that I don't know how much made it in. And they have Vault-Tec University which is kind of like West Virginia University which we did stop by there when we were driving through. Harper's Ferry is in there and we did stop there as well and the what else was...sorry the Allegheny asylum is also prominently featured and that's part of the storyline, so it's currently not open for tours 'cause it's being renovated I guess but we had stopped by the outside to see the building. And I guess that is one thing. A lot of the buildings are, I feel, in the game (laughs) and even in Lewisburg, we were able to find a courthouse that looked a lot like the game. I think there's Uncanny Caverns is in the game and it's Lost Caverns in real life and we had stopped by Lost Caverns as well, so we, as far as learning about...through the game.

EH: Go ahead.

MF: No that's all. I was trying to think of anything else we might have learned. There's also Greenbrier, right?

EH: Right, mmhm.

MF: Yeah. Like White Springs. We had talked about stopping there but it was kind of out of--we were running out of time and decided we wanted to do Green Bank but it was interesting to see pictures of Greenbrier and they had worked part of, and I'd known about Greenbrier before and they had worked part of the history of Greenbrier in there, being that it had a bunker and so forth. And it was interesting to see the pictures of that place in real life were matched really closely to the game as well.

18:10

EH: What do you spend your time doing in the game?

MF: I think every now and then an event will come up, they'll add some new content, so I'll get interested in some of the stories. Like they had a big expansion when they added the Fasnacht and the Sheepsquatch stuff but largely I kind of like wander around the different locations and just I like constructing things (laughs) building things so in the game it's kind of interesting you can make your own little camp, is what they call it, that you build your little camp and you can build it in different ways and then it's interesting to see the places that people build--the camps or ? that people build and how they work in a lot of the terrain and so forth. And that's something I like about it.

It's interesting to interact with some of the other people on line and to meet there. And it was kind of funny, after we went to WV I had actually talked to a couple people in the game about having visited and a little bit about how things in the game are represented.

EH: Oh nice. Did that happen in-game?

MF: Yeah, yeah. It happened in-game. Just people that I came across randomly. So I was able to share a little bit about actual West Virginia to people. I talked to some guy in Texas, somebody else in Washington State. I think I talked to some kids in Canada one day about it.

EH: Oh nice! And what do the conversations go like, you just say hello and start chatting?

MF: Well sometimes we'll be talking about something like some experience in the game or wanting to do this or that, help each other out or trade, but you know then just bring up, it'll come up in conversation.

EH: Uh-huh. Do you feel like it's a cooperative game?

MF: At times? Because there are certain missions or events that take more than one person. They're a little difficult so it is cooperative. I do know that a lot of people kind of meet up in the game and play together. Run around visiting different places in the game and doing different events together. And I played that way with my son and there are some other people that I would play with at times, so yeah there is some level of cooperation and community. How much true interaction with people there are, some of the people I had met on there, it's not like I'm gonna visit in real life really, but I suspect that there are some people in that.

EH: Uh-huh. Are you part of any community online around Fallout like Twitter or reddit or anything?

MF: No, not really, I think I was--I don't have a lot of time and I've tried to kind of stay away from Twitter and reddit because of the level of almost interaction and so forth. There's so much going on that I just couldn't keep up with everything that I would be interested in. But I do kinda pop into there's a Fallout settlement and I look at some of the things that people have built just because it's an aspect that I really like and think that people get really creative with.

EH: That's cool. And is that Fallout Settlement? Is that what it's called?

MF: I'd have to look.

EH: Okay.

22:30

Let's see. Why do you play other than to interact with your son?

MF: I kind of, I don't have a lot of time for games and so forth but it's just kind of a way to decompress at times and then it's also a creative outlet in a lot of ways and as an art school dropout, it's nice to have creative outlet for me. I don't always get to work that into my day. So I guess mainly it's interacting with my son and also the creative side of the game, I guess.

EH: Has any other game led you to have this kind of in-person experience like this?

MF: No, I mean this is all kind of different. I know, like I've played a few other things that are set in cities that exist in real life and it's, but I don't know that (sighs) like I've played a few things that are supposedly set in New York and it's kind of interesting to see and recently there was the Spiderman game that came out that has a lot of details from New York City, and I've visited New York City quite a bit so it was interesting to see a lot of places there, like how expansive that map was. But yeah as far as this goes, it was--I feel like because of the storyline and how it kind of tied in different regions or cities I feel like it was a little different in that sense, instead of like go here and chase a bank robber or do this or do that, which you find in a lot of other games that it has an environment but the story doesn't always die as directly to the environment.

EH: Right. Are you planning to come back to WV?

25:34

MF: Yeah, it's pretty funny, when I visited I thought it would be great to go to Fasnacht, when we first visited in August but it wasn't I think until later that I got really, really more and more excited about it and while we were there at Fasnacht it was kind of like, "Oh and so next year...(laughs) we'll know what to do." And it was kind of funny 'cause I knew the road in from Pickens and I tried to drive in from the Flatwoods side but I hadn't actually mapped it out well ahead of time, but I had been looking, like I had downloaded the region for Google Maps but it still was trying to put us on logging roads a lot. Now that I have, I know all 3 roads to get into Helvetia now, but yeah I mean--we also stopped by the New River Gorge Bridge this past time so we could see that as well. It is kind of nice, it would be neat to go there and I do enjoy the driving.

EH: Yeah, what would you say your impression of West Virginia is now?

MF: I'd say it's overall positive. I do like it. I mean in Columbus, OH things are a little more--like there's a lot of art and a lot of restaurants and so forth, so I think when we were in Lewisburg there were some shops that were interesting to see, and we stopped in Charleston and ate at a place there and that seemed to be, you know there were some interesting places around there as well, so it wasn't (sighs) I don't know how to put it. I guess I'm too used to living in a city so there are some things in that regard. But I really do like--I was driving by and I'd be like, oh that'd be really interesting to live there (laughs). Oh here and there, thinking of different places that we were driving by. We didn't only, I tried to stay off the, you know like 68 or whatever or 64 and 79 and drive through different areas as much as we could. But yeah I guess I'm rather fond of it, I guess. (laughs)

EH: Nice. Yeah, do you, how would you characterize the state, I know it's generalize the whole state but is there sort of a feeling or defining characteristic?

MF: I don't know. I mean I know that the state has a lot of struggles as far as with the collapse of the mining industry and various other things and but yeah I don't know but the people I met were all nice and...I know the state motto is Almost Heaven and Wild and Wonderful, so...but yeah I mean as far as characterizing the state, I don't know. I mean I don't know how anybody would characterize Ohio to some extent without being there. I've been through Pennsylvania and it's pretty diverse as well you know in terms of you have Pittsburgh and Philadelphia but then the rest of the state is just small towns.

EH: Mmhm. Yeah. Well is there anything else you would like to add?

MF: No, I guess not. I just again you know, I don't know that I would have spent as much time in West Virginia driving around or looking into it were it not for the game.

EH: Right, yeah that's cool. Well thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me. I'll send you a release form so I can quote you in the piece and we could put the recording in our archive and then I'll probably send a draft to people I talk to to make sure I got it right.

MF: Okay, well if I was helpful or contributed in any way then I'm glad (laughs)

EH: Yeah, it's great. Thanks so much.

MF: Alright. Thank you!

EH: Yeah, well take care.

MF: You too, especially with everything going on.

EH: Yeah for sure. Alright. Bye!

MF: Bye.

31:04

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END OF INTERVIEW