

Porter Lyons

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

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Porter Lyons (b. October, 1993, Cleveland, OH) is a resident of Dayton, OH and *Fallout 76* gamer. He was inspired to visit West Virginia in anticipation of the game's release, and then visited again after he began playing the game. In 2019 he participated in 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.

EH: Emily Hilliard

PL: Porter Lyons

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EH: Yeah, does it have the record button on your screen as well?

PL: Yeah, it says Emily is recording the call.

EH: Okay, great. So why don't we start, why don't you introduce yourself, well first of all, do you have any questions for me before we start?

PL: No, no not really.

EH: Well why don't you introduce yourself, tell me who you are, where you're from, when you were born and start by how you got into Fallout 76.

PL: Okay, yeah. So my name is Porter Lyons. I was born in October of 1993 in Cleveland, OH but I now live and work in Dayton, OH. I got into Fallout 76 as a result of just being a fan of the Fallout franchise since the 3rd installation back in 2008 maybe? So when you know, it felt natural to play Fallout 76 as a result of just being a fan.

EH: Got it. Had you been to WV before you came after playing the game?

PL: Yeah, I had actually gone to WV once before the game released but it was also as a result of getting hyped for the game. Just to visit some of the spots that I knew would be showing up in the game.

EH: So what would you say your impression was of the state maybe before you started playing the game, before you started visiting.

PL: Oh yeah, absolutely. So yeah WV, let's see. Growing up it had always been a state that I'd driven through with my family to like get down to the southern states so I hadn't had much knowledge of it, even being in Ohio like right next to WV. I had always thought of it, it was like an adventure destination so for anybody that wanted to hike or go on the rapids, seeking an outdoor adventure, WV would be a find destination for this region of the United States.

EH: Right.

PL: Lots of small isolated communities in between the mountains and just sort of like weird stories and legends. So when Bethesda had announced that they'd be making a game based in here I thought it was very appropriate for an installation of Fallout.

EH: Right. What were some of your awareness of the stories and legends?

PL: Well I had known about Mothman, just because Point Pleasant is right across the river from Ohio. So even, I think the first time I had heard about Mothman was like in Middle School where all my friends had brought in pictures of him and we were just talking about how creepy it was. And there's that dumb movie with Richard Gere and stuff like that.

EH: Right.

PL: So that was my first exposure to West Virginia cryptids. And then we'd talk about hillbillies and stuff like that. Just like songs and things like that. I'm trying to remember all that. Yeah, I suppose in terms of cryptids, Mothman was my really only exposure there. And Bigfoot I guess too. Bigfoot's kind of all over the place, not just exclusive to West Virginia.

EH: What were those places that you visited in WV in anticipation of the game coming out?

PL: Yep, so let's see first stop was Parkersburg which I don't believe made it into the game, but that was just a nice first stop 'cause it was also right across the river. Then made it over to Weston for the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum. Did an overnight there and spent some time in the forest close to Weston--the Stonewall Jackson State Forest. Then went over to Elkins which I don't think is in the game either. And then went down through the Monongahela Forest to the Green Bank Satellite there. This is kind of weird--I had no idea that there was gonna be no cell reception and we were staying at an Inn that was in that zone of zero cell reception and we got there and (laughs) and it was this weird creepy place with flies everywhere. We were totally convinced that we were gonna day. Not really, but...just kind of an interesting part there, being disconnected. And then let's see, from there went to Point Pleasant to wrap things up, and that was the pre-trip there.

EH: And was this based on the trailer or how did you know some of these locations were in the game?

PL: Oh, I didn't. I, actually I knew that Point Pleasant was gonna make an appearance because yeah, there was this poster that was released with the, some Fallout characters on it and then there was like Mothman above them or something like that. So I knew that that was gonna be in there, but as I said before, I knew about Mothman and stuff like that so I had always kind of wanted to go to Point Pleasant and explore that anyway. And then I think I knew that the Greenbrier was also gonna be in it, but I never did make it to the Greenbrier. So yeah, I had done some research and looked at some of the cool, creepy spots around WV and sort of plotted out some destinations based off of that.

EH: So yeah and then where did you go after the game?

PL: I went to basically the same places. Went to--added Helvetia on to the list after Fasnacht was released in game and looked into that, yeah I went back to Point Pleasant, went back to Weston, Charleston--I added Charleston on but you know, being the capitol I don't think there was much of a, I'm trying to find the right words. Stopping in Charleston wasn't as much of a destination I guess, it was let's just stop and take some pictures and then keep going again. And then the Pumpkin House as well.

EH: Oh yeah, uh-huh. And was that during October?

PL: Yeah, yeah, this was October 1st actually 'cause we had gone in late September and leaked into October there.

EH: So how did your experience in the game map on to the actual places? Were you surprised with what was really realistic or what did they get right and what did they get wrong?

PL: Well (sighs) that's an interesting question, so this might be a pretty longwinded answer.

EH: Oh that's okay.

PL: So having visited some of the destinations before the game came out I sort of had these ideas built up in my head of what it might look like in-game. I think they got, they got some locations pretty spot on based off of what I had seen before going. However I think I was a little let down in terms of some of the

feelings that I suppose you get actually being in WV and being in those locations in-game. I suppose being at the locations physically in real life, there's this sort of sense of mystique and wonder and oddity and yeah, I think those are probably good words, that the game isn't quite able to capture as well as I feel like they could have. When you visit those destinations in game--I feel like Bethesda just went for cosmetic only, you know? And didn't try as hard to capture some of the feelings you might get from actually visiting those locations. But yeah, like I said, in terms of cosmetics, they did a really good job with Helvetia and the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic asylum was pretty spot on in terms of cosmetics. The Pumpkin House was really well done. And their iteration of the Mothman statue was pretty cool too.

EH: Yeah, I've spent a lot of time in Helvetia and I was pretty impressed, just how the layout is pretty exact.

PL: Yeah, yeah, even the small little gazebo and everything like that, the bridge. Yeah that was very crazy.

10:45

EH: So what in your words is the Fallout 76 story? And the point of the game in your opinion?

PL: Oh, well do you want to tell you like the main story, like the quests that is the primary goal of the game, or more like what is the...

EH: Um, yeah! I'd like to heard that. I'm not a game but I've gone on a walk through with a few people and I've been going through the holotapes, so I know the basic outline, but it would be helpful just to hear in your words.

PL: Sure, yeah! So the primary story in the game is that you come out of this underground vault and you're faced with this threat of these Scorched Beasts which are mutated giant bats that are kind of wreaking havoc on WV and destroyed the bits of civilization that were scattered across what they call Appalachia. So like the player is tasked with going to these different groups or the remains of these groups across WV to eventually track down the nuclear silos so they can launch a nuclear bomb on the Scorched Beast queen, who is the, breeds these Scorched Beasts across Appalachia. And therefore ending the Scorched Plague.

Yeah, so the, I guess most people have already finished that bit (laughs) and you know it's really not a main part of the game anymore. A big part of the game right now is kind of boring I suppose--it's just a lot of like grinding out doing these random events over and over to get like different weapons and things like that. So there's really not a whole lot in terms of like investigating WV and all of that. However there is this pretty unique group on Twitter that posts virtual photography and I can give you some handles of some of like the prominent figures in that community.

EH: Yeah, that would be...

PL: But it's this group that posts pictures of their adventures in the game and things like that and a lot of them are actually really good and do the state well. They're able to showcase how well Bethesda did with some of the cosmetic parts of modeling WV.

EH: Right. Cool! Yeah, I would love to see those.

PL: Yeah, I'll email you those handles afterwards.

EH: Great. And then, yeah, I'm curious about what the kind of role of the player is, or the not even the player but the avatar because in a sense they're kind of a tool of Vault-Tec--the vault opening, it's 100 years before every other vault?

PL: Yeah, I think it was just 25 years after the bombs dropped, so yeah, like 100 years, 200 years, the different vaults across the country open at different times depending on certain factors that they meet.

EH: Yeah, so an I know there's like the narrative that Vault 76 was the best and brightest. So what do you think the role of the character is and are they a tool of this military industrial complex or are they a force for good? What is their service to the world?

PL: Yeah, so simply put the role of the player character, the avatar, is to rebuild Appalachia, and that's what the Overseer of the vault tasks each of the residents with doing, so that's a huge part of the game--going out and trying to civilize different parts of Appalachia while dealing with the Scorched Beast plague. But Vault 76 was one of the only vaults that lived up to its true purpose. As I'm sure you're familiar with, Vault Tec had a bunch of experimental vaults where they promised the residents inside that they were just keeping them there for safekeeping and would let them out eventually but had more insidious purposes for the residents of those vaults. But 76 was one of the ones that didn't have any experiment. It was just let's put all the smart people there and let them out after 25 years or whatever it was.

EH: Got it. What do you spend your time doing in the game? I've heard some talk about social gatherings happening in game? Have you participated in anything like that?

16:34

PL: Social gatherings--a couple. I definitely see that there are some people who do that for a majority of their time. I would say my main social gathering period was during that Fasnacht event that last year in February.

EH: And could you describe that?

PL: Yeah, well the goal of most people was to get these rare masks that were a result of finishing the mask, so a lot of people ended up coming and repeating the quest over and over just so they could get a chance at getting one of the rare masks. But everyone's wearing microphones and we're able to talk, so after the quest was completed a lot of the times people would just sit around in one of the houses and just end up chatting about the game and what they've been doing and things like that.

EH: Cool. Do you happen to know what house?

PL: Yeah, it was a couple different ones. Let me see--trying to remember, this was last year, so...it was--there's one next to the church on the church side of Helvetia, of that path. There was one, oh man, there was one with instruments inside of it and I remember that one specifically 'cause we would sit and play those instruments.

EH: Oh cool.

PL: But I can't remember which house exactly that was. I think it's one of the only houses with the instruments actually inside of them. But a lot of the gathering would take place actually outside of the church just because that's where the quest ended.

EH: And can you actually make music on the instruments?

PL: Yeah, yeah! Let's see, there's a piano, there's a mouth harp, there's a banjo, there's a tuba. Let's see, I think maybe a steel guitar or something along those lines, but yeah those are the main instruments there.

18:58

EH: And do you have to be skilled in real life to play them?

PL: Skilled in real life?

EH: Yeah.

PL: No, no it does depend on your intelligence skill in the game how well you play them. So if you're intelligence is like a 1, you're gonna play the instrument horribly but if it's like a 14 or 15 you're gonna play it really well.

EH: Okay, got it. That's cool. So let's see--are you part of, other than the Twitter group, are you part of a Fallout community of Fallout players?

PL: Not really. I've met some friends within the game and we'll play sometimes just the 2 of us but I wouldn't say I'm really apart of the community. A lot of the time I spend is like building up my camp and getting weapons and stuff. But I suspect that will change. Bethesda is releasing the Wastelanders update on April 7, so that's adding nonplayer characters to the game which don't exist right now.

EH: Right, right. Yeah, what else do you expect from that update?

PL: Like in terms of content or just in general?

EH: Yeah. Yeah, just general and content.

PL: Okay, yeah so in terms of content I'm really hoping that they add a diverse array of groups to the game. They've really only talked about the raiders and the settlers. This is kind of like the goods v. evil dichotomy there. And I believe they've also teased that the Mothman cult will be a joinable group. But yeah, kind of like to what I was speaking of before, when you go to some of these locations in the game that are so well-known in WV in real life, how they feel kind of lacking and empty in mystery and character, I'm really hoping that by adding these non-player characters to the game, that it'll help restore some of that character to those places and whether by how those NPC might interact with the location or tell stories about it and what not.

EH: Nice. So yeah how has the game informed your understanding of WV history, culture or folklore?

21:49

PL: Probably not too much. I suppose I try not to let the game dictate what I think of real life understandings of things. So I've limited my understanding of what I've actually experienced in my time in WV (sighs) but yeah, I don't think I have a good answer to that question. The game, it really doesn't feel like real life. Like I said, it's really just cosmetic, the locations.

EH: Right. I mean it seems like it has made you more interested in the place.

PL: Mmhm, absolutely. You know, I suppose each state has its own character and stuff like that, but growing up in OH you really didn't get much of that. It's such a plain potato state. (laughs) So I suppose like when I was growing up hearing about WV, I didn't really lend much credence to it, just 'cause I didn't think states had that much to offer until I actually visited and found out how much character WV did have. And of course that was inspired by the game itself.

EH: Yeah, and has it led you--I mean I'm sure you have had talks with people through your travels, but has it forged any friendships with people in WV or connections?

PL: I've definitely talked...or let me just make sure I understand the question. You were saying like when I visited WV, has it been, have I forged any like real life friendships there with the game removed, or have I met people from the game there.

EH: Oh, well I was thinking the former, but I would be interested in the latter too.

PL: Yeah, yeah, so I haven't made any like what will be lasting friendships. I've definitely met people as I've traveled and we've talked for an hour or two. Like I met some really cool people from Morgantown at the Fasnacht Festival just this past February, so that was really cool, and then just like traveling to like Point Pleasant and the Asylum, you know, you meet people there and just kind of share stories about what you've done in WV. But I haven't made any Facebook friends or anything like that. Just talking with people, getting names, you know, swapping stories.

24:54

EH: So were there, would you say there were a lot of Fallout players at Fasnacht this year?

PL: Yeah, there were. A lot more than I expected to be honest.

EH: How many would you say?

PL: Oh let's see. There were 1,2,3,4...there were 6 or 7 that I met directly and this was just because they had actually made Fasnacht masks from the game, like the one that Bethesda had designed, so they made them in real life and wore them to this festival. So they were easy to spot and talk with. But and then I saw a couple people talking with them, so I'm sure there are probably anywhere between 15-20 people there that had actually played, that had gone there because of their experience in the game.

EH: That's very cool. What did you make of Fasnacht?

PL: Oh, it was awesome. Let's see. In the game, you basically have to go from destination to destination to collect these robots that celebrate different parts of Fasnacht, so there's like the music maker and the honey maker and the cheesemaker, and then you fight different monsters there but then you gather them at the end of the quest and you have a parade through town and you have to protect them, protect the robots. And then at the end of the quest you light the Old Man Winter pyre, so there are those aspects of the actual celebration in the game. But yeah, when I got there there was a lot of just hiking around the place, a lot of singing and dancing which was very cool. Yeah, square dancing was like a huge part of the celebration which was really neat.

EH: Right. Did you go to the Hutte Restaurant?

PL: I didn't, no. The line was like wack long.

EH: Yeah, it's really amazing if you're ever through. Just the setting is incredible. It's like a town museum, essentially.

PL: The Hutte Restaurant?

EH: Yeah, uh-huh.

PL: Yeah, it looked beautiful from the outside. But I just got to go into the Mask Museum, the gift shop thing.

EH: Yeah, that's very cool too. Have any other games led you to have an in-person experience like this?

PL: Not really, I suppose most games take place in fictional worlds but, that I pay anyway, but yeah, really the only games that take place in real world locations that I've played are like the Fallout games, 'cause they actually mention--there's the 3rd one that just took place in DC and the 4th one that took place in Boston, and the New Vegas installation which took place in Los Vegas, but you know I never visited those places because of the game itself. This is the first time that I've done this.

EH: And yeah, it does seem to be inspiring people to visit in a way that I haven't heard from the other Fallout games. Do you have any ideas why that is?

PL: I wonder if it's just the fact that WV is sort of off the beaten path in terms of states. It's not really talked about as much on a national scale whereas you know, the third one took place in DC. People go to DC on field trips and stuff like that so we're very familiar with these locations. And even in Boston, we're slightly more familiar with those locations too. And yeah I mean you know Boston now, it's a huge city so you know, when we hear WV I think most people probably think, oh wow, WV that's a state that's not talked about much. I'm sure a lot of these locations are still pretty well preserved and true to their character and form and not manipulated by progress and (laughs) innovation and things like that like so many historical places have. So yeah I think just going back to that idea of mystique and the character that WV has. I think that's very appealing for Fallout players.

EH: Right, yeah, I mean I think--I had lived in DC before I moved to WV and play old-time music so I would come to the state for music festivals but wanted to kind of have entry into other part of WV and didn't really know where to start, but I think Fallout is, I mean it's literally giving people a map which is very cool.

30:20

PL: Yeah, yeah, exactly right.

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

PL: Ah, let me see...yeah, not too much. I you know, I'm looking forward to sending these Twitter handles. There's a couple interesting people that I think have really delved into the spirit of this game and made it a huge part of their life, which I think could provide some valuable input and even their ideas about how they can, how they've influenced the game going forward because they have been actually able to meet with some of the developers at Bethesda and talked about the aspects of the game that they like and don't like and what they want to see added to the game that's done in real life. I saw one popular YouTube, he's got a few hundred thousand subscribers, talking about how he'd like to see the Mothman Festival that's celebrated in September, also done in game.

EH: Oh yeah.

PL: So I think there's a lot of excitement to be had by this community about what can be added to the game from real life. 'Cause they've got the skeleton in place. Like the foundation. They just need the--to keep adding that character and I think there's a lot of room for growth there.

EH: Cool! Yeah, I would love to know that YouTube channel too if you don't mind sending it in the email.

PL: Yeah, oh yeah I'll send all that for ya.

EH: Great. Well thanks so much, this was really helpful.

PL: Oh good. Let me know if you need any more information or if you have any other questions pop up with this whole virus thing I have a lot of alone time on my hands.

EH: Right (laughs) It's a weird time to be going through all these holotapes about plagues and quarantine and such.

PL: Oh my gosh, I didn't even think about that, but you're so right!

EH: And I will send you a release form that would allow me to quote you in the article, or in the chapter, and also to put this recording in our archive.

PL: Yeah, yeah cool, sounds good. Do you have a timeline as to when this chapter will be finished?

EH: Well it's for a book on contemporary WV folklore, like community-based folklore and my manuscript is due in April. I probably will need a few extra months, but I think it will be out in 2021. But I'll probably send drafts to people who are included just to make sure I got it right and see if there's any feedback. Especially from people who are players, to make sure I got everything factually correct too.

PL: Yeah, yeah, that's great. You do know you have one of like the coolest jobs, like to be able to do this, this is amazing.

EH: Yeah, it is pretty great.

PL: (laughs) Cool, cool.

EH: Well thanks again and I'll be in touch over email.

PL: Yeah, no problem. Ok, sounds good.

EH: Alright, take care.

PL: Yep, you too Emily, bye bye.

33:53

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END OF INTERVIEW