CHAPTER 9.

ON BEING IN IT

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The author of this chapter developed a theory of storied community listening while participating, as a white woman and an academic transplant, in a Fayetteville, Arkansas, restorative justice project. As she explains through personal narrative, storied community listening combines iterative and critical self-reflection through story with ongoing and reciprocal community-engaged work. She identifies, through various points of tension in the group and their conclusion, the ways in which a researcher and community member might think about listening, hearing, and critically reflecting on what it means to be a white woman working toward community healing.

One quiet summer Friday afternoon, a few of us in the office ventured to the Arkansas Country Doctor's Museum, which featured an actual iron lung, a surprising collection of salt and pepper shakers collected by doctors' wives, and a plaque sharing the story of a prominent doctor in the area, Dr. James Monroe Boone, who was purportedly murdered at the hands of the men he enslaved in 1856. I found myself thinking about the plaque after the visit and inquired about the story to my contact in special collections at the University of Arkansas, where I worked. He directed me to Mike, a local historian in our area.[1] Mike, like many white residents in Fayetteville, had grown up hearing stories about the doctor's death as well as the subsequent lynchings of the three enslaved men believed to be responsible. According to white accounts, two were lynched by a mob; one was hanged by the state. However, Mike was working with a community group, the Washington County Community Remembrance Project (WCCRP) to share an alternative narrative that was already well known to the Black community through oral histories. The goal of the WCCRP was to erect a marker in a communal location that would prioritize—and humanize—the story of Aaron, Anthony, and Randall, the men who were lynched.

When I met Mike, I was about three years into my staff position with the honors college at the university and was regularly seeking ways to be more

1 All names in this story (aside from the historical individuals) are pseudonyms.

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inclusive of all of our students. Along with working at the university, I was in my second year of doctoral studies in English. I had just begun formally creating a list of readings for my exams that focused on story and narrative, inclusive pedagogies, and public memory. Personally, I was working to confront racial justice as a white woman and as a transplant to Northwest Arkansas, but at the time, felt frozen by the guilt of it all. I was still so new to this part of my journey and, therefore, had a sense of how much grounding and experience I lacked. Mike was really interested in the ways I could contribute and encouraged me to meet with Valerie and Terri, leaders of the group, as he thought there might still be time to get involved in their efforts. In a follow-up email to our meeting, he shared that "I think the key here is that we are allies in these projects, willing to help or learn in whatever way we can" (WCCRP, "Local History Interest").

Helping or learning in whatever way we can is, indeed, the key. I knew then as I know now that the only way to confront my trepidations is to jump in, to be in it. But in this world of performative activism, of guilt, of sadness, how can we be in it? What is the answer when it comes to striving toward allyship? How do we take concrete, intentional, and meaningful steps toward racial reconciliation? These questions, this tension, had been sitting with me through my work, through my budding research, and through my tentative foray into communal racial justice.

It is this question of being in it that centers my growth and development toward storied community listening, which I define as an embedded approach to listening that involves critical reflection through story and an active, reciprocal approach to working alongside a community. And so I took the jump. I emailed the two leaders of the WCCRP and met with them. I followed up after I felt like our meeting went well to see where I could fit. I attended meetings, and I sought to be willing to help or learn in whatever way I could. In each of these moves, I tried to align my strengths with the community's needs as we all worked toward racial reconciliation.

As I critically reflect on my membership in the WCCRP, I find that my storied community listening approach grew out of a series of important conversations that I share below to help others learn how to use this approach in ways relevant to their communities. Understanding the community history we worked with, as well as the ways in which I came to know the positionality and priorities of each group member, allowed me to carefully examine my own purpose and place. Our group's first major task of finding the perfect location, a historically Black cemetery, to place the public marker that serves both to memorialize the three young men who were accused and killed, Aaron, Anthony, and Randall, and venerate their legacy taught me the critical importance of community listening as a praxis in this work. By actively using community listening as we crafted the marker for the men's memorial, I was able to identify the leading importance of story. A reciprocal

and active community relationship through my own administrative role in the coalition solidified the role of community in my definition of storied community listening. This gathering of various elements of my definition, through stories, culminated in the unveiling of our project and an earnest reflection on the meaning and further applications of storied community listening. I don't think that I am inherently arguing for best practices to remember or even plan for navigating this memory in the present day, as others have done (Hosbawn and Sturken). A storied community listening approach helps me understand my role in this story and the stories I will be part of in future community spaces. I hope that my approach might help other scholars, particularly white female scholars, navigate the intrinsically personal work of racial reconciliation.

THE STORY OF OUR STORY

In progressive white communities throughout the American South, it's commonplace to hear people brush over the past, especially local histories of slavery. In Northwest Arkansas, for example, people say, "since we were in the mountains we didn't have much" or "people here were good slaveholders" (Bonilla Silva). Even within stories that acknowledge those enslaved, the focus we hear perpetuates the dominant narrative of criminality and subservience. Valerie, Terri, and the small community team that became the Washington County Community Remembrance Project had recently visited the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and were critically listening for community histories that contributed to the criminalization and dehumanization of Black men through centuries. In listening to the story of Aaron, Anthony, and Randall's death, the community team heard a dominant narrative that focuses much more heavily on the white man's death:

> What is agreed is that on 29 May 1856, two of his former slaves and a slave belonging to the brother of his deceased wife Sophie, David Wilson Williams, came to his house late one evening and demanded all his money. They beat him senseless with three hickory clubs and left him for dead. His blood stained the floorboards. He died 11 June 1856. . . . The slave owned by his neighbor was later tried and hanged. The two former slaves were lynched and hung by Dr. Boone's sons. The motive for the brutal death has been ascribed to jealousy of the perceived favoritism of an ex-slave overseer by other ex-slaves. Another supposition is that the slaves were put up to the murder by the brother-in-law who coveted the farms of Dr. Boone. (Singleton)

This narrative, featured at the Arkansas Country Doctor's Museum, doesn't even say their names, a call we still hear today. Additionally, "what is agreed" suggests a kind of universal truth that the coalition felt was left incomplete. Storied community listening involves a critical reflection, and critically reflecting on this story reveals that this narrative works to further the dominant role of the white man and the subservient, criminal nature of the enslaved men.

The Washington County Community Remembrance Project was founded to help the Fayetteville community begin to unpack and critically reflect on this minimized past as well as the present it very much affects. As a member of the WCCRP, I describe the group's work as coalitional and describe the group as a coalition. We worked from a variety of positionalities toward our common cause, as explained in our mission statement: "expanding our community's capacity for facing difficult truths, acknowledging the reality and damage of racism, recognizing and calling out injustices . . . and working to address them in whatever way we can" (WCCRP, "Info about the WCCRP"). One clear example of our efforts is the marker project we undertook to present a fuller story of the lynching of Aaron, Anthony, and Randall.

By embedding themselves in the community, practicing what I now term storied community listening, the Washington County Community Remembrance Project heard a contested version of the story, a counterstory that "presents a contrasting description and narrative from a different perspective" (Martinez 16) and honors the oral tradition of the Black community. Tonya, one of our early coalition members, had a friend whose family had been in Fayetteville for generations. Tonya's friend had always told her that Boone, the enslaver who had the means and access to become a doctor in 1856, was "misbehavin" in the female quarters when he attempted to assault an enslaved woman, Thursday. Thursday protected herself by taking an axe to his head. Aaron, Anthony, and Randall then defended her, though they were ultimately still given the blame. Critical to our group's mission and directly in line with the goal and intention of storied community listening is prioritizing and unearthing the ways of knowing and pieces of the story that have not been prioritized or centered. In this spirit of storied community listening, the group heard the need to bring to light these competing narratives.

THE STORY OF OUR COALITION

When I joined in 2019, the WCCRP had received formal acceptance from the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) to be part of their national Community Remembrance Project initiative and was gaining steam on telling the community story of the lynching of the enslaved men. From Fall 2019 to Spring 2021, we met

once a month as a full coalition and completed the design and installation of a historical marker commemorating Aaron, Anthony, and Randall. Additionally, we held a series of related events, including hosting a high school essay contest, working with local libraries to spread the word on this story through public lectures, and forming community relationships that worked to further conversations in our town about facing difficult truths.

Even as we worked successfully through these public-facing events, we grew in our internal work together through valuable group discussions, fraught decisions, and earnest conversations. These important tensions stemmed from our differing positionalities as we earnestly worked to best tell the story of Aaron, Anthony, and Randall to our community. Acknowledging race and local affiliation of each of our coalition members plays an important reflective role in how we grew in our storied community listening. Our activities were led by Terri, a retired Black educator originally from Minnesota, who remained our steadfast leader and, I think, struggled with the tensions between the engrained dominant narrative and the Black oral history perspective. Valerie, a Black social worker and academic who has lived in the area for six years, worked to remind us of a new way to approach history. Elizabeth, Mike, Joshua, and Ruth were our most vocal white participants, all deeply connected to Fayetteville and the Northwest Arkansas region. Their local connections led them to focus on finding proof and a sense of historical accuracy that we collectively learned was often deeply biased. Diane, a Black history professor at the university, frequently offered an academic perspective on our work together, and Tonya, a Black artist and gallery owner with deep local connections, consistently maintained the importance of emphasizing the Black community and its oral traditions. Along the way, we were also joined by a local Black male resident named Terrell, a Black Journalism professor at the university, and a young white man studying for seminary working toward reparations through churches in the area.

As a white woman in her twenties, I was the newest and youngest member of the group and had only lived in Fayetteville for five years. Our team had several academics—a history professor, a genealogist, a community historian, and a social work researcher. My background in rhetoric and composition, however, primed me to listen carefully to how we told our stories and used our words. Our work began in earnest in August 2019, and about two months later, in October, I began to formulate the topic of my dissertation, a study that examined the public memory work of our group as we installed a historical marker commemorating Aaron, Anthony, and Randall alongside growing efforts to remove a Confederate statue in our town square that a local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy had worked to establish. On the Institutional Review Board (IRB) form that I needed all coalition members to sign, this only meant

that I was asking the coalition to allow me to observe, collect, and write on our work together. Having to ask for their consent so early in our relationship made me worry about seeming disingenuous as we worked together.[2] Opening that conversation, however, allowed me to form relationships with Valerie, Elizabeth, and Terri. Elizabeth, Terri, and I maintain communication on our reflective writing, reaching out to provide reading recommendations and hold ourselves accountable in our ever-present work toward racial justice. Valerie and Terri have published on their work together in Fayetteville's Historical Society publication, and Elizabeth is working on a grant for a similar local project. Though I started my project by looking for increased knowledge on public memory, I found the necessity of developing a storied approach to community listening and reflecting on it here to situate myself and others in the work of racial reconciliation for this and all community work.

THE STORY OF OUR PLACES

It was in our October 2019 coalition meeting, intended to make a final decision on the location of the marker, that I honed in on the "listening" component of my storied community listening approach. By this point, we had had two formal meetings and had settled into group dynamics and conversations. We had discussed a few options for places, chosen because they either had some relevance to the story (such as the former site of the homestead where Aaron, Anthony, and Randall were enslaved) or were in public (the town square) or sacred (a historically Black local cemetery) spaces. Elizabeth put together some information about each of these places and presented it at our meeting.

As I shifted into writing about our coalitional work together for my dissertation, I found myself spending most of our meetings staying silent. I listened, I carefully took notes, I respected and admired the work of the group, but I didn't actively contribute. I rooted this decision in Krista Ratcliffe's notion of eavesdropping, which is part of her larger development of rhetorical listening. Ratcliffe introduced rhetorical listening as a tool for white scholars such as herself to use when discoursing across differences. Her definition, "a code of cross-cultural conduct…a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in cross cultural exchanges," (1), was developed from reflecting on "emerging threads" in questions she received after conference presentations, comments on her writing projects, discussions in her classrooms, and her own tendency toward guilt as a white woman. I began using Ratcliffe's concept of rhetorical listening in the way one might expect at this stage in my project—pulling out the definition and

2 IRB protocol approval number 1912234807A001.

plopping it into my work. As an active member of the community I had been eavesdropping on, however, I soon learned I needed to question, reflect on, and expand my definition and use of this concept.

To decide on the location of the marker, Terri told us that we would, one by one, vote on our first, second, and third choice for a marker location. She felt that such a method would allow us to understand each committee member's motivations and would provide a more holistic opportunity to get a sense of our group at this stage in our forming. I immediately felt a tightening in my stomach and throat. My inner monologue became a melodrama about how the method she suggested would out me as an imposter, a scholar-in-training with good intentions but not much more. I wanted to hide. I wanted to disappear, but there was nothing I could stand behind as I was called to speak. My immediate and jarring reaction when being called to speak revealed to me that perhaps I had been using "eavesdropping" as a passive and disconnected practice instead of actively interrogating the ways in which I approach the work. I needed to expand on the way I interpreted rhetorical listening to find a more embedded approach.

As community listening scholars have explored, merely listening, even with the best of intentions, can often reinforce the privilege of white people and the dominant culture instead of truly embedding oneself in the work. In a special issue of *Community Literacy Journal,* Jenn Fishman and Lauren Rosenberg define community listening as "a literacy practice that involves deep, direct engagement with individuals and groups working to address urgent issues in everyday life, issues anchored by long histories and complicated by competing interpretations as well as clashing modes of expression" (Fishman and Rosenberg 1). Differing from rhetorical listening, for me, is the direct engagement element of the work—the "being in it" that I practiced with the WCCRP. Ratcliffe acknowledges that rhetorical listening functions "as one answer to Jacqueline Jones Royster's question: how do we translate listening into language and action?" (17). Fishman and Rosenberg acknowledge, in their introduction, their own evolution to community listening in response to both Royster's question and Ratcliffe's response. Storied community listening, then, is my own approach to this response. My development of storied community listening involves an embedded approach to listening, my own blending and building off rhetorical and community listening. Practicing this definition of listening can only be accomplished by being in it, as Terri and the coalition members had shown me through a call for direct participation.

Because I was also one of the committee members who would be asked to cast a vote, I listened to the individual votes of each member much more carefully and intentionally to parse where I felt we should place the marker. Instead of merely taking notes and observing as I had been interpreting eavesdropping to

be, this forced individual participation called me out of guilty complacency and allowed me to actively be part of the group. I began to understand the importance of an embedded approach to listening that involves critical reflection through story and an active, reciprocal relationship to working alongside a community. Allowing each of us to cast our vote based on our own viewpoints and stories led us to an intentional discussion about our own individual motivations. My vote for the homestead location was rooted in what felt like historical accuracy. Many of our white Fayetteville residents (Mike, Ruth, and Joshua), voted for the very public Fayetteville Square, as they felt motivated to share with their white peers our story. Valerie discussed her vote for Oaks Cemetery, a Black cemetery that is the final resting place for generations of Black citizens in Fayetteville. These differing motivations coalesced in a discussion on our collective goals, which we decided should ultimately be about venerating Aaron, Anthony, and Randall. To prioritize this goal of veneration, of remembering their story instead of placing too much of an agenda on their memory, we then collectively voted to place the marker in Oaks Cemetery. This first instance of practicing community listening, though it made me far more vulnerable, allowed me and the rest of our coalition to join the conversation instead of standing on the outside, which in turn provided me with far more investment in our final decision. Though it draws from concepts of rhetorical listening, community listening incorporates the embedded approach to listening that I see as critical to my ultimate definition of storied community listening.

Oaks Cemetery, our chosen location, is part of a historically Black church in Fayetteville, and a core group of church members serve as the caretakers. Though the process of deciding on the marker taught me the importance of leaning into community listening, it was our coalition's interactions with the caretakers that confirmed the importance of developing an active, reciprocal relationship alongside a community that I've grown to consider essential to my definition of storied community listening. As the WCCRP individually discussed locations and collectively gained consensus on Oaks Cemetery, we had excitedly planned to ask the caretakers about its placement, as one of the WCCRP members is a member of the church and a close friend of the leader of the caretakers. We were surprised, however, that the caretakers wanted to meet with our coalition to express concerns and learn more information before making a final decision. In our excitement over veneration and perhaps our eagerness to practice what I now refer to as storied community listening, we didn't extend these realizations out to the caretakers, the actual community members (and descendants) of this sacred place.

When I arrived at the church for the caretaker meeting on a cold, windy night, I navigated immediately to my coalition members. I didn't make small

talk with the caretakers before the meeting, and I spent the drive home later wishing I had visited with them, at least introduced myself, before almost othering us as coalition vs. caretakers. The caretakers, approximately ten of them, various ages and all Black, had set chairs up in front of the room, putting us in a position of authority (or placing us on trial?) in the sparsely filled, sparsely attended room. Such positioning was another realization for us as a coalition that we might need to recalibrate our expectations. Throughout the conversation, ideas circulated about identifying unmarked graves in Oaks, genealogical research, and possibly finding familial links to Aaron, Anthony, and Randall at the site and in the community. Their resistance to the placement of the marker came from additional traffic, additional upkeep, and additional work. They feared that the marker would bring unwanted attention, possibly leading to a lack of veneration for their own family dead (and eventually, them) who are resting there. I also sensed a hesitation to bring up the past, the times of overt racism, and the racial violence inflicted on their ancestors. It was quickly becoming apparent that we, as a coalition, had overstepped. By charging forward excitedly with our decision to place the marker at Oaks, we had neglected the very people who are and have been the community that Oaks, the project, that Aaron, Anthony, and Randall represent. Though I, as well as our coalition, had really turned a corner by embedding ourselves in the work, in the decisions, I had not fully grasped (or considered) the actual community, the legacy of Black individuals in our town, of the three men who had been murdered. Assuming that the caretakers would purely be excited by a marker to shed light on an untold story neglected to consider the pain and trouble that such a marker might bring.

After a series of questions and considerations, namely spoken between the caretakers and our coalition leaders, the caretakers said they would need some time to think about it and vote. As we left the fellowship hall that night, the leader of the caretakers shook our hands and asked a few of us if we had been to Oaks Cemetery. "No," many of us said quietly. Though Terri and Valerie had been, several of us who just weeks before were feeling amazing about our enlightened decision to venerate by placing the marker in Oaks Cemetery, were ashamed to admit we hadn't even spent time there. "You really should," he said calmly, "it's a special place."

This story, for me, exemplifies the critical component of community in storied community listening. Here, practicing storied community listening meant not just participating in the listening, but considering the whole community, namely those who would be directly involved. And even in joining the conversation, storied community listening as I understand it today after these reflections means listening, hearing, the levels of resistance that might come with a decision that we think is the right move. Our coalition grew and learned firsthand

through this tense encounter that being embedded in the community is a necessary component of storied community listening. As I reflect on my enactment of storied community listening, the community element could have been improved not through large revelations but simply steps. Going to Oaks Cemetery and immersing myself in such a "special place" after we had made our final decision. Separating myself from the people I know in a new setting and making small talk with the caretakers to get to know them. Putting down my notebook and pen in the meeting and making eye contact, asking more questions about the loved ones buried there, or even apologizing for our shortsightedness might have led to a greater community relationship in this development of storied community listening. Practicing enacting the community in storied community listening means a million tiny decisions to choose community.

THE STORY OF OUR WORDS

The coalition's decision on where to locate the marker (which ultimately gained the unanimous approval of the caretakers) allowed us to establish the important goal of veneration and taught me much about both community and listening. Another large and complex task was to decide what would be written on our marker. Beginning in January 2020 and continuing to our marker dedication in May 2021, the coalition split into two subcommittees. One focused on drafting text for the marker; the other collaborated with local high schools and libraries to make an essay contest, sponsored by the EJI, a reality. As with our decision to place the marker in the less public location of Oaks Cemetery, our coalition charged both subcommittees with "doing things differently" as we thought through the most inclusive way to share the story of Aaron, Anthony, and Randall that honored their memory and brought truth, or as much truth as we knew, to our community. Even though I ultimately led the essay contest efforts, it was in watching and listening to the work of the marker text subcommittee that challenged me and taught me the most about my growing understanding of story in storied community listening.

In mid-July, the marker text subcommittee emailed everyone their first draft, which would be the main topic of discussion at the next meeting in August. Because of COVID-19, our meetings were now online, and I had to join this one from the road while my husband and I traveled to his best friend's wedding. The meeting began as normal, with a now-routine checking in on everyone as the pandemic continued to surge, leaving all of us uncertain, burnt out, constantly skeptical, and craving human contact. When Terri then shifted to an open discussion of the marker text, Tonya almost immediately began to speak. She was very unhappy with the language of the initial text draft. She felt that the text

revealed a complete disregard for the power of oral history, for genuinely allowing Black voices to come through. Additionally, she felt that the text catered to white people and merely shared facts without addressing the nuances, the totality of the lynching of these men and their lives. She stated in no uncertain terms that she was "afraid this would happen" and felt that we were allowing the white voices, the dominant narrative, to come through.

Due to our bumpy backroad driving at that point in the call, I didn't have my camera on (though others did and service was clear) and, therefore, felt quite anonymous and comfortable saying nothing. Elizabeth, who worked directly on the marker text, tried to focus the conversation on revising. Eventually, however, silence took over the call, which ended early after a few half-hearted administrative updates. One of the items was my update on the essay contest, which I concluded by awkwardly saying something like, "I really value this conversation." But I felt frozen then and during most of that meeting, and throughout the week I stayed shaken up, wondering: What should I have said? What could I have done? How was I part of Tonya's worst fears realized?

Even as I reflect on this tense moment in our coalition's time together, I am struck by the power of reflection that has become part of the praxis of storied community listening. Here, as in the previous stories I tell in this chapter, it has been through present reflection that I interpret our silence and discomfort as a moment of growth and an essential part of community work. Tonya felt that, in our initial marker language, we were defaulting to the stock stories of our past, and she was imploring us to critically reflect on the ways in which the knowledge has been shared that are outside dominant culture standards. To practice this critical reflection that is an integral part of my approach, I look to the scholars of color who have shaped my unlearning and relearning work. I feel I have tried to listen to Aja Y. Martinez in the use of counterstory, which I hear as further need to provide a supporting role in these conversations. Patricia Hill Collins taught me that the idea of bringing in new knowledge claims, uncovering ways of hearing, processing, and determining how the story gets told, are not possible without dialogue "with other members of a community" (212). And I feel empowered by Jo Hsu's method of homing or using a constellation of stories to determine where and how we belong (9), to puzzle my way through this work. The story of our words is about expanding knowledge claims, unearthing the counterstory of oral history in our community, and critically reflecting as we focus on how we tell the story of Aaron, Anthony, and Randall.

This story is also about my own growth, legitimacy, and trepidation as a storyteller and a listener—the "critical reflection through story" element of my definition of storied community listening. I entered the coalition hoping to be embedded, invested, and in the work with the best of intentions, intentions that were

continuously challenged by the complexity of our coalition's goals and the nature of our work together. Again and again, however, I wrestled with where specifically, day to day, that placed me. As a young, white student success-staff-member-by-trade, my natural gravitation is to do. It was for this reason that I volunteered to head up the high school essay contest, which meant enough administrative duties that I always had an update to hide behind when it came to hard conversations, questions, and silences. As in my administrative update in our heated meeting around the marker text, I cast such silence as a cop-out, a form of eavesdropping, or intimidation. Lately, however, I've begun to push against such silence based on Layla Saad's casting of silence as arising out of white fragility, "a fear of being incapable of talking about race without coming apart" (53).

It is in this present reflection that I attempt to recast my administrative work for the coalition. As I reflect on this tense moment with the coalition, I see that each of us, in our own ways, moved (and moves) forward by doing, by working. For Tonya, that meant calling us back to the ultimate goal of our committee. For Elizabeth, that meant scouring historical records for some sense of truth. For me, that meant doing my part, keeping the wheels moving on all the minutia of arranging a community event, to engage in storied community listening and free up emotional space for others, like Terri and Valerie, to show us how to do the work. I found my place not as the leader, nor as an eavesdropper, but as someone co-working. My attempt at a half-hearted administrative update during our emotional conversation about the marker text, then, needs to be reframed as a part of countering my own default story of guilt and moving toward a more reciprocal and critical community relationship. This sort of reflection is the praxis of storied community listening—not simply an embedded approach to listening or striving for an active reciprocal relationship with the community, but a critical reflection, through story. Such critical reflection moves me out of guilt and shame and into accountability, allowing room for new knowledge claims, such as Tonya's suggestions on our marker text or a more focused and driven emphasis on administrative projects like the essay contest, to take the forefront over the distraction of my own white fragility.

After Terri had had time to collect herself and her thoughts from our contested meeting, she emailed our committee and asked for a follow-up meeting, which included documented agenda items to discuss the marker text, the strong feelings that Tonya had expressed, and to take our pulse in terms of realigning our mission, vision, and goals. As she had done in other meetings, Terri asked each of us to go around and share our thoughts and feelings—once again, I was not able to hide behind the silence and anonymity that I had grown comfortable within our new and uncertain virtual world. I stated, simply and without the need for eloquent realizations or guilt or shame, just how much I was learning

from everyone. Through the very reflection of this story, I see that a reciprocal approach to working alongside a community, in addition to an embedded approach to listening that involves critical reflection, is a necessary part of storied community listening. Leaning into and learning from white silences and reframing a sense of co-opting into learning are all part of this process, helping me learn to listen and hear in a way that makes sense for me. Storied community listening makes way for new knowledge claims, be they personal realizations or community counterstories, that I think is critical for academics as well as white people in this frayed work. I find in this story of our words my own attempt at truthfulness, the importance of reflective storying to truly process the listening that is needed to move toward a more holistic and inclusive community.

CONCLUSION: THE STORY OF OUR UNVEILING

The COVID-19 pandemic derailed our plans to unveil the marker again and again and again. With each new setback, we pivoted and tried to do the best we could. The public killing of George Floyd at the hands of the police in May 2020 ("Killing of George Floyd") awakened Northwest Arkansas and many communities to the racial injustices that are still part of our everyday lives, and I think only deepened our coalition's sense of purpose. This modern-day version of lynching led our area to protest the Confederate statue prominently featured in a nearby town square, and it was formally removed in September 2020 ("Crews remove Confederate monument). The conversations prompted by those protests led to an interest in the new site of public memory our coalition was working toward. As we grew closer to unveiling the marker, we felt a growing hope that we might earnestly be taking a step toward racial reconciliation, while also wanting to hold the importance of veneration over education in the way in which we publicly remembered Aaron, Anthony, and Randall.

We were finally able to hold an in-person, on-site marker dedication and unveiling ceremony on May 15, 2021. I was in my last month of pregnancy and had just graduated with my Ph.D. the weekend before. The day started rainy and cold, and there was inexplicable water gushing out from underneath our kitchen sink. I arrived at our public library before 8:00 a.m. to help Tonya assemble an art installation featuring Black art outside of our event space. We rushed from there to Oaks Cemetery, where I got to see many of our coalition in person for the first time since I had really started showing. We hugged and rejoiced, and I was able to receive a few belly rubs, so grateful that my unborn daughter Lenora could be part of the celebration (and that she hadn't come too early for me to miss it). When the ceremony began, Terrell was the first speaker. Representing both the WCCRP and Oaks Cemetery, he said a prayer and a few

words about the community, including his family's local legacy. Terri read aloud the marker language on one side, which can be seen below:

> On July 7, 1856, a white mob from present-day Elkins, Arkansas, kidnapped and lynched Anthony, a Black man and Aaron, a Black teenager. They were put on trial at the Washington County Courthouse in the death of a white man, James Boone, who enslaved them. Anthony was proven innocent. Aaron was released due to lack of evidence. Disregarding the rule of law, a mob led by Boone's sons reacted violently, lynching Anthony and Aaron near the jail, most likely on the estate of Archibald Yell, the deceased former governor of Arkansas. Randall, a third accused enslaved person whom an all-white jury found guilty, contested his verdict but was refused a retrial. Like lynchings, court-ordered executions—with mobs standing by—did not require reliable findings of guilt. Randall was hanged by the state on Aug. 1, 1856, likely on Gallows Hill, which is now within the Fayetteville National Cemetery next to Oaks Cemetery.
>
> During this era when enslaved Black people commonly faced violence by white enslavers, local oral history contends that, on May 29, 1856, James Boone attempted to sexually assault an enslaved Black woman who fatally assaulted him in self-defense. The Boone family then implicated Aaron, Anthony, and Randall in Boone's death. Slavery in Washington County, as elsewhere, devalued the lives of Black people resulting in violence, including sexual assault and lynchings for which hundreds of white perpetrators were never held accountable. (WCCRP, "Our Memorial Marker Photo Attached")

Hearing out loud the words we had so carefully chosen was powerful. It was even more powerful to hear those words at Oaks Cemetery, a site that taught our group so much about being and being part of a community. Terrell reminded us that "the inscription on this memorial will be here for eternity. But as you look at it, think of it, this could be the headlines for today. . . . I challenge you, as painful as it can be, don't repeat history." Even in that moment, we were reminded that such work is ongoing. Elizabeth rang a bell for a series of wishes she, Terri, Terrell and Valerie had put together on behalf of our coalition, and thunder rolled as she wished for an end to racism. The crowd of witnesses for the ceremony was small, intentional on our part, and the service, taking place in a cemetery, felt very much like a coming home ceremony.

We moved from the cemetery back to the library, where I got busy directing volunteers as to where to stand to manage traffic, a mad hunt for the gospel band that had agreed to join us, and last-minute scramble for access to the ice machine for the caterer. Along this journey I had become the point of contact for the Fayetteville Public Library, the manager of our coalition email, and our formal connection to the university. As I fielded phone calls from our leaders and shoved my husband and two coalition members out to the far reaches of the library to direct lost people our way, I wondered if perhaps I had found my own way to truly be in it.

The event started late, but we didn't care. A gospel band began the service, and many in the audience enthusiastically danced. I wanted to but, embarrassed, I didn't. One by one, Terri introduced each speaker—a long-time Black Fayetteville resident who spoke about the way things used to be, our two exceptional Black high school essay contest winners, and a Black psychologist who addressed the long-standing effects of racial trauma. The ceremony ended up lasting almost three hours, perhaps too long to hold the attention of the families and guests who had gathered to celebrate. Reflecting on my lack of full participation both in the dancing and in my own logistical regrets about the ceremony length, I return to this question, this idea of truly being in it. Through the reflective nature of this cumulative event and in the further reflection of writing my story as I have established the approach of storied community listening, I feel as if I have. Even in that feeling, regrets such as inhibition in a ceremony or the lack of holding my attention are part of it. There is no perfect resolution (as much as I might strive for it), but the process, the journey, are key.

Though I was deeply exhausted from the festivities of the day, the tensions and work of the past year and a half, and the growing pressure on my belly and my feet, I ended the night with a nice dinner with our team and two representatives from the EJI who had driven down to enjoy the festivities. We had one of those dinners that might be in a movie, where the narrator pans over each face laughing and talking, and soft music tells the viewer that something truly magical is coming to an end. In many ways, it reflected to me the growth we had all done as a coalition toward storied community listening. As we recounted our time together to the EJI representatives, I heard in each of us a version of storied community listening. Valerie walked through our complicated iterations of the marker language, and it was clear that all of us still wondered about those tense moments. Terri shared a growing relationship she now has with the Oaks Cemetery caretakers, and her plans to do more projects together. Ruth explicitly stated that this work and this project, led by Black women, taught her so much that she didn't know she didn't know. Each of us, including myself, had leaned into an embedded approach to listening, only discovered through critical reflection.

Together, we used this approach to strive for an active, reciprocal approach to working alongside our community.

As my unborn Lenora and I drove home that night, I was struck by a beautiful May sunset, and by the countless sunsets that were stolen from Aaron, Anthony, Randall, and those whose names we will never know. In my quest to more intentionally listen, to tell my story, I can't neglect to consider the community behind it all, and who I am within those spaces. Identifying my place in the coalition meant fulfilling the "duties as assigned" work of a subcommittee that, in my opinion, takes the pressure and the strain off the voices and the people who have historically been silenced for far too long. Finding my place in the coalition also meant stepping out of my comfort zone and decentering my own guilt to participate more actively. It meant taking risks and speaking up, being truly embedded in the work.

Storied community listening involves sharing the story of how I experienced these moments of conflict and ultimately practiced an approach to help me move toward racial reconciliation. In Terri calling me in to direct participation through casting my vote on our marker location, I learned the value of an embedded approach to listening. In the caretaker's questions about my physical presence at Oaks Cemetery, I starkly discovered the importance of working alongside a community. In Tonya's honest reactions to our marker text, I found a way to critically reflect through story. In the Zoom calls, answered emails, frenzied updates, tiny exasperations, and magical moments of our coalitional work together, I found a way to be in it. In writing this story out and its many iterations, evolving from a graduate student clinging to other scholars and centering her white guilt to attempting to move toward my individual voice with my own thoughts and ideas, I have learned the critical importance of story. Storied community listening, as I have come to enact it, seeks an embedded approach to listening and includes critical reflecting through story and an active, reciprocal approach to working alongside a community. I see where this project, my writing, might speak to other white women, other female scholars, and other scholars standing on the edge of academia and community. By always striving to truly be in it as we collectively leave that edge, however, I hope to tell my story from my positionality for my own reflection and growth, in the hopes that it can speak to others in whatever form they need it.

CODA: ON BEING IN IT

My story, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, has no ultimate resolution. The marker now sits stoically at the entrance to Oaks Cemetery, and the coalition has formally disbanded. Though I keep in touch with its members, our

work together is complete. I've recently moved to start a new faculty position in Cincinnati, and the unborn infant who attended our unveiling is now a walking, talking, highly opinionated toddler. And, though I'm often frustrated at white scholars who tie their newfound theories, definitions, and experiences into "a pretty bow" that blends theory and praxis at the end of their academic pieces, I find myself equally frustrated that I'm not able to do just that. Instead, I hope to take my idea of storied community listening with me into my classrooms at the university, into the community spaces I hope to be part of, into my work bringing up another young white woman. And, along with approaching these roles and spaces with storied community listening, I hope to see where it falls short. To grow it, challenge it, and evolve it as I, too, involve it in my roles as faculty, scholar, mother, white person, woman, and community member.

This is just one story. But it's my story. And if nothing else, I hope it leads me to deeper listening, to more equitable community work, to more carefully listening to my role and the role of others.

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This project is dedicated to Aaron, Anthony, and Randall, those that they loved, and those that loved them; to all those whose names we don't know, taken too soon in a white supremacist world, who were never given a chance to say goodbye. May we do better by continuing to try to be in it. This is a hopeful step in that direction.

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