



Playback Your Story asks the community around Gallaudet University to reflect on and unite through their connections to community, narrative, and place. Sponsored by Van Alen Institute and the DC Office of Planning, John Johnson conducted interviews throughout the community. The interviews culminated in a final performance by John Johnson's theater troop, Playback Theatre on the Gallaudet Campus in 2016. The initiative weaves together the stories of locals, inspiring us to cross the street, interact with one another, and understand the roots of our community.

Derek Swanson: My name's Derek Swanson. I co-founded DC Sharp four years ago with my brother Ryan in the newly-reopened Union Market, which is a food hall in northeast DC. We thought it would be a good location because we saw lots of people coming in for grocery shopping, looking for a gourmet experience, and we realized there was no other knife sharpener in town at the time, so we set up a little booth with a handful of sharpening stones and a bucket of water.

People saw that we were there and came back with their knives, and we've been sharpening knives almost every day since early September 2012.

What I'm doing is I'm using Japanese (or synthetic Japanese) water stones to sharpen this knife. It's a simple process. You basically rub the knife back and forth on a rough stone, and a rough stone will allow you to create the geometry of the edge that's appropriate for the knife that you're working on.

After you've created that geometry, you'll move to one or two finer-grit stones and you'll do the same thing; you'll rub the knife back and forth. After you've gone through the process, the result is that you should have a really fine edge that cuts your food efficiently and cleanly.

That's basically what we're doing. We're just taking tired knives and bringing them back to life. We probably do about anywhere from 50 to 100 knives a day here. It's mostly home cooks who live in the city and within the DC metro area, but we probably work with every professional cook in town as well. It's a pretty simple operation. We think we do a pretty good job. We've gotten mostly good reviews. That's basically it. We're DC's knife guys, DC's cutlers.

I discovered this place the first weekend it opened up. I came down with my family just to see what it was all about. You could tell how much potential it had, the real estate team that created this place. They're one of the best in the country, and they

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had a vision for what this neighborhood was going to be. In four years here, I've seen that vision really come into its own and realized.

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity