



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.

Maceo Thomas: My name is Maceo Thomas.

John Johnson: Maceo, where are we today?

Maceo Thomas: We're sitting on the patio of Union Market between the stores and the parking lot. I come to Union Market a few times a week just to do work. They got WiFi, it's easy to park, good food.

John Johnson: What has been your experience like today? What just happened to you recently which elicited this interview?

Maceo Thomas: I was just sitting here doing some work and these two young people— probably nineteen, twenty—came up to me and a young lady asked me in a very soft voice if she could interview me for a business class. They were Gallaudet students. She told me she was going to sign. She and her classmate proceeded to interview me and asked me some questions about trying to help improve a business here at Union Market.

John Johnson: Has this been your first time ever engaging with folks from the Gallaudet community?

Maceo Thomas: This was actually the deepest. I go to the smoked salmon place and the young lady who serves there all the time— don't know if she's a Gallaudet student, she probably isn't because she works full time, but she could have been a former student. She's deaf, so she signs to me. Throughout the Market, if it's not some kind of conference going on, there's just staff people and students who are constantly throughout the Market.

John Johnson: Okay. How does it feel to be integrated into a community? Does it encourage you to want to learn to sign? Are you appreciative of just being in the presence of

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another community that you typically don't engage with? How do you feel about that?

Maceo Thomas: I would say I'm probably not integrated—I'm kind of inside looking out. Actually a good friend of mine works on campus now. She's a social worker. She did her social work degree there, her masters in social work. She's not deaf, but she works with people, with the students, and places them on campus. I know her and I'm constantly like, "How can I get in a sign class?" Another friend of mine whose son is deaf, I'm constantly asking that question, but I have not followed through to actually find out how to get a class.

Often I sit here and I feel like, "Man, I really wish I could better be integrated by just having a regular conversation," because I love people, so I stop and talk to people all the time, but I can't do that as easily. I got "Thank you " down, and that's probably really about it. Excluded sounds like an active word, that somebody is doing something to me, but I definitely don't feel that I'm integrated in that community, and it's so close. I can see it right now. It's right across the street.

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity