

Steph A. Pang

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McGill University

Reflective Paper for Osler Essay Contest

My paper used a combination of written sources (both primary and secondary). To find these, I learned to input advanced searches in McGill Worldcat that led me to find medical history books and memoirs in the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, medical journal articles and several sociology books from the era I was studying (1960s-70s) in the Humanities and Social Sciences Library, and various books on Expo 67 and my specific building of interest at the Blackader-Lauterman Library of Architecture and Art. I also searched through PubMed and JSTOR for various journal and newspaper articles. I also learned that setting up meetings with a librarian (Anna Dysert) could be very helpful as they have extensive knowledge of how to probe for specific information I am interested in, as well as referring to useful databases I could sift through more carefully. Also, a retired professor I had the pleasure of corresponding with during my research (Dr. Roger La Roche) shared a booklet on the Health Pavilion he had compiled together out of personal interest, which contained many primary sources and own research he had collected over the years.

During my scoping searches while developing the paper topic, I found that my chosen topic, the Man and his Health Pavilion of Expo 67, had already been researched extensively and thoroughly by a McGill PhD student in architecture for a chapter in his PhD dissertation. Thus, while coming across and using similar written sources, I set out to make my paper unique from other previous papers on the topic by finding new primary sources. I went on to personally conduct about a dozen interviews/email correspondences with people who had been involved with or had experienced the pavilion itself. My interviewees came from a wide range of places, such as Montreal, Toronto and New York, and ranged from lay people to distinguished people in fields such as Medicine and Architecture (including professors and professionals in these two fields).

To recruit these people, I used a variety of methods including emailing people within my own networks, both personal and academic. Additionally, using Facebook to reach out in the Expo 67 group, which assembled together people who wanted to share memories of this magical

time, was an interesting, though not strictly systematic, method that yielded many eager interviewees. I put up a post asking people if they would like to share their memories with me or if they would be open to an interview. Quickly, members of the Facebook group started a lively discussion in the comments section. This allowed me to connect with new people who were willing to be interviewed in person or by phone, or by email correspondence. It was very lovely to discover how people were very excited to talk about their memories. This made me reflect on the potential of social media in qualitative research, which can bring very interesting results (when used with precaution and careful critical appraisal).

Much of the information I gathered from interviews contradicted some of my initial ideas when developing my paper's arguments. I learned to evaluate the quality of the new information and reconstruct my ideas accordingly. To have a more comprehensive set of primary sources and to minimize bias, I strived to acquire as many different perspectives as possible for my interviews - I spoke with lay visitors, professionals in architecture and medicine, and historians who had either visited or researched the pavilion. Due to the use of oral history, I also had to learn to be careful not to extend generalizations of information from interviews, while honouring the individuality of each person's experience. I came to appreciate finding a balance between subjective and objective information, by combining people's lived experiences (through interviews or written sources) with objective evidence from documents of events that had occurred. The use of McGill library databases allowed me to search for the latter in a more systematic manner.

Other useful research skills that I developed during this paper's process was learning to ask focused questions to have a more productive interview, which included employing active listening techniques. I was struck about how the interview process had resemblances to history taking in a medical context; I was also reconstructing a person's story through well-formulated open and closed questions, and through careful, analytical listening.

In conclusion, writing this research paper was an enriching experience as I was able to delve into new primary sources along with secondary sources, and I had the opportunity to have many discussions with people with fascinating insights to share. Additionally, I came to develop a more profound appreciation for the skills of historians, as they artfully and critically analyze both subjective and objective evidence to bring forth new insights on the past and lessons for the future.