# sonder

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Barbara Haskett



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#### This book is dedicated to my loving family and my boyfriend who helped make this book a reality.

Thank you to Mom, Dad, and my boyfriend Alex for helping me transcribe so many interviews. Thank you to my twin brother, James, for being a transcriber and my bodyguard in Washington D.C. Thank you to my older brother, Dennis, for being supportive and giving James and me a place to relax.

This book would not have been possible without you.

if you ever felt the sonder herein lies a window into the lives of passersby

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### Introduction

Some of you may have picked up this book wondering, "Sonder? What's that?" Well, that is a good question! The word did not even exist until 2012 when John Koenig created the term for his project *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*. I did not learn of sonder's existence until approximately 2016, when I saw its definition floating around the Internet. Upon learning about the term, I was finally able to put a name to my curiosity about everyone on the street, when I wondered more and more about others.

#### sonder

n. the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.

When you see someone at the bar, drinking heavily and causing a minor stir, do you wonder what got them to that point? What do they have to go home to? It would not be surprising if one was not interested in those things, after all, it is very unlikely that you will gain the ability to truly care about that person in that moment of passing. You have no stake in this stranger, no emotional connection. Talking to them likely does not benefit you nor are you likely to see them again. Even if you do encounter that person again, you may not remember them. All of these factors make it easy to assume the characteristics of that person. You can choose to hate someone you will never know, like that driver who won't stay in their lane or that parent who is having a hard time controlling their children. You can curse them up and down silently without them ever knowing, and no one is going to dispute you on your assumptions. In those moments, I believe it really is important to consider the other.

I am not implying that you romanticize a tragic path that person's life has taken to get them to that point so that you pity them. Pitying others and putting yourself on a pedestal over that person would not be right. It truly is hard to create this point without it sounding contrived. You do not need to be miserable all the time to be unhappy in a moment. You have heard "nobody's perfect" so often in your life, and even though those words hold merit, its constant overuse (and misuse) may make you roll your eyes. That statement is entirely true, as much as you may be sick of hearing it justify a bad action. In the end, you have no true idea what a stranger's life is like.

For *Sonder*, I interviewed fifteen complete strangers on the streets of Washington, D.C. These strangers are acting as representatives for all strangers you may pass by. Fifteen strangers could not possibly account for every lifestyle and I will not pretend they do. That being said, each stranger I engaged seemed to have a completely different set of life experiences than the next. There was no way I could have guessed the kind of life they lived just by looking at them. Every person had moments they reflected on fondly and moments they wish never happened. In the interviews, you will see that I kept in every falter and pause to give a more authentic sense for how the individual spoke. I wish I could have included every question and every answer as I found each person incredibly interesting. All of them had reasons to be out there on the three windy days I traversed

Washington, D.C., and all of them felt compelled to talk to me, to be open about their most personal thoughts and memories.

I will never see these people again. While some slipped up and gave me their first names, I did not keep them in my mind. Only one person gave me their contact information to get updates on the book. That being said, if I ever saw any of these partial strangers again, I would not know who they are unless they took the time to remember me and approach me. One of the goals for this project was to get to know passersby, not to know individuals. This book was made to instill a sense of empathy in the reader and for the reader to take these thoughts with them when they walk in a sea of people. I want the reader to understand the scope of any person, not just the scope of themselves. Think of every aspect, every acquaintance, your ancestry, and your experiences that make you who you are; really think about it. Every person you see is filled with just as much, and every person knows of a plethora of other people with the same amount of substance. Now I ask, reader, do you feel the sonder?





### **The Perfect Timing**

The interviews you will soon see were conducted in late February and early March. Only a few weeks later, the government orders to quarantine from the coronavirus were given. While writing these pages after not being outside for weeks, I cannot help but think about how this project would be different had I conducted it after months of quarantine and social distancing. Everyone has been given time to reflect on themselves, and for some, they have been given the time to do that completely alone.

I feel like it is common to take others for granted, or to take the small talk of strangers for granted. After being in seclusion for so long, I do wonder if people will be more friendly to one another. Have we missed the passersby? Will we be irritated if others come close so soon after quarantine? Will group events run rampant and cause a resurgence?

I do worry for the strangers I interviewed. As mentioned, I do not remember their names or faces, but I still care for them. Some were older, others were incredibly sociable. Some of these strangers may be essential workers, but that is not something I will ever know. All I know is that my interviewees were kind enough to open up to me a large amount for the sake of this creation. The most worried parts of me wonder if there is no chance to pass these strangers again due to tragic circumstances.

It is vital that we care for one another, that we protect one another, and that we are thankful for those strangers that are putting their lives on the line to keep others alive and functioning.







# interviews



## Aakaa

### What is your fondest memory?

My fondest memory? You know, when you're as old as I am you have so many fond memories. How do you pick the fondest memory? Maybe my fondest memory is that I'm still alive today and can talk to you.

### Do you think there is a meaning to life?

Well, the genetic meaning is we're just supposed to keep procreating so that our genes go down the line. So that's our genetic meaning of life. I guess my own meaning of life is not just one word... just kind of try to be nice to people like, you know, the Golden Rules are kind of the meanings of life. Like treat others like you would like to have them treat you, that kind of thing. Thou shalt not kill. My meaning of life is try to do good things and be nice to people.

### What kind of work do you do and why?

I'm a scientist. I still am a scientist. I guess I chose that because I was good at math when I was in high school. And so at that time you were supposed to become an engineer so you could keep up with the Soviets who had already launched Sputnik. And so I decided to be a scientist, and now I'm an ocean physics scientist. So all those things people say, "Do I believe in?" I say, "I don't believe in them." They are driven by data. Religion is for belief. I'm a scientist.

#### Do you have a secret you have never told anyone?

I'm happy to tell everybody all the bad things I've ever done, and all the bad things I'd like to do.

### Goku

#### Do you believe in anything like fate or destiny?

I believe in them, to a degree. I'm in the middle. I believe that if you naturally move through life, you're going to meet a fate or a destiny, but in the same degree, you can take control of your fate or destiny

#### What is the kindest thing a stranger has ever done for you?

Ah, I moved to California like three years ago. I went through a really rough time. I was homeless at the time, and a lady would literally bring me fresh food, like me and my like best friend, we moved out there together, both going through the same thing together, they would ah... She would literally cook dinner, she would come to my job, bring me, bring us plates, with foil on them, randomly, all the time. And it always seemed to be like the times where it was the roughest, like "what are we going to eat" type scenarios ...she always pulled up. So yeah, that was a blessing. Nonni, that was her name, by the way. I'll never forget her. Straight up.

### What's one of the worst things you've ever done?

I've done something out of like, spite. Like someone doing something wrong to me, so me feeling like doing something wrong in return, was like the solution. I dated a girl for a long time, we broke up, and she started dating my best friend, like two months later. This is obviously like when I was younger and an idiot. Fast forward, a year, we're both on Spring Break, we're both drunk, and we like hooked up for a week straight. And I knew she was still with like, the guy, but to me it was like, "Ha ha, bitch, this is what you get" type of scenario. I think that was like morally, like so against everything how I was brought up and how I am as a person, so I would say that is probably like one of the worst things. Just off the top of my head.



### **Oliver** Carnegie

#### Do you have any unique talents?

Uh... Do I? Uh... Uh, I am actually a pretty adept rock climber. I spend a lot of time doing it, yeah. You know, I do a lot of that. Actually been rock climbing in Yosemite, it's a lot of fun.

### If you were an animal, which one would you be?

Uh, they're called Gibbons, uh, they're incredible, yeah, yeah...yeah, uh, well not only climbing but I....uh feel a spiritual connection to them. I think they're really exciting and funny creatures and uh, incredibly playful, I really enjoy looking at them yeah, they're great.

### Has anyone close to you ever died? How did that affect your outlook on life? Was it good, or bad, or both?

My uh... My, I remember when my grandpa died. That was a big deal. Uh, he was, a really, he was an incredible man, and he took care of a lot of us. Uh, and he was just like an ideal, like, like 1950's American man, took care of his family, and everything. Uh, and then his wife, my grandma died, uh and you know when he died that affected me a lot, I think I cried a little bit later, uh, but I didn't know what to do about that. Uh, then his wife, my grandma died who I didn't really have an emotional connection to, but uh, uh, I was drunk the last time I saw her, and that felt really shitty, uh, yeah, I was really embarrassed of that, yeah.

### What is a secret you have never told anyone?

I think I'm uh, this is fair, I think I'm a hateful person. I think, I think I really am, uh, and that's, that's fair, yeah. That's it, yeah.





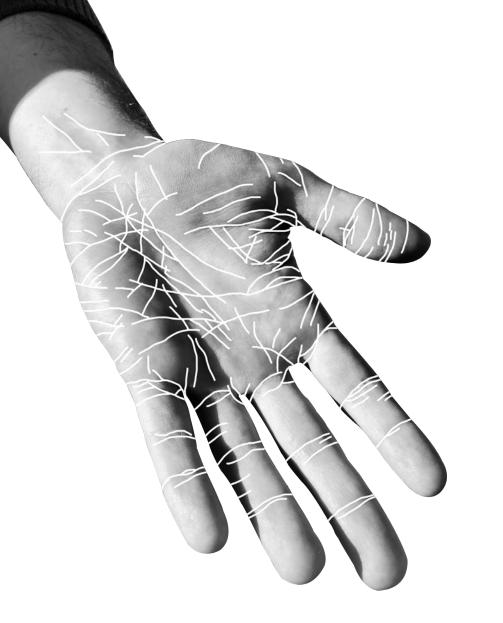
### Betty

#### What is a time you were so happy, you cried?

I, there's, maybe this isn't like a super climactic point in my life, but there's this really dumb video of me. I was uh, a counselor at a camp, uh, for a camp that I had previously gone to, and there was a lot of opportunities at this camp to do, to go on further trips and further opportunities remember I come back as a counselor and I coached this girl. I, I'm not going to say I'm not taking any credit for it, this was all her, but she was so quiet and reserved... didn't speak um, I, she decided to run for this certain thing, this certain opportunity that I had gotten. And I sat, I remember I sat down with her and told her everything that she needed to know and I'm like, "You've got this, just be confident, go in there, you know your shit, she was, she was on her shit, she knew it you know, she was just quiet and reserved. And it was revealed who got this opportunity in this big ceremony and I remember I was sitting in the back crying for her because I was so happy for her. Yeah, she got it. She won... and that was, that was my legacy. Um, and there's a dumb video of me crying.

#### What's one of the worst things you've ever done?

I think one of the worst things that I've ever done... is uh... uh... I lied to my mother once. Um, and it just made her not trust me. I was young, and dumb... but I was old enough to understand. I, I lied to her, and I lied... and my father asked me to lie to her. And um, my father asked me, ah, just not tell my mother something, and I didn't realize how big it was, so I just didn't tell her, and she ended up finding out, because it was a pretty big thing. Um, and um, when she found out that I knew and I just hadn't said anything, she, she was like, "I thought you were supposed to be... like with me, you know," and "I like thought you were supposed to protect me..." And I didn't protect her at all, and... I still, I still regret that. Or I... I think that's the worst thing I've ever done. Um hmm.



# **Bill MacAlbee**

### Has anyone ever saved you?

Yeah, I would say, you know, someone save me from suicide once. Um, and, and I'm a Christian so I believe Jesus saves me.

### What is something that you lie to yourself about?

Lie to myself? Oooooh. That I don't know how to experience joy.

### If you were an animal, which one would you be?

Huh! Which one would I be? Um, Groundhog, 'cause then I could dig. Dig tunnels. For whatever reason I'm in a dig, dig tunnel mood.

### If you could make one person magically disappear, who would it be?

Um, I don't think I... no one. Because everyone has value.

### Do you think there is a meaning to life?

Yes. To give glory to God.

### Are you happy with your life?

I'm, um, am on a trajectory to happiness. So. I'm not happy now, but I have hope for happiness in the future.

### What group of people in the world need our help the most?

Orphans. The fatherless. There are a lot of good runner ups, but I choose that as the top list.

### **Edward Grass**

### What's a time you were so happy you cried?

I guess during the birth of my children. Um, my son was, uh, that's twenty years ago, and uh, April 17, 1999, yeah. I am sure there's other times, but definitely those ones.

### What never fails to bring you down?

Never fails to bring me down, um, I guess thinking about, I've, I've had to fire people, so that, that, when I think about those moments that brings me down.

### Do you pretend to like people you really don't?

I probably do, yeah. I, I, I'm somewhat of a people pleaser sometimes, and I probably pretend, but I try to work at actually becoming more connected with them then at the same time. Yeah so I hope to, to, uh, not pretend at some moment.

### Would you make your younger self proud?

I believe so, but I, but yeah, I'm not sure if I love the term proud, but uh, um, yeah. Cause, I'm sure that I, there's moments in my life that would, and there's moments in my life that wouldn't.

#### Is there a secret you've never told anyone?

A secret that I've never told anyone... I don't know, I'm sure that there is some, uh some, uh secret, uh, that I have not told my wife. I'm not sure, if th– yeah. I can't think of anything right now, and I'd need to take some time to process, to go into the depths of myself to figure that out. And I'm not positive if I want to do that right now.



### Tonto Kowalski

#### Has anyone ever saved you?

Yes. Wading across the river, and going fishing, and I slipped, and my friend caught me by the collar, and propped me up so I didn't go slogging down the river. A very cold winter... and mid-February, it'd be death. Steelhead fishing.

#### What's the best purchase you've ever made?

Oh gosh...philosophically? My wife's wedding ring.

# If you could do one thing to change the world, what would it be?

Probably... figure out a way to sustainably... alleviate world hunger... As we're standing here across from the Department of Agriculture!

### Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

Optimistic, because I look for the good in people... And I talk to strangers on the street and help them with their book!

### What is the dumbest thing you've bought?

Um, this is going to age me a bit. 8-track tapes. They didn't last long... the technology moved so quickly. Yeah, they were only around for probably four or five years. Maybe.

### What's a secret you've never told anyone?

Um... I would like to write a book.



### Maria Arroz

#### What is the best gift you have ever received?

Ok, um, I would say... the love and wisdom of my mother.

#### What is the kindest thing a stranger has ever done for you?

I would say, I was in a... I was in Bolivia and we were in a, such an extremely crowded situation and my... I was lifted up off of the ground? I was clearly panicking. And the people around me recognized it, separated out, and instead of being completely oblivious to what was going on for me, they, they turned and paid attention to me. And made sure I was okay.

### What is one of your worst memories?

Um, probably my father yelling at my mother. Specifically, on our boat. Um, he was a sad and angry person who did not know himself and um, took his pain out on other people.

### What is your biggest regret?

My biggest regret. Um, not being kinder to my mother. Uh, in my teenage and young adult life.

### Do you think there's something after death?

Yes, but I don't think it's Heaven, like I think that it's, that we become a part of energy, the world energy? And so, you know how people say they're going to live a good life so they can go to Heaven, I think that living a kind and moral life, allows you to be part of the positive energy of the world.



### Penny

### If you were an animal, which one would you be?

I would be...an octopus. Octopus are adaptable. They change their situations, and they don't... they're kind of... I don't know what the right word is. They don't... they don't let anything stop them. They're very inquisitive, they're also kind of loners. They don't do well in groups.

#### What is one of your worst memories?

Um, worst memory? Um, my mom kicking me out at thirteen.

### Has anybody ever saved you?

Many people have saved me. Um, let's see. Well, my boyfriend kept me out of jail. My other boyfriend kept me off the streets, gave me a place to live.

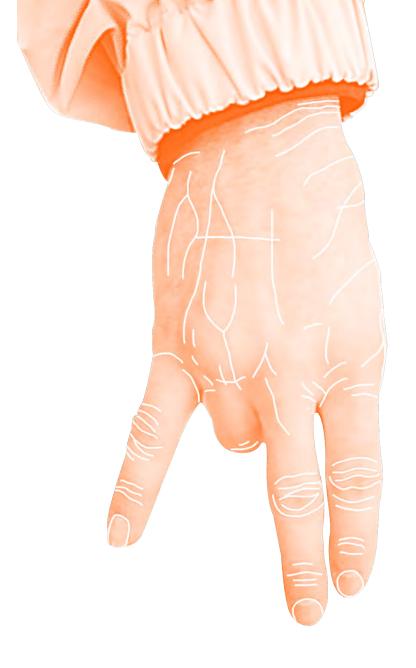
### What is the most dangerous issues the world is facing?

The most dangerous issue... um, I really think the biggest issue our society is facing is our susceptibility to false information and our reliability on social media.

### Do you feel like there's a meaning to life?

There's gotta be something, I mean, I'm not very religious, you know the whole going to Heaven thing doesn't really guide me in any way, but I mean being good people and you know... We're all here together so we should be nice to each other.





### **Neil Andblowme**

What is the best purchase you have ever made? It was a dildo, a double sided dildo.

**Do you have any unique talents?** Um... I can hacky sack pretty well.

If you could do one thing to change the world, what would it be? Just end slavery, you know? Just get the slaves out of the streets and stuff.

If you could make one person magically disappear, who would it be?

Um... Uh... Shit... Uh... Hillary Clinton?

What is the biggest problem America is facing? Uh, racism?

Is there a lifestyle choice you make that others disagree with? Smoking pot.

What kind of work do you do and why? I'm an electrician, and I don't know, because I hate it.



# **Frank Reynolds**

### What never fails to cheer you up?

Something that never fails to cheer me up... uh... hearing laughter, no matter whose it is. I just like, love that sound, I mean there's something about hearing that sound that instantly brings a smile to my face.

### What is your biggest regret?

My biggest regret was... honestly I didn't have a great relationship with my dad, until just recently when I've really been trying to get closer to him. But like in high school, there were times when I was super distant and like part of the reason I left my hometown was to get away from him and my family and especially him. I mean, I just wish I had tried harder when I was a kid.

### Have you ever faced any kind of racism or sexism?

Oh my God! Well let me tell you! Ha ha... a former roommate I had, we went through *hell*! He is one of the *worst* human beings! One day, two of moving in together, he calls me a *terrorist*. It's like *really*? That bad? And he's just like, "No..." It's not just that he had these painful beliefs, he was a really bad person. It was just bad. He was really a bad guy! He's one of the worst people I've ever met in my life and I like kind of consider myself spiritual, but I really failed to see the good in that man. And like that really shook my core of humanity because like he's a really bad dude... that guy... fuck that guy.

### Is there a piece of media that you connect with?

Media... oh, uh, man, I guess I really love Wagner's music. Do you ever listen to classical music that's like a superheroes' soundtrack? Right before the hero's going to beat the villain? That's the bomb.

### Jessica Martin

### What is the most dangerous issue the world is facing? Climate change.

### What's a time you were so happy you cried?

Oh God. So happy I cried? You know the first time I ever saw my little cousin, she was like the baby of the family, and I had never like, I had never like taken care of a baby or anything and I was probably about 9 or 10, and I was like, "Oh my God here is such a small little human, someone smaller than me," and it was like great. Just so cool to see.

#### Do you have any unique talents?

Um, I'm good at memorization. I like knew, I at one point knew, over a hundred and fifty digits of pi. And won an award for it. Yeah, it's really fucking nerdy and terrible, whatever!

### Is there a lifestyle choice you make that others disagree with?

I'm not religious at all. So I don't believe in an afterlife, I don't believe in a god, I guess, huh, most people in America don't agree with that. But I just kind of think that we're here and while we are, we should be the best people we can be while we have the time we do.

#### What is the dumbest thing you've bought?

The dumbest thing I've ever bought...oh God, I bought a lot of stupid shit for my cat. Like so many cat toys, he does *not* need them. All he needs is a good snuggle and like, I have this huge ass cat tree that I literally spent \$75 on, and I'm like, he does not need it!



### Roosevelt

#### What is the best gift you have ever received?

My wife (Anja Cole), after we got engaged, the Christmas afterwards, she surprised me with a... I've always been into astronomy, and she surprised me with a plaque about how the stars were in position on the night I proposed to her. And that's always stuck with me.

#### What is your biggest regret?

Um, my biggest regret is probably not talking to my grandfather more before he passed away. He was a big part of my life, and I don't have anything recorded as to what he said other than in my memory, and the memory of my family members, and that's really a collective thing for all of us because sometimes we like, sit down and we say you know, we wish we had written down more of his stories and you know, figured out who he was more, because he meant so much to all of us... But that was a big thing for me too.

### Is there something you know you could never tell someone, in fear that it would hurt them?

Probably telling my parents how much it hurt that they didn't make it to our wedding? That's probably the big one that comes to my mind, so... Just 'cause I don't know how they'd react to how brutally honest I'd be about it, so... that was only August, so it's still pretty fresh. Yeah.

### If you could make one person magically disappear, who would it be?

Currently, it would be our roommate... No, no, no, no! To be honest, it's the person sitting over there. No, which way is it? The White House is one of these ways... It's hard to choose. It's either the roommate or the President.



### Anja Cole

### What is the best purchase you have ever made?

My wedding dress.

### What's something that never fails to cheer you up?

My husband (Roosevelt) and cats. Also, [redacted], what's your fake name? Jaiden. Jaiden always puts a smile on my face.

### What is the worst thing you've ever done?

The worst thing I've ever done... Oh my God, I have one major regret. It wasn't like a bad thing I did to somebody else; I pride myself on not doing that as much as I can. My dad was selling a Paul McCartney poster, like a first print of some really old Paul McCartney poster from when he first went solo. And um, he was selling it, for about five hundred dollars. And it had always hung in his house, and I was an adult, at the time, so I was like, yo, I'll buy it from you. Like I know, I know that you want to sell it, but it means so much to me, because it's always been in your house. I wanna buy it. Um, but he said he wasn't selling it. And then for Christmas that year, he surprised me with it, for free. Yeah, right, so I'm getting a little emotional just talking about it. My biggest regret in life, is um, that at the same time that he gifted it to me, I was in an abusive relationship, with a man who treated me like shit, like absolute shit. And, so when I was moving away from his place; we'd been living together so the Paul McCartney was in his house, and in the basement, and I needed to leave so quickly that I basically just got to pack a couple of bags, a couple of boxes and get out of there. He still has the Paul McCartney. That's the biggest regret in life. And I've been dating this man (Roosevelt), married to this man for five years now, so in the last five years, I have no idea if they've gotten rid of it. I don't want to contact him because he was awful, it just hurts. Every day. Yeah.





### Jaiden

# Is there a lifestyle choice you make that others disagree with?

Ho, ho, ho, ho! That's a good one. Non-monogamy. I don't like the idea of hierarchies within relationships. Like, you, a lot of people value, like, their significant other over everybody else and I don't think that's right because every relationship you have whether, you know, uh, romantic or not, is like unique and important, um, and can fulfill your life in different ways. And so I just say non-monogamous because it doesn't really imply hierarchy or anything like that.

### What is your fondest memory?

My fondest memory? Sitting with my grandma watching HGTV even though I hate HGTV. We just lay there watching HGTV for funsies.

### What is a time you were so happy, you cried?

Oh man, when I saw my cats after a really long break.

### What is something that you lie to yourself about?

What do I lie to myself about? Um. Huh, let's think. What do I lie to myself about. I don't give a shit about my grades. I don't have to study for that exam. Yeah, that's... like, I'll get really stressed, um, and I'll kind of just stop, uh, caring and I'll be like, I don't care, it's fine. And then I care a lot.

### Are you happy with your life?

I'm so happy with my life! It's so good! I have so many great things! I'm here in D.C. all the way from Michigan. I'm so happy. Yeah, I'm happy.

# the making of



### **Physical Process**

I'm not going to lie, I felt a little ridiculous walking around Washington, D.C. with two paper signs taped onto the front and back of my winter coat. The wind was blowing hard, and I had to do everything in my power to keep the pages from flying away sometimes. I travelled to the District on three separate days, February 23, February 29, and March 1. It was absolutely freezing, and I sincerely believe most people thought I was some kind of crazy person or con artist. Being a bit of an introvert, gathering people to interview was hard for me, especially given the nature of this project.

I heavily relied on inquisitive strangers that came to me and asked about the signs taped to me. Something just didn't feel right about approaching someone and saying, "Hey, would you like to open up to me about the most personal details of your life?" Obviously, it was phrased a little better than that when the time came, but that is what it felt like I was asking. I credit my ability to find willing strangers to the locations I chose because nobody really wanted to be outside due to the cold. Helpful tourists saved the day! I stayed close to the national monuments and the Smithsonian Metro stop.

The interviews followed the same format. First, a stranger would have to approach me asking about my sign. I would explain that I was a senior design student at George Mason University who was creating a book for her final project. I went on to say that I needed to interview strangers about very personal topics, but that they would be kept anonymous (aside from their hands) and they could skip a question if they did not feel comfortable answering it. At this point, strangers would decide whether to stay or go. If the stranger agreed to be my interviewee, I would inform them that I would need to record their answers to my questions with an audio recorder. The first three questions were the same for everyone. I asked them to create a fake name for themselves, I asked them what their favorite color was, and I asked them what their dominant hand was. The first two questions got implemented into the visuals of the person's page. My intention was to put the left-handed individuals' hands on the left side of the page and right-handed individuals' hands on the right side of the page. That did not work out as all of the interviewees were right-handed and I did not want the spreads of my book to be monotonous. I asked each stranger approximately ten questions. I put the answers I found the most interesting in the book, but due to the varying lengths of the answers given, many answers were not included in the finished product. After the interviewee finished giving me the answers I wanted, I took a picture of their hand in a gesture they said they felt connected to and went on my way.

Transcribing the audio from the interviews into text was very difficult. In order to keep the interviews as realistic as possible, I wanted to keep every little falter and pause in the transcription. This required a lot of good listening and was, at times, very tedious. I did not get too far into the transcription process before reaching out for help. I am lucky to have very loving family members and a boyfriend who helped me transcribe every interview. With their hard work, each transcription is typed exactly how it was spoken to me.



### **Design Process**

I chose to create a graphic element in this project by utilizing the hands of the interviewees. Growing up, I often heard that you can tell the kind of work and life someone has had by looking at their hands. I find this to be true on occasion. Something that intrigued me about hands in particular are the lines one accumulates over time from scars, age, and more. The lines are a story of that person's life, almost like the rings on trees.

I tasked myself with tracing the prominent lines of each person's hand, to show all the paths their lives have taken. These hands have been used to greet, push away, create, and grasp so much. I wanted the hands to exist on their own, separated from the body because they feel like the part that is one of the most indicative of the stranger's life journey. In time, each interviewee will accumulate more lines as they continue their adventures in life and the hands in my book will be a snapshot of every moment until their interview.

### Gallery

A window into the lives of passersby





### About the Author Barbara Haskett

### What is your biggest regret?

One I remember from time to time when I'm trying to sleep is this one. I was at a store as a child, I forget how old... maybe 7 or 8? I really enjoyed playing with younger girls because I always wanted a baby sister, and there was this absolutely adorable little girl in this store and we were kind of playing with each other in the aisles. Then, I noticed she had this kind of skin condition, where parts of her skin were red and peeling. I was not very knowledgable about skin conditions and that they aren't necessarily able to be transmitted to someone else. I remember sort of running away from her, and she got so confused, and probably upset because her dad kept saying "it's not contagious" over and over. I didn't look back though. I bet a lot of kids avoided her because of it, and I feel so horrible that I was one of them just because I was ignorant at the time.

### What is a time you were so happy you cried?

Haha, this is probably because of the last one, maybe some kind of retribution. I was in Girl Scouts for a while as an aide to the leader of a group of younger girls participating in summer camps. There was this girl in my group I had to lead and supervise who was missing her middle and ring fingers on one hand. Because of that, the other girls her age wouldn't hold her hand. I felt so bad for her, and she looked up at me with these big eyes asking me if *I* would hold her hand. I told that of course I would. She was so happy, and gave me quite the vice grip of a hand hold. I had thought more about it at the end of the day, and cried. I was just so happy I could make her feel involved, and thought about what kind of looks and hesitations she would receive in her life just because she was missing two fingers. I was so happy that maybe, in that one moment, she didn't feel like an outsider.



### **More Information**

To learn more about the work that I do, visit **blhaskett.com**.

To learn more about sonder and other unique feelings given names, visit *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* (created by John Koenig) on their website, **dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com**.

#### sonder

**n.** the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.

- John Koenig, The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows, 2012