My documentary fieldwork partner, Kevin Dyess, and I were on our way to Batesville, Mississippi on Monday, May 21, 2007, to interview a gospel singer when we got the phone call that our intended narrator wasn’t feeling well and needed to cancel the meeting. Feeling like we needed to complete an interview for our coursework, Kevin and I began to brainstorm about possible interviews we could conduct that afternoon. It was already close to 5 p.m., so we were concerned about finding someone on short notice.

Earlier that day, I phoned my neighbor, Lee Morgan, about getting some contact information for several local musicians I am interested in interviewing for the North Mississippi Music Project. Lee is a local booking agent who handles several bands, as well as the music lineup for the Two Stick sushi bar venue. I know that Lee works from home, and Kevin and I agreed that he would be our most readily available narrator to comment on music in North Mississippi. I called Lee from my cell phone as we turned around and headed back toward Oxford on Highway 7. Lee agreed to meet us at 6 p.m. at my home on Madison Avenue in Oxford for an interview.

Having little time to prepare for the interview, I tried to work with the knowledge base I already had about Lee and his background. I brainstormed several basic questions over an early dinner at local restaurant, Ajax, with Kevin. Knowing that Lee ran a music venue in Jackson before moving to Oxford to work as a booking agent, I hoped to explore how he got involved in music business.

Lee arrived on foot promptly at 6 p.m. Kevin and I met him on the front porch and the three of us sat down and talked about the project and what we might want to cover in the interview. Kevin set up the audio recorder at my kitchen table, and the three of us sat down to begin. Kevin served as the tech and I worked as the interviewer. Being my neighbor, Lee is familiar with my home and seemed comfortable sitting at the table in my breakfast room. He was wearing a black “Pithecanfunktus Erectus” T-shirt (a local band composed of former members of the Kudzu Kings—one of Oxford’s first widely popular local bands), khaki shorts and tennis shoes. Lee has short salt and pepper hair, and a neatly kept salt and pepper goatee. As we tested the equipment, a friend dropped by and left soon after we explained what we were doing. I decided to make a note and hang it on the front door to prevent further interruptions (it is common for my household to have visitors around 6 p.m.).

The interview began smoothly and I was surprised to hear about some of Lee’s early music experiences, especially the story about growing up near a rural recording studio in Grenanda County. Lee was comfortable about talking about his childhood, early music experiences and eventual career in the music business. However, he seemed somewhat shy about the process as well. His body language and facial expressions sometimes conveyed that he was unsure if he was recounting the kind of information we were looking for, and he often referred to other individuals as better authorities on the
subjects than himself. Altogether I don’t think he was quite as serious about himself and his role in the North Mississippi music scene as other narrators might be. I’m not sure if that had to do with the fact that the interview was done on short notice, or the fact that Lee is not a musician, but rather a facilitator of music performance.

The interview went by quickly and fell just short of one hour. We wrapped up the interview and had a quick breath (about 30 seconds) and then went back on air for Kevin to ask a couple of questions. When Kevin began to ask his questions, Lee reached out and turned the microphone toward Kevin. It all happened very quickly and I didn’t want to reach out and tell him not to touch the mike, so I just let it unfold naturally. He turned the mike back toward himself when answering Kevin’s question, and then left the mike alone for the rest of the interview.

The interview was good because it documents the general music scene of the Oxford Square and also offers some commentary on the types of listeners that can be found at music performances in Oxford. Being somewhat on the inside of the Oxford music scene, I already knew a lot of the information that Lee conveyed. However, Kevin seemed enamored with the lifestyle Lee talked about and commented extensively on how he didn’t have any idea that live music was so readily available on the Square. Lee also talked a good bit about the community of musicians in the area and how they interact with one another. This information seems important to me in order to capture a place in time and how the local music community is composed. He also spoke about his own home environment, one in which three musicians (and Lee) live above a recording studio.

This interview was a helpful in understanding the lifestyle and social aspects of the Oxford music scene. On the same note, I am not completely satisfied with this interview, and would have considered Lee a secondary source rather than a featured voice for the North Mississippi Music Project. However, considering our situation I was happy to have the information and the practice that this interview offered.