a friend, she mostly captured quiet landscapes: reservoirs, farmland, and lush green tracts in New Hampshire and Vermont.

For one of her favorite courses, “Survey Research Methods in Community Health,” Walker developed the Greater Boston Noise Survey to elucidate not only loudness levels and frequency composition, but also the qualitative aspects of urban noise: respondents’ perceptions of common environmental noise nuisances. By 2016, she had collected more than 1,200 survey responses, then combined that information with her Harvard research into the comprehensive Greater Boston Noise Report, accessible on her website, Noise and the City. She’s also developed the free NoiseScore app, with a $15,000 grant from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study’s Academic Ventures program, as a tool for citizen science. Users can record and document anything from tranquil urban oases to roaring hot spots, and upload their data to her live, evolving national soundscapes map. “I see myself as a problem-solver,” she says. “I’m putting tools and data into the hands of people who can use them.”

Growing up in Jackson, Mississippi, Walker lived near a highway, a park with popular basketball courts, and a rail line. She noticed when neighbors were hard of hearing or irritable, when they complained of not being able to sleep because the trains rolled by. But because she “grew up poor,” she says, “noise was just not a priority.” Walker studied math and economics at Simmons College, graduating in 2001, but then started a furniture-making and book-binding business, noting that she enjoys “anything constructive, where you can pull it apart and put it back together.” The quiet, time-intensive work was fulfilling but unremunerative, and in 2009 she turned to another interest, the economics of McGrath Highway and Interstate 93. “Major highways, in bad condition,” she says, “so you hear all this ka-doonk, ka-doonk, and roaring of cars and trucks going by. It’s horrible.”

This “noise work,” she says now, is a passion. “It allows me to balance who I am, essentially—both scientific and artistic,” to work with numbers and metrics—and communities and human problems, too. “I believe, on a spiritual level, that the situation with my neighbors happened to me for a reason. Before that encounter, noise was never on the radar.”