

TI COVID-19 Oral History Project

Introductions:

My name is Claire Boston, and I am going into my third year at Butler University. I am double majoring in computer science and accounting. Natalia, before we start, is it okay to record this interview?

My name is Natalia Velarde. I am an upcoming junior and I am majoring in both Dance and Psychology. Claire before I ask you some questions, is it okay with you if this interview is recorded?

Questions for Claire:

- 1. What were your first thoughts when you heard about COVID-19?** A/. I remember the first time I heard about COVID-19 I was in school. It was the end of the school day and students were discussing COVID-19 and how worrying it was. I recall mentally dismissing what they were saying, because I did not believe it would have an impact on my life. I did not understand what COVID-19 was and knew nothing about it at the time and because of this I did not think that COVID-19 would be that serious. Then COVID-19 began to be more prevalent in the news, cases started to rise, and the staff at school started to stay behind and clean every classroom thoroughly after school, which was unusual. Then people started dying because of COVID-19, the US closed its borders, the school was closed and we moved to online learning. Everyone was in quarantine and I was stuck at home. I was very fortunate that quarantine didn't impact my life too much. I live on a farm, so I was still able to be outside and be around the animals and live my life as normally as I could at home. Although I was incredibly lucky that COVID-19 didn't have a huge impact on my life during this time, I initially genuinely thought that it was not too serious and that I had nothing to worry about.
- 2. Did the pandemic have an impact on your daily life? (such as school, hobbies, or daily interactions with friends)** A/. The pandemic changed a lot of things for me. At home it did not change much. I live on a farm, and so I was very removed from the pandemic. In the real world, everything I had previously known was different. We could not leave the house for a long period of time, and when we finally could, we had to always wear a mask and be careful to social distance from others. Often stores would have masks if you forgot, but you usually would not be able to enter the store without

your mask. I remember that when you were waiting in line at the store, they had stickers on the floor to tell you where to stand so that you would be six feet apart from everyone else. Every time I would go somewhere, often with my mother, we would always come back to the car and immediately she would get out the hand sanitizer, which isn't something we really did before. Still to this day, she keeps a bottle of hand sanitizer in her car and we still use it anytime we go anywhere. I was able to go back to work when the quarantine was lifted, and that was very different too. I was a cashier, and there was a plastic screen between me and the customer. There were COVID-19 posters all over the walls, and everyone had to wear a mask. The staff would offer you one or ask you to leave if you did not have one. School was one of the biggest changes I experienced. Online school was very different from going to school in person. I actually enjoyed online classes at first because it was nice for me to be at home with my family. It was hard to get used to at first because it was unlike anything I had experienced previously. Online school lasted about half a semester for me, and then it was summer. I was allowed to go back to school in the fall. We had to wear masks at all times and all the desks were several feet apart from each other. Sometimes, someone would get COVID-19, and the school would close and move back to online learning for a week or two. It was an interesting experience to say the least, but I am grateful that I was able to return to school in person so quickly.

- 3. Would you say your perspective regarding safety precautions has changed since experiencing the pandemic?** A/. In some ways, yes. The pandemic reinforced how important safety precautions are. During the pandemic, staying healthy was newly important for me. The health precautions that were put in place became a habit, and still are to this day. For example, I keep my distance from people in stores and I make sure to constantly wash my hands or use hand sanitizer more than I used to. It has also given me a renewed sense of appreciation for the time I get to spend with my friends, and for the fact that I can still go to school in person. I also find I stay at home more than I used to, instead of going out. Socializing has decreased in importance, which is another change in my life since the pandemic. These are just a few of the ways in which my life, as well as my perspective, have changed due to the pandemic.

Include a brief note as to why you wanted to include each of these questions in your oral history: A/. As I came up with these questions, I wanted to know how Claire's experience

during this pandemic was different or maybe similar from my experience. We are both from different countries and I wondered how the US safety measures differed, if they did.

Questions for Natalia:

- 1. What was your initial reaction to hearing about Covid-19 and did it impact your travel experience returning from Russia?** A/. It was March of 2020 when I first heard of Covid-19 while studying in Russia. My initial reaction to Covid-19 was somewhat puzzling. People at the school were almost keeping it a secret from us, and it just seemed like students were getting regular colds even though they were being sent home to quarantine. It wasn't until I saw the news that I realized the matter of the situation. I contacted my mom in fear, wanting only to go home, because the school was starting a lockdown. Those that lived near were able to leave, but me and a few other internationals had to stay. I kept hearing about all the deaths happening at home, and I just wanted to be there with my family in case something happened. The pandemic made it harder for me to return home as flights were getting canceled. It took me three months until I could finally book a flight through the embassy in order to get home. I needed a lot of documents and I was required to wear a mask at all times throughout my journey. It was an exhausting and long trip back, but it was all worth it. I made it home.
- 2. Did Covid-19 affect or change your everyday life and what are some examples (school, quarantine)?** A/. I would say the biggest change Covid-19 had on my life was on my education and dance journey. Once I returned home, I no longer continued my Zoom dance classes with my Russian school due to the difference in time zones. I was devastated, because I loved my academy. Luckily, my life took a turn again and I was able to travel to Washington around August. In order to travel, I was required to have the Covid-19 vaccine, as the vaccination cards were being asked. Once I got to D.C, I was able to continue my education and dance classes at a boarding school. At this time, all classes were still online and we had to wear masks, but I was hopeful again. We slowly returned to the studios while still wearing masks, and we had to clean our barres daily after touching them. Sometimes we would even have random Covid-19 tests done to us to make sure no one could cause an outbreak. If someone ever felt sick, they would immediately go on quarantine to prevent any spread. I will admit having my academic classes online was hard, because I became a little lazy, so I was thrilled once we were able to get back into our classrooms. I was also grateful when the requirements for

wearing a mask while dancing were taken down. It was challenging to breathe, but now we were able to breathe and move freely.

3. **How do you think Covid-19 has impacted people's perspectives on public health and safety?** A/. There was a time at home when the government was so worried about all the cases and the need for containing the spread that they created a "Gender-Based Lockdown." This consisted of having men and women alternate days in order to do their essential shopping. A woman wasn't allowed to go out on a day that only men were supposed to be out, so that the number of people in the street was reduced. This later on caused an issue for people that identified as transgender, as the police would arrest, prevent, or scold them for being out on the day that didn't match their gender from birth. It wasn't until 2021 that Panama finally took down the gender-based safety measure. There are times where I still see people wear masks occasionally, so I would say that is still a way that Covid-19 has impacted our perspective on public health and safety.

Include a brief note as to why you wanted to include each of these questions in your oral history: A/. I wanted to ask these questions because Natalia and I had different experiences over the course of the pandemic and I was interested in learning more about how her experiences affected her and how they were different from mine. We did not experience the pandemic in the same country and Natalia was not at home when she heard about the pandemic. I wanted to know more about the safety protocols in other countries and how they were similar or different from my experience.