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Anonymous, Oral History Interview, 2022

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Eastern Michigan University

Oral Histories

Sound Recordings

Fall 11/17/2022

, Oral History Interview, 2022

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Eastern Michigan University Archives, Covid Impacts, Oral Histories

Oral History Interview with

Conducted by Student, Julez DeShetler with a Journalistic minor (JD)

Transcribed by Julez DeShetler

Recorded 2022 November 11 over Zoom

*Name redacted at interviewee's request

JD: Julez DeShetler: Hi, I'm Julez DeShetler. [REDACTED]. And today we are going to conduct our interview. You can start off by telling me a little about yourself, your name, your major?

[REDACTED]: Uh, for sure my name is [REDACTED]. I'm twenty-two years old. I'm a Fashion Marketing Innovations major here at Eastern. I am also a journalism minor, and this is my fifth year at Eastern Michigan University.

JD: Okay, so you were about maybe twenty or nineteen when the pandemic first started then?

[REDACTED]: Yes, I was nineteen, and I turned twenty during the pandemic.

JD: What was your life like before the pandemic?

[REDACTED]: I was still getting used to college. I had just had my freshman year, which was a bit of a train wreck socially, not academically. And like going into my sophomore year in fall two thousand and nineteen I kind of have the idea that I had like it figured out somehow, and like I was going to do it right this time because I felt like I had a lot of friends and stuff, but I didn't feel like I was fully like leaning into the college experience my freshman year. So that was my goal going into sophomore year.

JD: So, before the pandemic you were not in a romantic relationship, correct?

[REDACTED]: No, never had been.

JD: So, when did you guys meet? And like, how long did you guys know each other before the relationship started?

[REDACTED]: We met through a mutual friend, and I knew he existed kind of because she was his like he played DnD, with my best friend from high school. She lived in Houghton, Michigan, at Michigan Tech. So, she was far away, and we would like discord, call every week together to like kind of catch up, hang out stuff like that, and she tell me

about him, and I would joke like, "Oh, is he cute?" And she was like, "Yeah, kind of. He's okay. He's just some guy." And I was like, "all right, cool." And I would like make jokes about like hitting on him during that fall, like during that fall going into winter. And then I don't remember how we came to the conclusion, but I did eventually end up like meeting him on New Year's Eve. I was on call with my friend from High school. Her name was Natalie, and I was on call with him, and I was on call with their mutual friend, whose name was Blue, and she lived in Florida.

JD: So, it started all very nonchalant. Nothing serious.

█: Definitely.

JD: Can you describe the relationship during the early stages of the pandemic? And how has that progress throughout it?

█: We started talking in January. We got really close, really fast once we started talking, one on one. And then by the time we were kind of like officially like talking stage, I guess, it was like end of January beginning of February, and then, by the end of February I went up to visit Natalie. And I eventually was going to stay with him. I stayed at his house for that duration. We kind of just like did couple shit. Um. Sorry I probably shouldn't swear, but we did like couple things for about a week, well like a little under a week at the end of February. And once I also lost my virginity during that time, which was huge for me. Just developmentally, not even on like a vulgar level. And then I left and went back home and was like "Well, that was cool. Never talking to that guy again." Then I just kind of like stopped giving him a lot more of my attention. And then, less than a week later the pandemic started.

JD: So not only was that, like hard to navigate as it being your first relationship and a serious one at that, but then the pandemic hit which made it much harder, I'm sure.

█: Absolutely, and once that hit I was like "Well, at least I got this guy, might as well just keep talking to him!"

JD: Right! How long did the relationship last?

LD: We started officially like dating in March two thousand and twenty. We considered our anniversary to be January, two thousand and twenty, however. So, we dated until February, two thousand and twenty-one. So, kind of like a year.

JD: So definitely a little while then. What do you remember about that relationship that you enjoyed about your partner before the pandemic?

█: It wasn't anything extraordinary. I just liked that he gave me a lot of attention that I wasn't used to. I've never been like truly pursued by somebody like I'd had like things and partnerships kind of, and flings and stuff like that, but it was always like stuff that I initiated. And people would either tell me like yes or no. It was always meeting like

upfront with how I wanted to be with people. This is the first time that he was very much like pursuing me, I guess.

JD: That is definitely a big change going from never really talking to anyone on that kind of level. So that makes this very interesting. What things do you remember disliking about him or the relationship in general after the pandemic?

Once things started opening up our relationship just completely fell apart, and I don't know if that's in like just coincidence, or they had something to do with it. But I ended the relationship in February because I there was around three incidents. I give them a three-strike rule because partners do things that you don't like all the time. Things that get on your nerves, stuff like that. I wasn't counting that stuff; it was like the deep strikes that makes you look at them kind of different. He got three of those, and then that's when I started thinking like, "Okay, I need to get out of this." I kind of came to that realization around like December two thousand and twenty, and then January, February was just me trying to figure out if I if I really felt that way, if I did feel that way, how to say it? But eventually we just realized that our ideal version of the future, which up to that point we were like, "Yeah, like where we're going to get married and have kids. And do these like huge things." Our idea of what that looked like was so different, and we just never talked about it because we agreed to getting married and having kids. That was the end of it, right? But that's not really realistic. You have to look at like, "Okay, what do I want my life to look like as you know, a person?"

JD: So, as you were figuring out what you wanted your life to look like, what lessons or like actions that you learn to take to keep your relationship successful during that time? Because it was such an isolated, difficult time. How did you guys try to keep that relationship successful for that period of time?

: Communication was huge. We spoke every day. After we finished all of our stuff at night, we would literally talk from the minute we were done with like either homework, work, school, whatever, until one of us had to go to bed. And then like we would text pretty normally throughout the day. But, like part of the lesson was kind of like, you can't just like expect someone to read your mind in terms of what you want. That was a big one that I learned. Also, sometimes you got to compromise like if your partner really, really needs something, if that makes sense. Like something that he really needed to feel like normal in a relationship was he wanted to text "Good morning." He wanted to text "Goodnight." He wanted to speak throughout the day pretty regularly, even if he knew we were going to talk later that day. And I had never had that level of text communication with somebody. I'm very much like a "I'll send you a meme, maybe." It was just a lot, but it was one of those things, and I did tell him like "I don't know how I feel about this, like I've never done this. So, if I don't respond right away like that's why." But eventually it was like something that at the end of the day didn't really take a lot of effort on my part, even if it wasn't always like the thing I wanted to do. And it was what he needed to feel secure in our relationship, you just must give it. Sometimes, you know?

JD: I definitely think communication is just big in any relationship, but especially the pandemic, not being able to see each other whenever you wanted, it's a very important factor.

JD: When do you think the relationship started to shift, and like what ways also? Like maybe the dynamic, the activities you guys did, the interactions with one another. When did you notice that shift?

█: I don't. I don't want to be like, "he got depressed." Cause like I had like a litany of mental health issues as well. I was also very depressed at the time. So that wasn't really the trigger, but it was like when I met him, he was in his last semester of college. He graduated in April two thousand and twenty. And then he kind of like worked at his friend's parent's flower business through the summer. He was trying to find work, and I could tell it really dominated a lot about what he thought about. Because obviously like, new grad, just graduated. You're trying to find a job and like you can't even leave your house. I can't even imagine the amount of stress. But it the kind of like the "I can't do it-ness" of it all very much seeped into everything if that makes sense. He used to be like a very confident person like, "I'm not the greatest, and I'm not the best. But I'm trying." That used to be his like self-concept. It seems like his self-concept almost changed a little bit and like, and obviously I don't want to speak for him. He's not here, but that's kind of where I saw things shift was like in the dead middle of the summer. He's trying to find a job very much feel like incapable of doing the things that he feels he should be able to do. For me it like it put me in a position where even though I'm also going through things that are very hard, I'm having to make compromises and like the things that I expect from him because he's in this kind of down place. Which I told myself I was willing to do temporarily, and I thought things would change once you like found work. And they really didn't.

JD: It is hard because he's at such a life changing, like crucial moment as a graduate, and that's very important for him, and great for him. But it does strain the relationship when not all the attention can be like equally dispersed, and it's stressful.

█: Yeah. From what I can tell, that's something that's kind of persisted because he and I are still like in like contact. It's a complicated situation, but I still hear from him sometimes, and like that confidence that he had like when we first met, like is gone. Has been gone at this point, for years.

JD: Did you ever notice a decline in the relationship, intimacy, or affection wise when you guys were able to be together?

█: Hmm. A little. Cause I did the math at the end of our relationship, and I saw that we had like met in person, like if we looked at how many days we'd spent together in person in our relationship. It was a month, like it was thirty days total. Because how that ended is, he eventually ended up finding a job as an underlain at an engineering lab that made chemicals in the middle of nowhere in Wisconsin, about fifty minutes outside of

Milwaukee. He loved it. He had a fun little apartment, and around that time we started the dynamic of like we would switch off. We would see each other once a month. Sometimes he would come to me because he could drive. I do not have a driver's license so other times I would take the Greyhound from Ann Arbor to Milwaukee, which is about six hours. I think once we kind of settled into that normal pattern. It did kind of lack intimacy. Looking back. I'm like, "Okay, I know there was just like the honeymoon period ending." It was very jarring for somebody that had, like, given me a lot of like - It was very interesting or painful rather to have, like somebody who gave me a lot of praise sometimes, or like just a lot of like attention. Like I said, he was pursuing me. It felt like once he felt like he had me like he kind of gave up things that like made me feel really good. Towards the end, he never really complimented me if he thought I looked nice, and I would like, ask him like, "do I look okay?" because we're like dressing up about to go out somewhere. He's like, "Yeah, you look amazing!" I'm like, "why wouldn't you just tell me that?" Like, "why do I have to ask you?" Was an argument we had like a couple of times, and he was like, "you should just know." I'm like, "but I don't. You should tell me." We never really settled on that. But it was just like I felt like I kind of had to like prompt him to get any type of like romantic thing to happen. Not even like big things, just like telling me things that he and he liked about me as a person.

JD: When that occurs, when someone gives you so much confidence, and then that starts to as to dwindle down, I feel like it makes insecurities arise so like, how did you deal with that like shifting from so much attention to like, almost nothing?

█: Not well. I'm not going to sit here and pretend like he was the bad person, the relationship, and I was just the easiest girlfriend in the world to have. Like, no. Like I said, I had a litany of mental health issues. This is my first relationship; I didn't do well with that. I very much would like, I don't want to say act out, because it's a very childish term, but, like I would. I would nitpick, and I would find ways to start like fights sometimes, just to have something to fight about like stuff that didn't even need to be an argument. Which had been happening kind of like throughout the like last six months of our relationship and like it eventually culminated into something a lot that pretty much ended our relationship. But yeah, I didn't take it well, at all. I would start fights. I would get upset with him, and I wasn't communicating super great, either.

JD: In society when girls act out in that way it's always seen as crazy, but like when you look at the scheme of things, and how it was your first relationship, the tension is shifting, and then you're during a pandemic when you can't just go see the person. And then the distance you guys had in between. I feel like you had a lot of factors where it was like, "Okay, this relationship might not work out for the long run."

█: Yeah, and like on top of that, even knowing like this might not work out for the long run. Your options are literally nothing else. I couldn't like you know, swipe on tinder to find somebody that you can't even meet up with in person. Like it wasn't an option. I

was literally just like so happy that I wasn't single at the time like I just didn't care if my relationship was bad. I just didn't want to be alone.

JD: That's a good point, because I feel like it almost like admitting to like you almost feeling trapped in that relationship because of no other options, which is also like a whole other issue in itself. But overall, how would you describe the quality of the relationship at the peak of the pandemic? And then what about after it?

█: For me like when I think of like peak two thousand and twenty it's like the summer. Like I said, we had like three events that were just like, I look at you differently. I don't know if I can do this. One of them very much happened during that summer which affected the quality of our relationship. I was happy, but just because I was happy doesn't mean it was great. Something specifically in two thousand and twenty that really bothered like me, and my family was the whole, like the George Floyd riots, and those sorts of like the Black Lives Matter thing happening. My thing is like I've been watching those kinds of stories since two thousand and fourteen when Michael Brown was shot, and like it was something that I had like talked to like my mother's side of the family a lot. Didn't really get a lot of like care. For context, I come from like a mixed family. So, my father is black. I'm mixed race. My stepmother is white, and then my mother is also white. My siblings are also mixed race. I'm very white passing. They don't really have that privilege. So, during this whole like thing, we're having these huge conversations about race. Like "what does it mean to be black and stuff like that?" It was the first time my siblings had ever like we had ever like, seen something like this happen, and thought like they were finally old enough to think like, "well, what if it was me, right?" And that was like heartbreaking for a lot of my siblings, and I got to watch like my ten-year-old brother sob on the couch because he doesn't understand what's happening, and like these things that were very real to me. Yeah, it was a rough. It was a really rough time, and like watching these things unfold, knowing that, like it felt personal. It didn't feel like "Oh, there they are in the streets again! Turn off the news." It was very much something that was real to us, whereas like for him in Houghton, where there aren't a lot of people of color. My father was the third black person he'd ever seen in his life. Type deal. He was twenty-three years old. Those issues were kind of just like news headlines, and like the way he talked about them, and the way I talked about them were very different. I would try and like, explain the significance of these things because he would kind of just be kind of like *laissez-faire* about it. And it was the first time in our relationship that I was like, "Okay, if you really are serious about me the way that you say you're serious about me, I'm not asking you to be a political person, if that's not who you are. But I need you to understand that issues like this will affect you directly, because if you get married to me like you want to marry me you will have black family, and it will be stuff that you can't just look at and brush over anymore." For me, that was kind of like the height of the pandemic, and like that kind of conversation sat at my mind a lot, because like we were very, very different. I came from a very low-income background. His father was the CEO of a bank. That's why I started noticing a lot of the disparities between us. It was at the time I was like, "Wow! Like we're so different, and we're making it work! How cool!" And then, as the pandemic went on, and as things started opening up on it more and more, and like as our relationship

progressed, and all these other things, it's like those things that felt like differences that we could achieve and get over. They felt like just huge obstacles that we would never see eye to eye on. It's like not even like arguments we would have, and we can't get along about these certain things because of our background. It's like stuff that he wouldn't even consider. But like towards the end, when I would visit him in Wisconsin, he'd want to go to these expensive restaurants, and I'd be like I can't eat here. I can't afford to eat here, and I think you know that, and it got to a point where he was willing to kind of like pay for everything for me, which was nice it was it was cool, but it also made me feel like in a place where I owed him something. It made me feel kind of like icky and gross. I took him to a Coney Island one time, and he was like, "this tastes like shit." I'm like, "Yeah, it's Coney Island, it's like comforting like it's not supposed to be good." What are you talking about? He's like, "Sorry if I just want my food to taste good." I'm like, "it's six dollars. Just be quiet."

JD: It definitely seems like the two of you had like different perspectives. Also, like couldn't agree and come to like a compromise, I guess. Like it seems like you guys were just very different people.

█: Yes, very much so. It was a little naive because we were both like "we're going to get married and have kids!" In my head, I'm like we're going to get married. We're going to live in a semi metropolitan area, and we're going to have kids, and we're going to be able to walk them to school. We're going to live in a walkable community. I'm going to be like it because I'm a fashion major. I'm like I'm going to have my own fashion label, and he's going to work in his little factory or whatever, and we'll figure it out. And in his head, he's like, we're going to have children and live in the country, away from everybody.

JD: Defiantly different stands. But I also think you mentioned political standpoints. And I think you were saying how that caused some arguments, and it's definitely common. A lot of people don't like to talk about politics, religion because it is such a sensitive topic. However, I think it's evident that the stuff that you were bringing up is more about human rights rather than politics. So, I do think it's very hard to connect to someone who like doesn't realize the sensitivity and the importance of those events.

█: Oh, yeah.

JD: How has the long distance because you did mention you guys were long distance earlier. How has that impacted the relationship? And was it something you guys were like already used to? Or was it like a big change for you guys during the pandemic?

█: It was something we were already used to. We lived five hundred miles apart before the pandemic even started. The first time I went to visit him in Houghton, I had to take a twenty-four-hour Greyhound. Not my proudest moment, and that's not like both ways, it was twenty-four there, twenty-four back.

JD: Wow! So, you definitely put in the effort to see him. Did he return that and try to go see you, or is that not a possibility?

█: It wasn't something I really asked him to do, or expected him to do, because it wasn't something I took very seriously. It was like I'm going to go have fun on a weekend at Houghton; and then I come back home, and I'm never going to talk to him again, you know? So, it was like I don't really care if he returns favor, because I'm just going to be like here. I'm going to be done with this. But that eventually, like as I considered like as we decided to stay together, I guess he did eventually come down to visit me during in June. During the riots, in Grand Rapids, which is across the State from where I am. Little weird, his family was coming down, and it was the only way we could get them in the lower Peninsula, and I was like, you know what I can work with that. So, me and Natalie got a hotel room in Grand Rapids. It was while the city was on curfew because there were riots in Grand rapids a couple of nights before. Instead of staying at his parent's hotel that night, he stayed at our hotel with us.

JD: That's good. At least you guys had like experience from long distance, and it wasn't just like you guys are seeing each other and boom the pandemic hit, and you never got to see each other after.

JD: What would you say, was the hardest part about being in a relationship at this time.

█: I think I'm going to give a personal answer, and I'll make a more general answer. Um! Generally, I think what was hard about it was nothing really happened, like months and months, especially like when lockdown was super strict. Nothing really happened I didn't have anything to update this guy about. It wasn't like, "Oh, well, today I went to the gym, and then I ran some errands, and then, I, you know, got back from class like" No. There was nothing I was like "I sat in my house. I woke up in my house, and when I go to bed I'll be in my house, and when we're doing stuff, we'll be in my house" like nothing changed. So, for that reason we kind of had to like to find new things to do if that makes sense. I remember we did like a colored pencil, Bob Ross, YouTube tutorial. Like you just kind of like make shit up, I guess. We would just like do little date ideas. We had a list of movies we have, like my top ten favorite movies, his top ten favorite movies. And we have like a really sophisticated like Google sheets algorithm, where we'd rank it based on how much I want to watch it, and how much it he wants to watch it, and how much to the other person if the other person would watch it. And then, based on that, it would spit out like an order of how we would watch things.

JD: It seems that the pandemic has like forced people to be more creative with the way they like interact with one another. You were saying how this is like your first serious relationship. So, to be clear, you guys were never together outside of the pandemic.

█: [Shakes her head.]

JD: So, explain how that has affected you mentally and emotionally, how like you were so used to this pandemic relationship, and barely having interaction, having connection. So

how has that evolved to your new relationships, after the pandemic, where you're not used to this more casually and in person connection?

█: Oh, my God! Like it's so weird. It's one of those things where it's like when you start your first relationship on like online kind of, I guess, like a long distance. I saw my friends having this experience of like, they meet some guy at class. And that kind of like slow like start to the relationship, where like you first realized you start liking each other, and then like suddenly, you go from like hang out at once a week to like twice a week. And suddenly before you know it, they're like hanging out like every other night, and like stuff like that. My relationships have been very abrupt and very intentional. I haven't been in a very serious committed like boyfriend-girlfriend relationship since that. But like if somebody wanted to do those things with me, to have that kind of like more casual like in person, like starts little, gets more intense as time goes on. That kind of like slow building relationship. I don't even know if I would pick up on it, because I never had it, and I don't know. I feel pressure to be very explicit in my relationship to be like, "Are we dating now? But I don't know.

JD: Just by the way, you're answering these questions, you seem very like careful of what you're saying and like you're like taking the time to think about it. So has it affected you? Mentally or emotionally.

█ It put me in a weird spot, especially since I'm in an even weirder spot now, I guess. When I left the relationship, I was so relieved. I had so much time on my hands suddenly, like I didn't have some guy texting me every day, and like while it was kind of sad, I don't get a good morning text anymore. I also like I looked up from my relationship and realized that I hadn't done anything. I used to be a big writer. I used to do crochet. I used to do these big kind of creative projects, and like I looked up once I broke up with my boyfriend. "I was like I haven't done anything." I just haven't had time. I have my whole. I have so much more energy and some much more things that I could do now, and time. I felt really justified in why I ended the relationship. The relationship essentially ended, for like a lot of reasons that we touched on. That's been like coming down the line for a long time, and then I met a friend of his that I got really like emotionally attached to. In a way that I thought was romantic, which is why I broke up with him partially, at least a little bit. It turned out to not be romantic, but it was still very, very intense. I realized my boyfriend was not a good friend to this guy that I was extremely emotionally attached to, that he had known for like ten years, and I was like, "Okay, you're like this to a guy you knew for ten years? I don't even want to be around you because I don't know what you're going to be like to other people or to me, right?" I had more pride in the fact that I was a good friend to this guy that I got attached to. Then, you know, reluctance about leaving my relationship. I don't know I used to feel very like indignant, like, "Yeah, he was weird. He was a weird guy" whatever. As I've gotten like some distance and some perspective, I guess. It just seems like we just weren't right for each other.

JD: And sometimes that just happens.

█: Yeah, and it's not because he's like a bad, terrible person or anything. I used to be like, "I never even really liked him like that, like I was never even attracted to him like that" and like those things kind of just like rewriting the narrative after the fact to make myself feel better and like I realized very recently, I'm like, "no, I loved him." I loved him. I was loved by him. And that's okay. You don't have to like cringe at the fact that some guy you don't like anymore, doesn't like you anymore.

JD: Do you and your partner ever still keep in contact in like a friendly manner?

█: Yeah. So, this kind of goes into that complicated ending I was telling you about. We talk sometimes, but it's not the fondness isn't there because we're very different people. We wouldn't have been friends in any other circumstances.

JD: How would you describe your overall life now, after the Covid-nineteen restrictions have been mostly lifted? How have you balanced everything? How do you incorporate that in your life now? And what are you going to take with you into your next relationship?

█: I definitely want to keep the creativity, just because I think that was like a really special part of dating that I wouldn't have got in any other time period. My life is like normal. I don't know. I was scared to break up with my partner because I thought if I did, no one else would like me. That's not the case, as it usually goes. I've been in a not really committed, sort of, semi, romantic relationship since like January, two thousand and twenty-two. So, like eleven months. But yeah, my life is okay, it's fine. I have a lot of complicated feelings about the pandemic that I just don't think I'm going to ever really deal with um, just because, like I don't think there are ways of dealing. I don't think we're far enough away from it to deal with it yet, even though it's like "over" or whatever. I get nostalgic for it sometimes, like if we had another lockdown I'd do it better, do more hobbies, or have something to show for it. But also it's just like I feel a sense of anxiety that I didn't have before.

JD: Really, you feel anxiety after more?

█: Yeah.

JD: Oh, wow, explain that.

█: I was really in the Sci-fi before the pandemic. I was looking at climate change is what it was, and I was like, "we're living in like a sci-fi novel, like something crazy is going to happen." And then something crazy did happen. It wasn't like the Sci-fi novels. It wasn't like adventurous or extreme, or anything like that. It was just kind of this like mundane sludge, and i I don't want to be like it was cool, but like it wasn't like twenty-eight days later, it wasn't like the zombie movies, like it was just death constantly, and like fear and anxiety, and like people believing a bunch of stuff that wasn't even real and like people trying to like flip elections and like storm the capital. And it was just crazy and weird. I

feel more anxiety now like the world does not make sense anymore, and it hasn't for a really long time. I'm about to turn twenty-three in in June next year. So not really like soon. But that is terrifying to me, because I still feel twenty. I still feel like nineteen. I feel like nothing has changed.

JD: I do see and relate to the fact that, like I feel like the pandemic kind of put a pause on everyone's life. And like now, no one really knows how to interact anymore. I do think it has changed the sense in the way people are around each other. But I also like how you mentioned earlier. How like you want to keep the creative side of your relationship continuing because I do think that is a good benefit that came out of it. That's like a silver lining, because even if you do have a relationship, and you see them every day, and you live together, it is still like fun to be creative together to like to allow your spark to continue to go on. I do think it's a good way to make the relationship last longer, and like have a connection to one another deeper.

■ I feel like when people or guys hear that sometimes they think like, "Oh, you want a big, romantic gesture all the time?" And it's like no. I think I'm guilty of it too. When I'm with somebody too long I'm like you know I like you, you know I'm attracted to you. I don't have to tell you every day, right? But like it's nice to be reminded.

JD: Yes, I think, because of the pandemic and all the insecurities, and like the loneliness and isolation and anxiety people felt. It's like It's good to have that reassurance from someone you love. I think it's important.

JD: Okay, yeah. Well, thank you so much. I'm Julez DeShetler and thank you so much for Larissa for joining me today; to open up about the challenges of being in a relationship during the pandemic.

■ Thank you. Have a good night.