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Julez DeShetler, Oral History Interview, 2022

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Interview with Julez DeShetler (JD) conducted on November 18, 2022 via Zoom by EMU undergraduate Larissa Diem-Conlen (LDC) for You Li's Journalism 313 course.

Transcribed by Larissa Diem-Conlen

LDC: So welcome to the interview, it is November 18th at 11:23 a.m.. Today we're going to be talking about physical and mental health during the pandemic and would you like to say your name? A little intro moment?

JD: I'm Julez DeShetler, I'm a sophomore here at Eastern Michigan University. I major in digital media production with a minor in journalism. I'm 19 years old, so during the pandemic, I was about 17 and 18 years old.

LDC: Nice. And before we get started, I just want to mention that I am recording the interview and we do have a consent form already filled out, so we should be good. So, to start, to the best of your memory, can you walk me through your day to day routine during the pandemic?

JD: Like during quarantine?

LDC: Yeah.

JD: Okay. When lockdown was happening it was different every day because I was so bored. There was nothing to do. So I had to find things to keep me feeling like I'm not just trapped in a house. So, you know, if I'm being honest there were a lot of days of me being up really late and sleeping way too late into the day. Watching YouTube videos, but then I would like to try to go outside and walk my dog. Like I would try to do something, maybe just drive around in my car going nowhere, listening to music. My sister lived with me at the time. She doesn't anymore. I love the fact that she lived with me during quarantine. I don't know what I would do without her. So, I would go to her room every

night. We would make TikToks together, watch TikToks. It was great. I loved it. I honestly didn't hate quarantine as much as everyone else. I kind of found it peaceful, but I do think the longer it lasted, the worse my mental health got.

LDC: Did you struggle with mental health issues before the pandemic, or did it just start during quarantine?

JD: I think I've always had--I don't know if it's mental health issues--but I've always struggled a lot with anger management control. So, that's always been a thing. I think after quarantine, my anxiety got worse, so now I'm on medication for that. I think beforehand, I never had a really had a problem with anxiety. So, I think maybe the isolation made it worse. I'm not sure.

LDC: How was your physical health and doctor during this time?

JD: Actually, surprisingly, my physical health was great during quarantine because I was trying to find so many new hobbies. I started going to the gym or I would go on a treadmill like that in my basement. It was something to do to pass the time and it was fun. Now I go to the gym every day because I love it so much. But yeah, my physical health was ideal during quarantine. I loved it.

LDC: Did you have any pre-existing conditions or anything to worry about like that?

JD: I did not. I am considered healthy for my age, so I was never worried about the consequences of getting COVID myself, but I do live with my dad, who has a lot of issues. He has COPD. I don't know if you know what that is, but it's like a very bad cough. So he has a lot of issues and we actually did end up both catching COVID. It was way later, like after lockdown, but I got COVID. I knew I was sick, but I was confirmed one night when I was going to eat ice cream. I went in the drive-thru. I wasn't around anyone, but I tasted the ice cream and I couldn't taste anything. So I was like, okay, yeah, I have to go. So I obviously stayed in the house all the rest of the week, and then I gave it to my dad. I thought I was dying, but I was fine, you know? I felt like I couldn't breathe. It

was literally the worst. I do not recommend. And I gave it to my dad. It was really bad for him and it was scary. He had to go to the hospital and he had to be on steroids and a breathing treatment. So it was scary, but thank goodness I was fine.

LDC: Oh yeah, I'm glad that worked out. So I know you mentioned that you are on medication now. You don't need to go into detail about that but I was just wondering what did seeking help for mental health issues look like for you?

JD: It's difficult because I feel like it's such a sensitive topic and I love my family, but I just feel like it's not something we talk about and it's kind of uncomfortable to talk about. So I do feel like there's-- Even now, I wish I could do more for it, but I just like I don't want to talk about it with my family. I feel like the only person I really talk about that stuff to is my boyfriend. I need to like, get over it just so I can get my mental health better, you know? But I will say, when it came to me finally needing--I knew I needed help for my anxiety. It wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be talking to my mom about it, because she actually does have anxiety, too. So she understood that. So that realm of things made it very easy, and I'm very appreciative of that. It's just like the other things, like maybe depression and stuff that I feel like my parents don't get.

LDC: Okay, that makes sense. Do you see a therapist? Do you see a psychiatrist? What does that look like?

JD: I don't know if I'm being totally honest. Like a couple months ago, I was asked if I wanted to before I got on medication, I was not against it, but I feel like-- this is my personal opinion. When a doctor or when a psychiatrist has a patient, I feel like they are forced or they're trying to look for something so they can be like, "Oh, you have this," so they can diagnose you. And I get it, but then I'm like, "What if there's nothing wrong?" Like, what if I'm fine for, like, they have, like, you know, like now and I look at things now, I have a different perspective. That was months ago. I realized it's actually very beneficial to talk to someone and I don't. I'm not talking. So I'm currently not, but I have an interest in doing that. I do think it'd be beneficial to talk to someone, get it off your chest, and I think it's healthy. So I've changed my perspective on that.

LDC: Okay. Was that just in dealing with mental health issues in your experience, or is that not related to the pandemic?

JD: I'm sorry, what.

LDC: That change in perspective? Was that just kind of in response to your lived experience now with worsening mental health, or is that related to the pandemic, you think?

JD: I think my perspective changed when I realized how popular or how common it is for people to go to therapy. I see people talk about their experiences and how beneficial it is for them. I'm like, "Oh, okay, maybe I should try it." I haven't, but maybe I will.

LDC: I also want to ask if you had any experience with telehealth during at all during the pandemic in the past two years? Like, I know that there was a big transition in the medical health field doing appointments virtually as long as you had the experience with that.

JD: Had an experience with? I'm so sorry.

LDC: No, you're good. Telehealth.

JD: Telehealth? What is that?

LDC: Oh, it's like, it's like when doctors will see you virtually like over a zoom call. Like, I had strep throat during the pandemic and they saw me like this, like over Zoom call. Did you go?

JD: Wow, I don't know if it's because we live in different cities, but now I don't even know what that is. I don't even know if anyone here knows what that is. Okay, that's actually crazy. No, so I go to the doctor, obviously, like once a year, like everyone else. When the lockdown happened, I didn't have

an appointment, so I never saw my doctor. When I got COVID, I already knew what to do now. Yes, I felt like I was literally dying; it is the worst. I knew I would be fine though, so I never had to see a doctor. Luckily.

LDC: That's good. During lockdown-- I know you were younger, so this might not be a concern of yours. If it's not, we can just move on--Did you have any type of relationship with substance use? Like drinking or smoking. Or did you not?

JD: And I say that because, yes, I'm a college student. I understand we all do it. And I'm not saying I don't, but because I live at home and I'm a commuter and I still live at home, I have strict parents. It's hard to get away with that stuff.

LDC: Yeah, I was just wondering. I know it's something that was a topic around health and the pandemic. Was your family at all concerned about doing bonding activities throughout the lockdown?

JD: Yes. This was my mother's moment to shine. She would know. First of all, we were all locked in the house together, so she was very difficult to be around. Me and my sister, we would always argue. Like every once in a while after we had an argument, an hour later, she was like, "Okay, game night time, let's go." And we'd be like, "Okay." And it made the mood better, obviously. But yeah, she would try to do like game nights and movie nights and it was really fun and I kind of missed that actually. But yeah, she tried.

LDC: You don't do those things anymore?

JD: My sister moved out and I'm honestly really busy, commuting to school all the time. So we're not really home much anymore. So no, sadly. We meet up every Thursday. My sister will come up Thursdays and we'll have dinner together and maybe play a game, but it's not really regular anymore.

LDC: Okay, more. Your favorite games was more popular.

JD: I think we like a good go to Monopoly but we also love charades. We love trivia. We're we're very competitive. We're a competitive family. Recently my sister taught us euchre. It's like an old person game, but it's fun. So, those are my favorites.

LDC: Nice. Um, I know you mentioned during the preliminary interview that you are you lost a family member to COVID. Obviously, there's no pressure to go into that too deeply, but are you willing to talk about it at all?

JD: I lost my great-grandma to COVID and it was during the beginning of spring. It was hard because she was, I wanna say she was like around ninety-four. So we were like, "Oh, she's living forever." Like, she's literally my great grandma. She's going to be with us forever. So, like, because she was like so, so much older, we knew it was sensitive. Obviously she probably couldn't handle getting COVID, but we never thought about it so negatively. We were just like, "What the heck? She's going to get over it." But she did have people coming in and out of her house. It wasn't intentional. Obviously, people gave it to her, but she lives in Michigan and I live in Ohio. So, it's like she would have family members coming in and out and I think she just ended up catching it. So she was hospitalized. When they said she had COVID, this was when you had to quarantine for like two weeks. This wasn't like how it is now, like less days. This was like two weeks. So after the two weeks, though, she got, like, better. Like, we were, like, really happy. It was great. She was getting better. But then she developed--I don't remember what exactly what they called it. It was like a breathing issue in her lungs. She developed that because of COVID. So after that, it was like downhill from there. didn't want to e in all the stops and we just knew that I was like, okay, she's tired. And that was that's it.

LDC: That's hard, I'm so sorry.

JD: It's okay. It was sad.

LDC: You said it was towards the beginning of the pandemic, like the BEGINNING?

JD: Yeah, it was. Well, it was in. I want to say--See because of the pandemic, my timeline is so--I can't remember anything now, but I think it was actually 2020. I want to say maybe April 2020. Honest to share. Which is so bad.

LDC: That's so early, though. Did that make the pandemic feel more real for you?

JD: Yes, it actually did. So obviously, it was hard and it made me angry because there was so much news like, "Oh, this is fake, it's a hoax." And all these like young kids--I get it, all locked up in the house, but until you lost someone, like, can you?--It's selfish. Please just stay in the house. It just made me so mad. So then, because of this tragic death in our family, my family took it even more seriously. We were not allowed to do it. Me and my sister were not allowed to do anything. Obviously, during the time I was frustrated, but now, looking back, I'm grateful. Yeah, we were not allowed to do anything, not allowed to go anywhere. And out of CNN. We were literally in our house all day, every day. My dad was not playing around, he was prepared.

LDC: That's okay. I mean, that makes a lot of sense, especially given the circumstances. Did the death of your great-grandmother cause any type of mood shift in the house other than around restricting the rules around visiting or?

JD: I think it hurt my mother the most because it was her on her side and she was close to her. Obviously I loved her but I was-- Me and my sister weren't as close because we did live in different states and stuff, so it was harder to connect. Also my family's Mexican so her first language was Spanish, which is so cool. But mine isn't, my sister and I's isn't. So it's harder to connect on its own and understand someone. Which is so sad because I wish I knew Spanish more. But with that being said, so it hit my mom the worst. Then my grandma, she didn't live with us, but that was her mother who just passed. She hit it hard the most. I think it took a toll on like the entire-- My mother's side. My great grandma had a lot of kids. She had sixteen kids. So there was like-- yeah, I have a big family.

LDC: Oh, my goodness.

JD: So it was hard. But then when the pandemic lifted we-- like EVERYONE, it wasn't limited, actually. Everyone got tested and made sure no one had COVID and stuff. We did get together to celebrate her and have like a little Rosie party. That was like a celebration. I feel like that's common, we do that. It was really nice. It was enjoyable. It was something we needed to do.

LDC: That's good. And that was in lieu of, like, a funeral or something, or?

JD: I'm sorry, what is that?

LDC: That was in lieu of, like, a funeral or how did--?

JD: I'm so sorry. I cannot hear.

LDC: Oh, goodness. Okay. Is this better?

JD: Yeah.

LDC: Okay. But was the celebration of life kind of instead of a funeral?

JD: No, we had a funeral. It was just a couple of weeks later. we were like, okay, we need to do something because-- and there was actually because when the funeral happened, when my grandma, great-grandmother, caught COVID because somebody came over and gave it to her, everyone who else lived there had COVID. So a lot of the family members couldn't even attend the funeral, which was so sad and-- I don't even know how they-- I can't even imagine not even saying goodbye, not being all the time. So a lot of people couldn't even come, which was sad. So then we're like, "okay,

let's do this party then." So we all could celebrate it together. It wasn't a party. It honestly was like a get-together.

LDC: How would you say the pandemic has affected your relationship with each of the people that were living with you at the time?

JD: Honestly, I don't live with my family, my immediate family. I don't think the pandemic can have much of an effect, because we're so close and we have to see and live with each other every single day. But like I said earlier, my sister doesn't live with me anymore, but she did at the time and I it it was amazing to have her here, because I couldn't imagine being an only child. I would have been so bored without her, so I'm so happy I had her. So our relationship is great. We were extremely close. My mother and I were also very close, but we tend to bump heads the most. And being trapped in the house did not help. We never see eye to eye. Our argument styles are very different. So I like to scream and yell and she likes to get in your head, so.

LDC: Oh.

JD: Well, we argue a lot. And then my dad, we don't argue as much, but he's like a jokester. It's funny and I love it. It brightens a mood like every single day of every second. You can't have a serious conversation with this man, even if you're being 100% genuine. He makes everything joke. Sometimes it's great and sometimes it's annoying.

LDC: Yeah.

JD: So obviously we get annoyed with each other. But our relationships are great and I don't think the pandemic negatively impacted our relationship because we have to-- because despite the pandemic, we're still with each other every single day, you know.

LDC: Real quick, is your sister older or younger than you?

JD: My sister's older. She is, she just turned 21.

LDC: Okay. Sounds good. The last of my questions kind of revolve around more policy questions, if that makes sense. When did you start wearing a mask in public? After things started loosening up, and it wasn't a lockdown.

JD: When did I stop or start?

LDC: Start and stop, honestly.

JD: Well, because I told you earlier, my dad was so strict with the rules. Gratefully, though, he was on strike at the rules. I had to wear the suit. It was suggested, like. Well, first of all, I wasn't coming out of the house, but if I did, I mean, he made a mess. He wouldn't let us go to the grocery store with him. That's how serious he was. But when. If we were allowed to, I mean, it's not like every second we were not allowed to take it off like he was. So anytime we did leave, even in the corner, like there was still cold, but like the lockdown wasn't happening. He would literally make sure he's like, "Okay, did you guys have a mask? Bring your mask." And he was so strict on it, and he even had my aunt make us stitch us some--the storebought ones were not good enough. He needed to make his own.

LDC: Oh my gosh.

JD: Yeah, so we were always wearing masks throughout the whole thing, then I recently just stopped not stop it because it's not recommended anymore. I'm going to be honest, I don't enjoy wearing masks just like anyone else. So, yeah, I probably stopped when it was safe, when it was suggested. Not just randomly.

LDC: Do you remember around what time it was? I'm sorry. I know the timeline looked different for different people.

JD: I do not. I want to say well. It was probably 2021 because I know 2020 was really dangerous. I worked at the mall, I know the mall was shut down. So I think it was 2021 when the restrictions started lifting up, but not sure what on what time. I don't remember.

LDC: You said that you didn't leave the house much at all. When did you start leaving? Was that after lockdown was officially lifted or?

JD: Okay, so, I will always remember this. I was at school. I was a high school. It was my birthday. It was literally my birthday, March 13. Everyone knows it. They were like, "Okay, we're going to go on a two week break. It's fine, we'll come back in two weeks." No, we didn't. It was lockeddown. Then I went to Red Robin that day because of my birthday. That was the last place I went. Then literally on my birthday, the lockdown happened, at least here it did. I was just like, "wow," and then next year happened again. Yeah, I said, Nobody come to my room. I'm literally on the school zoom right now.

So was my birthday. Yup. Yeah. So that was the last place I went in after that. Next you're going to happen again on my birthday, so I sort of think I was like a bad luck thing. But I'm so sorry. I forgot the question I was trying to write.

LDC: That's okay. I was asking when you like because you said lockdown was pretty serious. Or your house. When did you leave?

JD: So after a couple of weeks, my birthday was-- No, that was not even a thought. I couldn't even ask without getting yelled at. No, I'm not leaving, and then I want to. My boyfriend and my sister's boyfriend were golfing together, and they were like, "Come on, you guys can just sit in the golf cart, come with us." And I said, "We're making a plan. Okay? You ask and then I'll tell them the details of where we're at and stuff." We made up this whole plan and we finally asked and my dad said no, of course, but my mom said, you're only gonna go for like two hours. So we ended up going and it was the first time we were out for the whole lockdown. It was just great. It just felt amazing to get out.

LDC: That's so good. And this was around, like you said, April 2021 or?

JD: Now this is probably around-- Actually, it might have been early May because it was warm outside.

LDC: I see. Then my last question is once things finally started opening up, did the-- I know a lot of places were talking about new cleaning protocols and social distancing inside. Did any of those policies make you feel more safe or secure about going out?

JD: It definitely made me feel more safe, like when people had a mask on and would have hand sanitizer, and wash their hands, and stuff. If someone around me wasn't doing that, I was freaked out. I was like, "Can you please?" I was kind of annoying about it. My dad had put it in my head, I was so scared. I did feel more safe. But at the same time, at a point where it just kept going on for months and the quarantine days got lower and lower. I was like, "How did it go from two weeks to like three days?" It is all sort of getting really confusing to me. So then I started like realizing-- I started to think okay, everyone's probably going to get COVID now. I think we can't just stop the world anymore. We had put the world on pause for two years, and when I think back about those two years, I can't even-- it just seems so bizarre to me. So I just was ready to get out of this state and move on with life. Yes, it's a sickness, it is a disease and-- not a disease, but it's a virus and it's like it sucks and everyone should be safe from it. But at this point, I feel like it's going to be so common. We have to just get over it now. We have to build immunity to it now, you know?