

11-17-2022

## **Anonymous, Oral History Interview, 2022**

Erin Flynn

Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

Interview with [REDACTED] conducted by EMU undergraduate Erin Flynn (EF) on 11/17/22 via Zoom conference for You Li's Journalism 313 course.

Transcribed by Erin Flynn

Name redacted at request of interviewee

---

EF: Hello! This is Erin Flynn, a senior student at Eastern Michigan University. It is currently November 17, 2022 and I am here with [REDACTED]. Today we are discussing [REDACTED] COVID-19 experiences and transitions in her schooling during the height of the pandemic. So [REDACTED], let's get started. But let's go back a little bit first. Could you just tell me your major, minor, living, and family situation?

[REDACTED]: Yeah. So my major is journalism and I'm currently minoring in English. I am a commuter, so I drive to school every day. I live at home about five to 10 minutes away with my family in Ypsilanti. So it's a fairly easy commute for me.

EF: Any jobs?

[REDACTED]: Yeah. So I work in retail. I've worked in retail for the last three to four years now. I just hover around the different jobs, usually until I kind of get bored with them. Right now I'm working two retail jobs at the mall. I'm working at Bath and Body Works and Pacsun.

EF: What's your age?

[REDACTED]: I'm 20 years old.

EF: Okay. So 20. When did you graduate high school?

█: I graduated high school in 2020. I was in the class of 2020, which I know is very unfortunate, but yeah.

EF: So you're a pandemic baby. No, not baby – graduate. Your high school year was at the height of the pandemic. So you didn't get to complete everything in high school right?

█: Yeah, I would say so. My class, we didn't really get anything. We did get an online graduation. And that online graduation is up on YouTube. But I think it wasn't done very well. I went to a K through 12. I did not go to a public school and that K through 12 is owned by a bigger organization and that bigger organization doesn't really do online stuff. So they kind of had to figure out how to do online graduations. I graduated with 41 people, which I know is a pretty tiny number, but it only showed about five or six out of all of us. And so the rest of us kind of didn't feel like we had a graduation. And then we also talked about doing one of those drive by graduations, but that never ended up happening. So I feel like a lot of us just felt robbed our senior year because I know like a lot of other things were cut short for us. A lot of our college tours too. Class trips were cut short. It was just a lot of things that never ended up happening for us.

EF: So how do you think your transition from high school to college would have been different had you completed your high school senior year in person?

█: I've always kind of wondered what it would've been like had we had a final goodbye, I guess. If we never got that cut off, that ending. We never got to say goodbye. And so we never got a normal beginning to college because, you know, you always hear of college in movies, you read it in books, and you hear it from siblings, friends. You know, it's very different from high school. It's a lot more freedom, it's a lot of different experiences. And I

feel like for me it went straight from my online high school to college. Without any of those final high school experiences.

EF: So how was your college transition?

I would say my college transition personally was not bad. Physically I mean. But it was kind of bad mentally. Like I said, I felt like I didn't have this ending and it kind of made me so stuck on high school. I'm a very nostalgic person, so I constantly would just think back to high school and, you know, wish it ended in different ways or I wish I had gotten certain experiences with certain people, or I just wish I could, you know, redeem myself in certain areas. So I just kind of stayed so attached to high school that I didn't really focus on college while I was in college my freshman year. And I feel I struggled with that mentally. It did take a while to get used to being online. I will say in the beginning of the pandemic, it was a lot harder. But once college started, it became very easy because it was easy to navigate working and doing schoolwork. I am not a very motivated person. I kind of need that push. I kind of need someone kind of on top of me, like a teacher, to constantly give me, you know, stricter deadlines or just that added amount of help for me to get my work done. But I had to learn to kind of teach myself and kind of do all of that myself. That is because I'm doing everything online, you know? There's no teacher that's right there, you know, teaching me and telling me what to do. And things where things had a lot of lot a lot there were a lot longer deadlines. Deadlines were very extended, things like that. So it was kind of just a learning lesson for me to learn how to navigate. Teaching myself and motivating myself and being dedicated to my schoolwork. But besides that, I generally did like the online learning aspect of it.

EF: All right. So you said you like the online learning aspect. So at any point during the

pandemic while you were in school, did you end up having an in-person course?

█: Yeah, I did. I want to say I had an in-person course that very first semester of fall of 2020. I had an in-person class and it was actually a field course. So in that class, we went out to a pond, I believe, and we did fieldwork, and then we were in class the rest of the time. Towards the end of the semester, we were kind of moving more online just because of different things that were happening with COVID. And it was taught by two professors. If one of them was sick or things like that the other would step in. It was generally a good course and it kind of set the standard, at least for me, knowing what I was going to go into in the future for COVID restrictions and things like that on the campus. I kind of knew how we're going to be sitting, how things are going to look like. You know, things might move back online sometimes and that's cool. So it just kind of taught me what the future of the next couple of years is going to look like in regards to COVID in school.

EF: So do you feel that course brought you out of your comfort zone? Maybe in a good way then, even though it was during the pandemic?

█: Yeah, I'll definitely say that. And I learned to love it. I loved being on campus. I think 10% of it was because I used to be a biology major. They had a good handful of classes in person because it was a lot of STEM labs and that fit into that category. I did love that we were in class and it kind of felt like being back in high school because I still stayed stuck on that high school idea in my head. I missed that type of environment. And this kind of gave me a taste of that environment again. And it kind of also gave me a taste of how college is supposed to look like.

EF: So what did you fear about the COVID-19 pandemic when you did have this class?

█: I definitely did fear COVID, but I didn't fear it as heavily as I was told to because my parents were a lot stricter on me with COVID. Which was understandable. I lost my grandfather due to COVID. It started off as COVID and then it became other things and he passed within a month of him getting COVID. And if I go way back in the very beginning of the pandemic, April of 2020, I lost, I think, three in-laws on my father's side. So it was understandable, you know, and then losing my grandfather during that time. It definitely reminded me that COVID still exists. If you lived overseas, it still exists. Here is still something very real and it's something that I should be worried about. Thankfully, I did manage to avoid COVID until this year. I got it at the end of June, early July, so I managed to avoid it when it was at its peak. So yeah, I was definitely worried about it, but I don't think I was as worried as I should have been, to be honest, looking back.

EF: I'm also sorry for your losses. So you said you weren't as worried about it. Do you think that how did Eastern Michigan University's COVID-19 protocols made you feel safer? Or do you feel like they didn't help that much?

█: I will say I do appreciate what Eastern did. And I remember every Thursday, the university was sending COVID weekly updates for the entire year of my freshman year. I was thoroughly reading those weekly updates every Thursday, and those helped a lot. I was learning more about COVID, and I was helping educate myself for my own safety at Eastern. And I do think that they did a good job. I mean, obviously, there are loopholes. There's loopholes everywhere in systems. So it obviously wasn't a perfect system. But I will say that I think that they had a pretty good system, especially looking at the surrounding county and different colleges that were constantly going back online or their

numbers were steadily rising and Eastern's numbers were consistently very low. And that was a good thing I really appreciated from them.

█: That in-person class was very hands on. We were touching a lot more things. We were sitting very close to each other, and that was kind of when COVID had reached another peak at that time, like end of 2020, early 2021. And that was the time that I was a lot more fearful of COVID. And being in that class did not help because of how many things that we were constantly touching. I know protocol still stood, but it was just a little uncomfortable for me at the time. But thankfully, you know, I don't think anyone in that class ever got COVID that I knew about. So, yeah, I do think that my experience being on campus during COVID, even during Covid's peak times, was not a bad one, thankfully.

EF: So how would you describe your time at home during the quarantine pandemic? How was your family in that sense?

█: So my family was pretty strict on COVID. My parents were always telling us, you know, use hand sanitizer, double mask, always wash your hands, things like that. That was when I first started working at Bath and Body Works. So it was kind of helpful to be surrounded in a store with hand soaps, hand sanitizers, things like that. So I got pretty used to constantly caring about COVID and thinking about COVID, even more so than my friends. There was a long time where I went without seeing my friends, especially in the very beginning. And I do remember that going back to the beginning of the pandemic when we were graduating. That was around June of 2020 because I know the pandemic started around like mid-March and some of my friends were starting to go out again. They all did like graduation parties, whether it was like a drive by graduation party or it was like an outdoor graduation party. I didn't really get any of that. I still stayed more

isolated, even though I wish I was able to go out more or even like to go out, period, or to do something for my graduation. Even though I still completely understand, I do know why my parents were worried because we did lose three people in the very beginning of the pandemic. So I know why my parents stayed worried after that. But yeah, I definitely wish that things were a little different or that it didn't happen in such a big time in my life for me, because, you know, I was graduating high school. That's a big milestone in most people's lives. And I remember the first time I was allowed to go out anywhere besides going to work was to my friend's birthday party. And I want to say that it was early September. So that was like a six month period where I wasn't allowed to go anywhere and I was allowed to go to her house for the first time, which was very nice. But it was definitely jarring to me to see how different other people took COVID versus how I was told to be careful about COVID. But I just kind of readjusted after that and learned to do things differently. And also I want to say that's when I started sharing a little less. And do I necessarily regret sharing a little less? Maybe. But I'm also glad that I was never extremely strict on myself with it and allowed myself to still live during the pandemic.

EF: So how would you say you not being so strict on yourself helped when you got to campus? How did that play a part?

█: I want to say that it definitely helped me when I went back on campus. Obviously, I took my parent's words into consideration and I did try my best. But of course, at the end of the day, I was going back on a college campus and while I wasn't necessarily going to like campus events and things like that, you know, you're still wanting to go get food or. You know, like going to see friends on campus, going to class, saying things like that, and you can never do things perfectly. You're always going to mess up in, you know, certain areas and you just have to be nice to yourself and, you know, just try your best



with whatever you need to do. That's what I just tried to do. So, like, use hand sanitizer before I eat anything, try not to touch my face, which is a huge thing for me because I am so used to touching my face all the time, which is a really bad habit of mine that I had to really be strict on myself about. I was always constantly wearing masks. I think I let up on wearing a mask, actually, for the first time I want to say May of this year. And that was when my job at the time told us we didn't have to wear masks anymore. So I was wearing a mask consistently indoors, pretty much for about two years. So that was something I'm very proud of myself for doing. And yeah, I think things have definitely changed a lot now because we don't wear masks anymore on campus, but it was good for us to learn to do that for a time because I feel like what the pandemic did for me and probably for a lot of other people in the US that we are able to get through something like this. And if something were to happen similar to this again, I think we would be able to handle it.

EF: So I'm going to take it back again to when you were in high school. If you could go back in time without COVID-19 and experience one event you missed out on in your final year of high school what would it be? One that you probably had online or you didn't have it all?

█: I mean, there's so many things I wish I could say, but to be honest, I think my biggest thing is my graduation. I missed out on so much. I feel like never experiencing a graduation. I'm not the type of person that likes attention, and I'm not the type of person that's ever really had any big events for myself. But graduation is just something that I feel like everybody needs as an ending, and it's such a big part of your life, and especially for me, like I've never gone to a different school in my life. Like I went to a K through 12 preschool to senior year, which is 14 years. So I was at that school for 14

years of my life and I was robbed of it the last three months. So to be somewhere for 14 years and not get a graduation is really hard. Like that was a really hard thing for me. I didn't just know some of those people from high school. I knew a lot of those people from preschool and it was closing a chapter and I didn't realize how much that chapter was closing. But that chapter closes more and more on me every single day. And you know because things change, people change. Everything changes in your life after high school. And I didn't realize how much that was going to impact me later on. And I just really wish I could go back and give myself even a piece of a graduation. I had so many plans. Me and my friends had already started planning it, you know, we were so excited for something like that. And you know, my sister, my older sister, she graduated also from there. She was valedictorian of her class. And so I always knew, you know, I'm never going to get her experience. And she was the very first graduation I've ever been to in my life. I'd never been to a graduation before her, so I went to hers. And ever since then, I couldn't wait for my graduation. I knew I wasn't going to be valedictorian. I knew I wasn't going to give any speeches, but I was still really excited for my graduation and it just fell short. I think that's the best way to put it. It's like I had all these hopes and dreams for it. I finally had a day where I could, you know, be in some sort of spotlight, being a big part of something with the rest of my class. And to just not have that, I think that hurt me a lot back when it happened.

EF: So you had to experience the pandemic with this going into college. But what advice would you give to students who might be fearful of attending a college campus in-person or even just attending college in general?

█: I would say don't be, to be honest. It's a different experience for sure, especially

post-COVID, but it's something that I think is very doable. Just take it one day at a time. Professors might not be as understanding as they were during the pandemic or like at the height of the pandemic. But they're still generally understanding now. Take time for yourself, focus on yourself, focus on your mental health. School is not people's number one priority sometimes, and that is definitely understandable. But I do believe school is important. But just take it one day at a time. And if you're unable to do that, that is perfectly okay.

EF: Yes it is. Well, that will wrap things up here. That is all I have for you. Thank you, Najat, for sharing this very interesting experience, for sharing your transition into college from high school during the pandemic. So thank you again.

█: Thank you.