

11-17-2022

Erin Flynn, Oral History Interview, 2022

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Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

Interview with Erin Flynn (EF) conducted by EMU undergraduate Najat Hachemi-Bouzid (NH) on November 16, 2022 via Zoom for You Li's Journalism 313 course.

Transcribed by Najat Hachemi-Bouzid

NH: Hi, my name is Najat Hachemi-Bouzid, and I'm a junior at Eastern Michigan University. I'm here with Erin Flynn, who is also a student at Eastern. Today is November 17, 2022, and I'll be interviewing Erin about her experience during COVID and her transition back after school, once the pandemic kind of slowed down. Erin, thank you so much for meeting with me today. I'm just going to ask you a few quick questions just to get to know you a little bit, before we jump into the COVID questions and your transition back to school. So if I can go ahead and just ask for your class standing and your age and your major, please.

EF: Yes. So I am currently a senior at Eastern Michigan University. I started here in 2019. My major is media studies and journalism with a minor in PR.

NH: Nice. Can I go ahead and ask about any jobs that you have right now?

EF: Yes. So I currently work two jobs. One is at the school. I work in the university art gallery. And then I also work at TJ Maxx as well.

NH: Okay. Nice. What is your current family situation right now? Are you living at home? Are you living on campus? What does that look like for you?

EF: Yes, I do live on campus and I sometimes go home on the weekends. So technically I still do live at home with my mom and then my sister.

NH: Okay. And I'm just going to go ahead and jump right into the questions. So my first question is, have you ever gotten COVID?

EF: Yes, I have gotten COVID. It was actually at the end of the pandemic, or at least after its peak. It was last school year. I was a junior and I one day got COVID, this was probably in April, yes, April of 2022. And I did receive COVID. There was a very bad strand, very unfortunate. And it was during the time of finals. So that made it even worse.

NH: And how did that affect you during finals?

EF: Well, I feel like during the time of finals, students are already very like- their mental state is not in its prime because they're so busy, stressed over grades and having to study for this test and that final project, that it's really hard to relax, you know, and keep a calm, peace of mind. So to get COVID during that time, I feel like it made things even worse. And I found myself being very emotional, like, every day. Like, I remember one day I just, like, and like my roommate at the time walking into the room and asked what's wrong I just was, like, crying. I just felt so overwhelmed. One of my professors, I told her that I had a COVID, but we had a final project at this time, she was like, okay yeah you have COVID, but I'm going to need like some type of doctor's note or something because you're basically going to fail this this final, because you can't show up for this, you know? And I get it because, you know, it's important to come and do your finals. But I also- I just feel like she wasn't as understanding as she could have been because I was literally, in bed sick, could not get up, like it was really bad.

NH: Is there a part of you that wishes you had gotten COVID at a different time? Would you have rather gotten COVID earlier in the year or last year, or even the previous year when we were mostly doing online school?

EF: Oh yes, most definitely. I would have definitely preferred to have it during quarantine, I would say. And I say that because it would have been a lot easier dealing with the sickness, being at home versus being on campus. They had people in charge of it and everything. Either you can quarantine here or you have to leave and then teachers not being understanding. And I also got my roommate sick. So just- if I was at home, it would just make things a lot easier, being able to like, take care of my health and still do the [classes]. The work wouldn't have been in person for the final. So to be able to do it at home, would have made it a lot easier.

NH: Were you on campus when you had COVID? Were you still staying in your dorm when you did?

EF: No, I actually went home. That's a good question. I actually went home. They gave me the option to stay on campus, but I didn't want to be. I feel like with the state my mental health was in at that time because of being sick during finals, I wouldn't have been able to be in a dark room alone by myself, quarantined at the school. I would much rather have been at home. So that is what I did. Once they said I had to, you know, go, I was like okay, that's fine. But I'm definitely going home to quarantine. And I was under quarantine for like a good, like week. So I missed out on a lot of stuff, a lot of events that week. But yeah, that's pretty much how I had to be.

NH: Speaking of quarantine, how was your original quarantine when the pandemic first hit

back in March 2020? How was that original first few months for you?

EF: Well, the first few months, I was quarantining like everybody else. And then I'll probably say like a month and a half into quarantine, I eventually got a job, which is my first job at McDonald's. Um, very not fun, but that's- I feel like that ended up being a good part of my quarantine, the height of the pandemic experience. And it was one that I did not really enjoy.

NH: What were some of the things that you didn't like about that job?

EF: Um, again, speaking of, I'm gonna talk about mental health again, but you know with the pandemic going on and working and then school started up eventually after that like toward, you know, when fall came, the summer was over. I didn't like that. But at my job I had this boss who treated all the employees so bad, especially me for no reason. And I had to deal with that along with the stresses and worries of the pandemic. So, you know, I was already out working and I had a very- I feel like if you were working during a pandemic, there was a very high chance that you could get COVID and get sick. So I feel like I was already risking it being out there as it was. But the fact that I was getting treated bad during this time, it just yeah, it wasn't a good experience at all.

NH: Well, I'm extremely sorry about that experience. While you were working, were you ever extremely worried about getting COVID? Was that something that was always at the top of your mind or was that kind of in the background for you?

EF: You know, if I could be honest, I would say that it was very much not at the top of my

mind. And the reason why is because my boss was at the top of my mind. I'm like, I'm scared to get sick, but because I was being so stressed out at that job during this time, during the pandemic, I was like, I wasn't even worried about getting sick. I was more so worried about making my boss happy and making sure I didn't get on their bad side than I was getting Covid. And I feel like that was very sad, honestly, but just being honest.

NH: How is working that job and balancing school for you online? Because I'm sure that was a new experience, since everybody had to kind of be pushed online.

EF: It was very hard because I had to deal with one stress earlier in the day and then come home and deal with the stress of doing work. And the closer to the end of my time at that job, I started working longer hours too to pay for my schooling. So, yeah, it wasn't- it wasn't easy. And the work obviously like, as I'm getting further into my college career, being a sophomore at that time, the work was a little harder. The load of the work was a little more. So, yeah, it wasn't- It wasn't easy. Like I said, I had to go to work, come home, do more work.

NH: So were you originally dorming before the pandemic started?

EF: Yes, I did live on campus my freshman year. And this was before the pandemic. And things were just so nice. I can't even begin to describe how much fun I had my freshman year on campus before COVID changed everything. Like, it was- It was completely different.

NH: And how is that transition period back to housing, being kicked off of campus and kicked out of the dorms and having to go back to your parents? What was that like for you?

EF: Going back to that time, it was hard because then, that's when I also got my friend, my roommate at the time sick. So not only was I having to deal with the whole getting sick during finals, but my roommate did as well. I'm not gonna talk too much about her, but I feel like I just also had this guilt as well. So I feel like dealing with the guilt of her getting [my roommate] sick and then worrying about how I'm going to get my finals and everything completed while being sick was hard.

NH: Off of that note, how was the transition back on campus for you?

EF: Very different from, I would say, coming in my freshman year. Covid changed a lot of things, but it was- I noticed that the campus was very vacant. I wasn't here my sophomore year during or right after quarantine. I know that's when most of the things at Eastern were shut down. But coming back my junior year, things were- more people were on campus. I know, but it was still pretty vacant. I still had fun, but there weren't as many events. A lot of the food places were closed. Everybody was wearing masks all the time and they were very strict about masks. Which I understand. It just had this different feel to it. A lot of my friends didn't come back on campus my junior year, like pretty much dropped out during the pandemic. I kind of felt- I was happy to have my roommate and my sister at that time, but everybody else was gone. So it's just kind of like this different feeling that I did not like. And it honestly took a while to get used to Najat. But eventually things started coming together. All the events slowly started coming back. The dining places at Eastern started getting more workers again, the hours- they stayed open longer. But before, when I first got there, everything just was so dead. I feel like that's the best word for it honestly. Compare it to my freshman year, where things were just so alive and campus was booming. So yeah, COVID changed a lot of things.

NH: How did you cope with the absence of that sort of fun that you were having your freshman year? You said things were booming and lively and active on campus. How did you cope with that when you didn't have that anymore in your life during COVID?

EF: Well, I had to pretty much just work with what I had, and I believe that's the best way to sum it up. And by that I mean, you know, I said, I mean to me having my sister and one of my friends that I came into Eastern with, I basically just hung [out] with them because all my other friends I had on campus, they weren't there anymore. So I had to just kind of hang with them and talk about- I feel like having them made things a little easier because I had somebody to kind of relate to in this manner. Because my friend, she came in during freshman year too, at the same time as me. We were able to talk about everything, how everything was different and how it was kind of sad. But we're going to, you know, everything's going to bounce back eventually. So I think definitely having my roommate and my sister, helped because I feel like if I didn't have them, and I was completely alone going back onto campus, I probably wouldn't have liked my junior year at all if I'm being honest.

NH: Did you like doing schooling online? Because I'm assuming, I don't know for sure. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm assuming your freshman year was probably your favorite. But if you could rank your freshman year to your sophomore, junior, and now your senior year, how would that what would that look like?

EF: Hmm. That's easy. I will go ahead and- I'm not done with my senior year right now, but I will still go ahead and rank them. Maybe I'll do like, first freshman and junior year, but freshman will be number one. From best to, or favorite to least favorite. Freshmen year,

number one. I'd say senior year, I'll say this year, second, junior year, third, and then sophomore year, four, which is when we were quarantining online, doing schooling. Yep. I'll put it that way.

NH: So did you dislike the online coursework that you had to do? Did you dislike that system?

EF: I didn't dislike it. I've always been very disciplined doing work online. I know some people kind of struggle with that. They feel they can't sit in front of a screen and do work when nobody's teaching them anything but the like, having that freedom to kind of do work when I want in on my own time, especially working a job that I was already stressed about as is, was like when I came home, even though I did do my work, when I came home, it was still on my own time. Does that make sense? Like I was able to kind of, you know, work through it when I wanted to and, you know, I didn't have to get up and be in my work clothes. Imagine having to come from school and get dressed for work. But it was like, okay, I can come home, relax, put my pajamas on, still do this work.

NH: And just to kind of wrap things up, because we are closing in, how would you rate your overall COVID experience? I know that's kind of like a loaded question, but just in like, the easiest terms possible.

EF: I would rate my overall COVID experience. I would say it was-

NH: Like over the last like two and a half years. I didn't mean specifically when you had COVID, but over the last couple years.

EF: Yeah, I know what you meant. Um, I would say it was pretty okay. It was okay. Like, it wasn't really good, but it wasn't bad either. And I say that because I know that some people had it a lot worse than me during quarantine. People that lost family members. So I'd just like to be a little grateful, you know, because I didn't lose anybody to COVID. So I would say it was pretty okay because like I said in the beginning of quarantine I was fine being at home relaxing and that's how I kind of looked at it, just being at home, staying safe and healthy, you know. But then when I got the job, it wasn't good and I was stressed out, going into school junior year, COVID kind of changed everything. Friends dropped out of school, took away, like, a lot of, like, things that I was really looking forward to my freshman year that I got to see. I couldn't experience my junior year and then everything is just now starting to build back up. So I say it was, it was okay. I would say it was okay overall.

NH: And my last question for today is, if you can go back to 2019 or early 2020 and tell yourself any piece of advice, over the pandemic, what would that piece of advice be?

EF: My advice to myself would be, this isn't going to last forever, so keep that in mind. Because I remember at the time I was like, oh, COVID is never going to go away. Everything is pretty much going to stay like this forever. But now that the height of the pandemic is over, even though people still are getting it, things are slowly starting to come back like everything. I'm really happy to see that not just at Eastern, but everywhere. And I remember [there] was a time where we couldn't even go into a movie theater. And now, look, I'm doing that. So it gets better. It gets better. Nothing truly lasts forever.

NH: That was well said. Well, thank you so much, Erin. Thank you for letting me interview

you today. And I guess that concludes our interview for today. So thank you.

EF: Thank you for having me.