

11-17-2022

Jayla Lee, Oral History Interview, 2022

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Interview with Jayla Lee (JL) conducted on November 17, 2022 by EMU undergraduate Emily Kato (EK) for You Li's Journalism 313 course.

Transcribed by Emily Kato

JL: Go on with questions that you have. Whatever you want.

EK: Okay. So, I mostly wanted to focus on, like your spirituality because you mentioned that a little bit in the preliminary interview. How did you find your spirituality in the pandemic and what kind of spirituality do you find yourself ascribing to?

JL: Okay, so basically all this this is a good question for me. Well, I've always been spiritual, like, ever since I was a little girl. So, the pandemic wasn't really a difference in that, in my opinion. And that's only because I'm aware of it. I'm aware of this pattern about myself and this priority in my life, which it must be. My spirituality is my priority in my life because it embodies everything, everything about you, you know. I changed, but it just took a different form for me during a pandemic. I think that before that, pre-pandemic, I was angry a lot. Aware that I had that, you know, that I thought about. You know, for my spirituality, I always was raised in that way, I was raised in some type of church. But my family, we believe in different things.

EK: Yeah, interesting.

JL: I want you to repeat that question. That was so good.

EK: No, you're good. So basically, I just wanted to know how you found your future through the pandemic. And then you reiterated that you've always been spiritual. And then the other kind of part of that question was like, what kind of spirituality do you find yourself subscribing to as far as like a belief system goes?

JL: Okay, thank you. I don't know. Good guess that's where I'm at in my spirituality. I don't know, because I've always been able to express myself in that type of way. I've always been allowed to think. I've always been allowed to feel, and it didn't matter, girl. It's always been like that. My mother was always Christian. And then one day she became a Muslim in college. And now she's Christian again. And then my uncle, he was Christian. And now he's not too sure if he is you know, he and I, we discuss it. But. So basically, it's I don't know.

EK: And that's a valid response.

JL: I guess. I guess I can see God and I'm starting to see I can see God in different forms. Yeah. I can see negative or positive in different formats, different ways and different people, even if I don't see their point. They even if I don't agree with it, even if I don't agree with them like I can see. Okay, I guess I can't be mad at you, but I am. Yeah. Okay.

EK: But I totally understand. And they kind of like, did you notice, like, maybe like your belief system kind of changing during the pandemic or like, maybe like transforming like your mindset in a different way?

JL: I think I was tested. I think that this time around, before I knew the word, I knew the way to live, but I never tested myself. And being able to act upon it and live that way. You know what I'm trying to say?

EK: Yeah, it kind of sounds like the pandemic tested your spirituality yourself emotionally. Is that what I'm getting?

JL: I don't know. I'm not even [going to] know. I felt like it was different and that I was cognizant of the things that I was before. Oh, it's like before I knew that this was about me. I knew this about myself, but I didn't act upon it. You know what I'm saying? And I was kind to others, but I did not make it a priority to. But now I am. But now I got the understanding and I play action to it. Like, Okay, I know this about me. So, I thought, I've got to fix it. So now I'm in action to fix the things that I don't like.

EK: I was the same way. It wasn't really until, like, the past, maybe like couple of years that I really started making some positive changes in my life and kind of like trying to have firmer boundaries with people. And then, you know, pre-pandemic and now, I guess kind of like late. I don't even want to say post-pandemic, but like late pandemic to the point where we're starting to get back to normalcy, like maybe like a shift in the way that you think about your spirituality from like, you know, maybe back in late 2018, 2019 to the current day.

JL: Say that one more time.

EK: No, you're good. I didn't do a very good job explaining it. But my question was, did you

notice a shift in your belief system with the spirituality from, say, like 2018, 2019, pre-pandemic to present day?

JL: I don't even think it changed. I don't even know I don't even know that aspect of it. I don't know. I think I'm just everywhere in range.

EK: Which is valid and understandable. I don't blame you. It's something that's hard to think about, like, especially if you've never [actively] thought about it. I know when we talked initially that you mentioned that you changed like your professional and educational paths, like right before the pandemic started, did your spirituality help you navigate that time?

JL: Yup, it did. It also confused me.

EK: Yeah, in what way?

JL: It confused me because. I'm in it. We play different roles and in in our lives. My religion is like that in certain aspects. I can't follow the same morals that I may follow in one job, or one area of my life compared to the other one. And so I might have to say, I hold my tongue. I'm going to have to learn to hold my tongue. But in the other areas, I have to be able to have a voice. And to say no.

EK: Yeah. I also had to learn how to say no.

JL: Yeah. So, I think that's just an example, but, um, yeah, it confuses because it really did. I

was, I had a pay for it. I had to take some time to adjust what aspect of me that there was. I cannot use this on this role because I'm on a different path in this area. So, like, you know, for example, I'm a grandchild, and my grandmother struggles. You know, she lives with dementia.

EK: Yeah, that's hard to go through.

JL: So, she can be a little forgetful. Because that [disease] it causes people to be, you know, kind of... Yeah, and that's understandable. That's understandable because I had to look at her. I have to remember that she probably gets frustrated, you know. I have to. She talked, you know, she can talk crazy and she did some lecturing, too. Yeah. And I had to learn to bite my tongue because that's my grandma.

EK: Exactly. My mom is a certified nurse's assistant or CNA, and she works with a lot of dementia patients. She said sometimes work is just hard. It's like you don't want to be disrespectful to these people, you know? Or like say something that might, you know, throw them off. So, you know, I think with a lot of dementia patients, I think the protocol is, is to just kind of go along with what they're saying. So that way you don't freak them out. And so, I can understand the biting your tongue aspect.

JL: Yeah. And so, I had to bite my tongue in that area. But, you know, now that I'm starting my business and, I, you know, I'm working, I'm really taking the steps to progressing that. I finally have a vision of how far I want to go and what. When I'm in the world it's like I

got to be better, you know? You know, I'm still finding the balance to say and do instead of wishing.

EK: Exactly.

JL: I guess that's kind of an example of how my spirituality has been grounding me.

EK: Good. I'm glad. Did your relationship with your spirituality kind of help you during the pandemic? Because I know it was a dark time for a lot of people. I know you told me that you didn't necessarily struggle a whole lot, but it was quite a bit of change. So, did it help at all with maybe the changes that came with lockdown and such?

JL: Um, well, lockdown. Um, yeah, because lockdown was different for me in the because I was living during lockdown. I'm still moving. Like, we can do nothing. But we, we still had to do a lot, like, in a different way. But overall, I don't. Oh, girl. I can't even remember lockdown.

EK: So, it definitely was quite a bit of a blur.

JL: I don't know what I was doing. I'm just guess I've got to just celebrate because I out here.

EK: Exactly.

JL: Like, cause that's it. Two years and I'm here.

EK: I really relate to that. Did your spirituality or even just like that kind of mindset help you

kind of when we started getting back out into the world again, did that kind of help you with the adjustment period?

JL: I mean, I guess it was just seeing other people.

EK: Yeah. Being able to see other people again, that definitely helped me a lot too.

JL: I'm saying, like where I still see nobody.

EK: Yeah, that's right.

JL: I still see. I see people worse still. Someone like me, I guess, like it made me more exposed. Made me more aware. I'm more aware of people that I know and people that I just don't.

EK: Yeah, that's fair.

JL: It kind of helped me during the pandemic. My eyes, I can see. I can see. I guess you can say that this will help me being able to see and I guess you can say in our sense, physical. Emotional. And I'm laughing because what comes to my head as I answer this is my teachers, my feature writing class. She talks about using your five senses to write a story.

EK: Yes! Do you have Dr. Ali for that class?

JL: No, I have Dr... If I can't pronounce this lady's name, I'm not even [going to] lie. It's like [Uthoff].

EK: Professor Uthoff! She's pretty good, too.

JL: Yeah. Is that the lady you just said?

EK: No. Dr. Ali. I had her for feature writing in winter 2022. She's also really great. And I took the New York trip with her over the summer.

JL: Oh, my goodness. How was it?

EK: That was great. It was a six day trip to New York, and it was journalism and media in New York. It was pretty cool.

JL: I wanted to figure out how to do it [take the NYC trip class].

EK: I mean, I don't know if they're going to do it again this next upcoming summer, summer, 2023. But if they do, you should definitely do it.

JL: Well, if they got something for this, I'll email them now so I can prepare.

EK: I think if you are interested check like the study abroad website.

JL: I'm going to wait for that then. And I'm going to get back to what I told you that was going to do.

EK: Sure!

JL: So that's what I'm working on. This trip after pandemic. This is very important. I'm working on focusing because I never noticed that I didn't have focus like people told me. I have focus now. I started noticing, like, you know, maybe in order for to do things and

stuff. I started noticing that there was things about me that I didn't want or like. And I put that priority on the backburner.

EK: Yeah.

JL: So back to the five senses. She [Professor Uthoff] talks about the five senses. They talk about the eyes. Did you have to do the lesson where you had to write about going somewhere and write using the five senses?

EK: Yes, yes.

JL: Girl just now that came to my mind as we are talking. And I was like, oh, my goodness. Like. I'm happy because now I can see what I do well before I can see what I did wrong. So, I guess maybe just being able to look at and see like I can see like girl yes, I can see when people as I can't understand it. When people say something to me, I can go in and look for evidence about myself and be pretty good about noticing patterns about people.

EK: Yeah, I agree I, I'm a bit more of a people watcher because I'm very introverted. So, I'm not much of a chatty person. I really like that assignment because it just gave me an excuse to be a people watcher and just like, kind of like think about it a bit more than I normally would.

JL: Yeah, exactly. And I guess I compare that using the five senses assignment to other parts

of my life. But guess what? I know what she is teaching me. I'm applying it I'm using it. I'm using it at work in real life. Which is good. I guess that goes back to spirituality. I noticed something about me. This is how my brain works. So, it progressed. It is progressing in different forms besides God. Whatever, deity, whatever. Mm. Whatever you want to call it bro. I don't know. Elephant. You know, science, history, whatever you want to call it, I guess it's just progressive and I guess, you know, I guess when and I guess, you know, that being locked up was it for me. It allowed me to understand that.

EK: Yeah, I agree and understand that.

JL: I didn't want to see that before. And I didn't see it for a pandemic. I'm not [going to] lie. And then the pandemic hit, and I had to kind of see. Ah, you know, I had to acknowledge.

EK: But then, for you, did you notice any like, changes in your professional or personal life kind of like post-pandemic once we started like getting back into, like, the workplace?

JL: Oh, yeah. Professional and personal. Professional. I realize I really realized that I couldn't work with nobody else.

EK: That's fair.

JL: Before, I was good at quitting a job. Now I'm a little hesitant to quit a job.

EK: Any level of job security is hard to come by nowadays.

JL: I'm a little hesitant, but at the same time, Emily, you know, I really think that. Don't quit

a job before you have another job.

EK: Yes, I agree.

JL: I'm like it's like that. But it's like, don't quit the job and take your standing and do what you want to do.

EK: I totally understand where you came from with that.

JL: I hope you can use this material. And I say that a lot. But like, you know, I feel like sometimes because I am the way I am and I think the way I think, like a lot of people don't. You know, that's something that's very off the wall. And so, like my father, my dad taught me I guess you could say that something in the pandemic that that helped me a lot. I wasn't raised by my father, I was raised by my stepdad, uncle, and grandpa. You know, I wasn't raised with my biological father. He had mental health issues and stuff like that. Yeah. Um. And I never got to hang with him in a good relationship with him. I still talk to him, but now I kind of figure out his pattern. Right now, I'm trying to adjust to it, but I got to try to have a relationship with him. And that was something I always struggle with. But I'm happy for the relationship we do have now. I'm happy for the relationship. I think that my family thinks that that I'm still the little girl before you know, how they say pre-pandemic. They think I'm still a little girl who is still has the hope that you can or something because, oh, my gosh, she's here. He's here. But it's not like that. I guess in that aspect, I get this that I've got this set my dad for who he is and just take what I can get.

EK: I know you mentioned that you started writing a lot. And that's what kind of made you want to pick the educational path that you did. What did you find yourself typically writing about?

JL: Oh, wait. Repeat that. I'm sorry.

EK: So, in our initial interview, you mentioned that you started writing a lot, and when you started writing, you noticed that that's why you wanted to change educational path. So, when you were writing, what did you typically find yourself writing about?

JL: Like do you mean, like, poetry wise?

EK: Anything about your poetry, anything like that. Like, what kind of topics did you discuss?

JL: Oh, I mean, it has fluctuated. I've talked about a lot of things I've talked about. Love, I've talked about that in the aspect of a lot of things. The physicality of love, touch. You know? Stuff that is PG and M for mature.

EK: Sure. As far as like the PG stuff goes, like what did you talk about? Because I know like, you know, with COVID, it kind of isolated us from having any kind of physical connection with people.

JL: I've written stuff about what I want to say to a child. You know, little girl me. That was something

I did pre-pandemic, I guess you could say. I always had struggle with that when I was a kid, because I always thought I was beautiful. [Regardless of what society says about black and brown girls]

EK: That's really beautiful.

JL: Thank you. That's just a little push. I'm not going to go into that.

EK: And you don't have to.

JL: Thank you. Thank you. But I say some stuff about that, and I've talked about police brutality, and my mom, and who I am as in you could say, you know, scientific type of stuff. DNA, what's in my blood and my groups think. What else have I talked about? I've talked about. Love. Like, just, you know. I did that for a long time by myself. Things I've done in my past that I'm not proud of that I had to get over. I'll talk about crime that we do to our own people. I'll talk about being stagnant. Yeah, I talked about a lot of things, I guess you can say. I've talked about a lot of things.

EK: I mean, which is good sometimes. That's like really cathartic to be able to just kind of get that out there and organize your thoughts or even just like make some art that doesn't necessarily apply to you, but maybe applies to maybe like a community that you're a part of.

JL: And so it's like and I guess that you can see as the difference between somebody going to college and getting a degree is, am I going to college? May not get the degree or they may get a degree in applying it.

EK: Also how I feel some days.

JL: When you're like, you know, like I'm really comfortable. I'm trying to learn how to apply the knowledge that they give me in any class, no matter what class it is, I'm like, Oh, okay. Yeah. Yeah. Sure. I can't talk at that book. How can I write so much? You know, I could write so much, but I can't write it. I was struggling to write these papers and I was struggling to organize my thoughts about what should I do? Today is on my list. What is on my schedule for today that I need to get clear, cross-check that I'm working on to go?

EK: Yeah. No, I. I'm, I'm the exact opposite. I have a very hard time reading things. Like, if it's not something that I'm super interested in or if it's like class work, I'm just like, I'm so bored I cannot read this. And I like reading a paragraph and I'm like, out of it, but I can write a paper in an hour.

JL: I don't know how you do that. Also, as far as my answers I'm giving you everything I got.

EK: I have one more question left if you're willing to answer it. And then we can head out.

JL: Of Course.

EK: Okay. Okay. So just my last question was, did you notice any changes in your interpersonal relationships since the pandemic?

JL: Like with myself?

EK: Interpersonal is kind of like the best way I can describe that word means is like your relationships with other people that you are close with in your life.

JL: Oh, okay. Okay. Oh, yeah, girl. I'll cut them off. I have zero tolerance. Yeah, like I have tolerance, but I'll have the tolerance that I hear for people in their inability to do. I feel like and I say ability on the aspect of them pertaining to me, not pertaining to their other situations because they could be doing what they need to do in every other aspect of our relationship if they wasn't doing what needed to be done. I'll be honest with you, a lot of them are not here.

EK: Yeah. Now I have.

JL: I lost all my friends during the pandemic.

EK: If it makes you feel better, I did too. I lost the majority of all my friends. I think I maybe had one person.

JL: So, yeah, I think I have one person too. She broke in [to me as a person] and could be real. Ah, but I love her and just can't let her go. My closest friend. I can't let her go and I think is because even though she says things that I don't like. Is the fact that even if she said the things that I don't like, even if she said in a way that I didn't like, even if it hurt my feelings.

EK: She's being straight up with you.

JL: Yeah. The things she told me made me change for the better. Because I. I love her. I care about that person. I care about her so much as a person to me. You know that I can, and I can see it. Like, I care about her opinions. So that's what made me change. It hurt my

feelings. They, like you, really feel some feels. Oh, you make me want to cut you off. But it's still the fact that, like in doubt, don't worry. Stay strong. But they will me for the better. But everybody else, the majority of people, they got cut off.

EK: And yeah, I had to cut some people off too.

JL: I'm sorry you had to cut people off.

EK: I'm sorry that happened to you, too. But maybe in the grand scheme of things, cutting those people off was better for the both of us.

JL: Okay, I'll try to apologize. The one I ain't [going to] add the way I did her when we stop being friends, you know, I was kind of messed up. Emily, I'm not [going to] lie.

EK: It happens.

EK: Yeah. And that just shows, you know, personal growth that you look back and you're like, oh, I shouldn't have done that. Like that shows personal growth and that's a good thing.

JL: Yeah, I hope that wasn't too much information I was just trying to give.

EK: No, you're good. I appreciate it.

JL: Yeah, I know, but everybody got cut off, and, girl, I don't care. Oh, and those interpersonal relations with my tolerances were so low just because of the fact that I that in the pandemic and me growing as a person. So, if I stop calling myself out and doing things to myself that are not in the good of me, in this ain't right.

EK: Exactly. And that's a good way to wrap things up, too.

JL: I know these aren't necessarily the questions, but I have a god. The guy is everywhere.

But I'm happy that I have a god because I wanted it, I would have forgotten what I was in my head.

EK: I understand.

JL: And it's great because you helped me and thank you so much.

EK: You're very welcome. And I'm glad that we were able to have this conversation.