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## **Sara Jurca, Oral History Interview, 2022**

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Interview with Sara Jurca (SJ) conducted November 16, 2022, via Zoom by EMU undergraduate Aaron Hughes (AH) for You Li's Journalism 313 course.

Transcribed by Aaron Hughes

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AH: This is Aaron Hughes, a student at Eastern Michigan University. Today is November 16, 2022 and we are talking to Sara Juca. Sara is twenty-three years old majoring in creative writing with a minor in journalism. Originally attending Mercy College of Ohio for a nursing degree she now focuses on being a published author. During the height of the pandemic she left the university and pursued her career as an author. The central focus of this interview is to learn more about the experiences and perspectives of the Covid-19 global impact. All right. So when you were a student at Mercy College of Ohio, during the start of the pandemic, what were you most concerned about?

SJ: Well, when I first started going to Mercy, I wasn't initially concerned about anything. Just because at first they only said, oh, we're taking off a couple of days. Then a couple of days turned into a couple more days, and then by the end, it was two weeks. Since it was nursing school, I was like, great. I don't have to go to clinicals. So I wasn't concerned, but then about halfway through the semester when I realized that they had switched everything to an online format for our clinicals. I was worried that I would not be retaining enough of the information that I needed, that I wasn't going to learn properly. So that was probably my biggest concern as a student because I didn't really understand the gravity of COVID.

AH: What was it like later on during the year when you started doing more online classes and realizing, oh, this is going to become more common?

SJ: The worry stayed because it went on for the rest of the semester. So I was worried, just of am I going to learn enough, am I going to know enough? Because God forbid I finish school and go back to an actual building, actual clinicals and then get a job in the hospital not knowing what I'm doing. Just because I've never physically done any of those things. So that was my biggest concern. Then with the rise of COVID, I'm like oh my gosh, it's a new disease. If I am a nurse how am I going to combat this? I was just very nervous so that was interesting.

AH: So during COVID, you said you had a job at a hospital? Could you describe the environment of that job during that time?

SJ: Yes, it was very tense. Just because all of my co-workers were not familiar with this new disease and the protocols that were changing on and off, on and off. So as a clerk, it was stressful, almost more so than all of the nurses. Because I was the one who had to inform everybody this is the new protocol that went in today that we need to do this, and then we need to change that. That was definitely very tense and confusing. I mean, for a couple of months of COVID nobody was wearing a mask in the hospital. We still weren't sure about isolation. At my hospital, we had private rooms, but it was still the isolation factor.

Does the baby go with its mom, does it get its own room, does it go to the NICU? It was just very tense.

AH: So you change your major from nursing to creative writing. What were the factors that influenced your decision?

SJ: For one, I realized that during COVID being away from the hospital, my clinicals, being home, and actually focusing on the information. It made me worried about continuing nursing school. To begin with, it wasn't a passion of mine. I was going for nursing just because it's a steady job and it's a safe choice, you're helping people. But, seeing the changes COVID made was a factor, not only that, my school the way that they set up the program was after we finished one of our courses that they said, actually this doesn't count towards your college credit. The way that we formatted the class halfway through, you're going to have to retake it again at the first available moment. Which in my case would be the next year because my class was only taught once a year so I would be wasting a year. I would have had to pay for that class because I wasn't on a scholarship. So that was tense. So during that time of waiting, I started working on a book because I didn't have any extra classes to take. I was solely in the nursing program so during that time, I just started writing, and then I wrote a couple of sentences, then a couple of chapters, and then lo and behold, I ended up with a book and I ended up getting it published. This was something I always wanted to do ever since I was young, but it was a really good eye-opening experience for me that nursing isn't what I want to do. I want to be an author. So I dropped out and I started pursuing creative writing.

AH: So you said before that nursing wasn't really your passion. Do you believe without COVID-19 happening would you have stayed in the nursing program?

SJ: I guess it did, also my new instructors and subjects that were coming up. I think I would have stayed longer, but I don't think I would have finished either way. I think because of the pandemic it gave me the opportunity to be home and value my strengths, weaknesses, and my passions. So I think it definitely gave me an opportunity sooner to pursue what I actually enjoy and what I was better suited for.

AH: Earlier you said how difficult it was to learn virtually. What were the problems you faced during virtual learning?

SJ: For example clinicals, normally what I would do in the nursing program, half of our clinicals were at the school where we would be learning skills. Like how to set up an IP and then the other half we would be going into actually performing with a nurse. Once we went virtually it was definitely very difficult, because doing things hands-on versus a simulation, that alone is a very big difference in learning. Especially when it's something that has to be hands-on. So that was definitely very challenging. The Sims were also animated, so when we did wound care on the simulation, it was like okay, well I hope this is what it looks like because you know people look different. So that was difficult and then also our lectures instead of it being interactive where we could stop our instructor and ask questions. They were pre-recorded, it wasn't live lectures. It was a little bit less

informative because if someone asked a question you can build on that and it is very straightforward. So if you needed explanations, you had to go a lot more out of your way to get it so that was just a little a little more difficult.

AH: So how would you compare that learning experience versus now with the creative writing experience at emu?

SJ: I would definitely say it's a lot better for me than nursing school. Even though I am taking online classes. Most of my classes have actual meeting times where I can actually interact with my instructors and the ones that are pre-recorded the program was made that way from the start. So I think maybe just going into it knowing this is how it's going to be and not have drastic changes, is what's helpful for me. I'm reassured, I know what I'm doing going in, and what needs to be done. Not even that, I'm a lot more interested in creative writing. Whereas nursing school was just stressful learning about all the different diseases and medications and what would I do. I want to learn how to structure the sentence this way and learn how to write that way.

AH: So how would you say this change in your life affected your mental health?

SJ: It definitely affected my mental health in a good way in a very positive way. Talk to any person who is in nursing school, and they will tell you that it is probably one of the most stressful careers and schools to be going through. So I haven't gotten too far. I was only about a year in and I can already see the change from that beginning of nursing school to

when I finished. It was very stressful, I was crying a lot. Just feeling very overwhelmed with the subjects that I needed to learn. Not only that but nursing school, it's solely based on your four exams for that semester. If you fail one you have to do perfectly on the other. It was really stressful because I'm not a very good test taker even if I know the information I second guess myself. So that was really stressful and it was totally dependent on those. Not only that I had some difficult teachers that affected my mental health a lot. That school was almost an hour away from me so I had to be out the door early just to make it on time. I was exhausted from that. So now coming into the creative writing program. My mental health is a lot better, my just things that helped me mentally so it's definitely a good, positive change.

AH: That's great. Many students from many colleges report concerns about how their campus handled the pandemic, how would you say Mercy College handled the pandemic what was your reaction to their efforts?

SJ: Like I said, so the first couple of weeks, just kind of oh, we're off a couple of days. Well because we were still like oh, is this going to be a big thing? We haven't had a pandemic since the Spanish flu in 1919 or whatever it was. I think no one was really expecting a pandemic of that magnitude to be happening, especially with modern-day medicine. So at the beginning, I think they handled it as best as they could, that they were just going to cancel more, and then as the pandemic went on, they ultimately cut all in-person classes. So I think that was the right move. I think they did still keep a lot of their resources, which I was actually surprised of, for example, the tutors, they just were all virtual. But

the signing up system was still the same which was very helpful for a lot of students knowing we don't have to learn one more new thing. I can't remember how flexible they [the instructors] were for meeting times that I can't remember, but overall, I guess they handled it as best as they could under the circumstances.

AH: So looking back now, do you remember the moment you realize you wanted to make the career switch? Do you remember the day or the moment you realize, oh, I want to do this?

SJ: Yes, I was in the middle of an exam. It was very stressful. I think it was my second class, I don't remember. But, I remember just sitting there going through the questions and thinking oh my gosh. What we were learning about I wasn't particularly interested in. I think the likelihood of me getting a med-surg shot is very likely. This is what I'm going to be doing at least for a couple of months. I was just going through it and I'm like, oh my gosh, I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this. In my head I think that was the first time, I don't want to do this, I need to get out of it. Then once my class finished and with everything that happened with the school and they set up payments and whatever. I was like, okay, this is my way out. I think that was my moment of transition. Then as I slowly started to write, it just became more and more clear. But during that test that was my I don't want to do this I want to do something that I actually love.

AH: So looking back now do you believe you made the right career switch?



SJ: Yes, sometimes I wish that I would have finished just so I could have the degree. But then I remind myself, it wasn't even necessarily just because I didn't want to finish that I didn't finish the program. That was just the way that the program was set up towards the end and having to wait a whole year. How would I be able to retain all that information? How would I be able to bring in additional classes? Then it was out of state, so I had to pay more than any of the other students. So I'm very glad. I've actually had a lot of people who read my book come up to me and they're like, oh my gosh, not only was it good, but it was very informative and a learning experience for them or self-reflection for them. I'm very happy that I made this. I do not regret this in the least.

AH: So what did you learn from your experience of course switching and the transition you made from nursing to writing?

SJ: You have to listen to yourself and not to everyone around you. I know that sounds funny, but the reason why I went to nursing in the first place is because of the people around me. Who you know were like you have to get a good education, you have to be to get something that supports you, you can't just be going around doing what you want. I guess you could say it's like if a kid told their parents I want to be an actor, and their parents want what's best for them. But they're like okay, the likelihood of you actually being successful is slim, go do something else true. Do acting on the side if you want, don't make that your full-time career. So I guess that's what a lot of my friends and family were saying. They may have my best interest. But, I think now that I've switched and

established myself and everybody's really happy for me and they can't imagine you doing anything else. If that makes sense.

AH: So what would you tell people who are considering a career switch or a major switch?

SJ: One look at what you're switching to, I think there has to be some plot into it. You can't just switch to anything. There has to be a talent for it and the ability to pick it up quickly. Like oh yeah I want to be a gymnast and I'm not athletic at all and I find that very difficult. It's not that I couldn't do it, but just realistically. A big thing for me that I did because I was a little scared, I prayed about it because I'm a Christian. So I was praying about it a lot and seeing if it was the right thing for me, which in the end it turned out to be, and then, in the end, I would say sometimes you just got to take a leap of faith and trust yourself.

AH: Final question, what was it like when you finally got your book published? What was that experience and feeling like?

SJ: It was surreal when I first got a package from my publishing company, I was like, oh is this my book when I first got it. Then I read and I started reading out loud I'm like, oh, now it's not just me who knows I wrote a book, Everybody and literally anybody can pick it up, read it and give their opinion and do what they want. So that was both the awesome and then like, intimidating moment. So it was both a cool and scary experience and then I got to do a signing and I got to tell them about the book. When some of them bought it I

was like, oh no, they get to know how I think and what my writing style is. Is it good enough? I started having imposter syndrome but it was both fun and scary. I'm still trying to balance it out and I'm working on the second book right now so I am still trying to overcome my fear.

AH: All right, that's it, thank you so much and that's all the questions I had for you!

SJ: Okay, thank you so much!