



1 Amelia Wilson: Today is Thursday April 30th and it is currently 11:03 a.m. this is for the
2 Columbia College Chicago oral history project on capturing quarantine 2020. My name is Amelia
3 Wilson and I am currently living in Whiting Indiana um tell me your name.
4
5 Rachel McCumber: Rachel McCumber.
6
7 AW: And where are you currently living?
8 RM: Chicago, Illinois.
9 AW: Alright, awesome. And where were you born?
10 RM: I was born in Lubbock, Texas.
11 AW: Okay, and what year were you born?
12 RM: 1999
13 AW: And what was your job...previous to quarantine?
14 RM: I was a merchandise service coordinator at Ulta Beauty in Chicago.
15 AW: Okay. And how long did you work there?
16 RM: I had been at that position since September of 2019, but I had been working for the
17 company since May of 2018.
18 AW: And where was the job located?
19 RM: Um at Greektown on Halsted in Chicago.
20 AW: And what was your mother's name?
21 RM: Theresa McCumber
22 AW: And where—when was she born?
23 RM: 1961 (laughs) yeah

24 AW: And where was she born? Do you know?

25 RM: Lubbock, Texas

26 AW: Lubbock, Texas. Okay. And what is your fathers name?

27 RM: John McCumber

28 AW: And when was he born?

29 RM: 1968–

30 AW: okay

31 RM: I think.

32 AW: Where was he born?

33 RM: Uh, Houston, Texas.

34 AW: Do you have any siblings?

35 RM: I think–

36 AW: Oh. You're okay. (both laugh)

37 RM: Yes.

38 AW: Uh, what are their names and ages?

39 RM: Um, Laura Birch. She is thirty-nine, thirty-eight. I don't know. Um, then Kaitlyn

40 McCumber. She is twenty-six. And then Matthew McCumber who's twenty-two.

41 AW: Okay. Um, so I'm going to go ahead and start asking you about your early life in

42 highschool.

43 RM: Okay.

44 AW: So...what was it like growing up in Texas?

45 RM: Um, it was a little different for me. I think a lot of people think that you ride horses to high

46 school or whatever. Um, but I grew up in Austin, Texas, which is pretty liberal. Um, and yeah

47 they had really good uh education out there. I actually grew up in a suburb. Um so we would like
48 go into the city on like weekends and stuff.

49 AW: Okay um describe your high school. What was that like?

50 RM: So I went to high school in Wolfforth, Texas which is just outside of Lubbock, Texas um
51 and it was a pretty big high school for being such a small town because we did...people who live
52 in Lubbock went to that school. Yeah it was a pretty big school about 6A in UIL terms, um,
53 which is just Texas stuff but yeah it was nice um sports were a really big thing there. Um like
54 going to football games every Friday in the fall and yeah.

55 AW: That's great. I know that you had mentioned that you had done theater prior to this
56 conversation. So when did you first get into theater?

57 RM: I kind of been doing theater like casually Like my whole life just cuz It was always a class
58 that I had taken but I really got into it in high school um I took a technical theater class And I just
59 really like doing that More than being on stage and talking to people um Yeah and I got it really
60 into design And that's why I end up going to Columbia for

61 AW: Oh okay. What was the best theater production that you were part of in high school?

62 RM: Ooh, um, My senior year we did a musical and then we did a one-act and Those were
63 probably my favorites um, the musical was a little problematic cuz we did ,Thoroughly Modern
64 Millie” um and then the one-act we did was from the Kentucky Cycle ,Fire in the Hole” um and
65 it was one of my favorite shows that we’ve ever done. It was like we had a gospel choir singing
66 in it and it was awesome (laughs).

67 AW: Oh that’s great. Wow. Um, what were your expectations um when you graduated
68 highschool? For like the rest of your life?

69 RM: Um, I expected to be a Tony Award winner within the next 10 years um I thought I was
70 going to be—yeah I thought I was just going to like graduate college and just win a Tony right off
71 the bat (both laugh) That’s really—I genuinely thought that that was going to happen (laughs).
72 AW: That’s great. Don’t we all, tight?
73 RM: Yeah (laughs)
74 AW: Um how did you find Columbia College Chicago?
75 RM: I was sitting in my teacher's office that he never used, and I was on the computer looking
76 through emails. And I had gotten one from Columbia and I was looking through their majors and
77 I was like oh, they have theater design. And all our minors sounded really cool. And I was just
78 looking at the campus’ like, um, different locations and I was like oh, I really like, I want to go
79 here. And so then I went to one of their meetings that they had in Texas and I was like yeah I'm
80 going here. (laughs)
81 AW: Did you have any other options aside from Columbia College that might have swayed your
82 preference or?
83 RM: I did. I—I went to a theater convention and I met the people at the school um the University
84 of Southern Indiana and that’s like where I almost went. It was between USI and Columbia for
85 me.
86 AW: So why did you end up choosing Columbia over USI?
87 RM: Because I was going into theater I figured it would be better to start my theater like, career
88 in Chicago rather than like a small town in Indiana.
89 AW: Okay that makes sense. Why were you interested in moving away for school?
90 RM: I...In the part of Texas I was in was very conservative and I was kind of known as like a
91 feminist crazy person um, and I just didn’t like everyone thinking I was crazy all the time. Um,

92 and I've always been really independent and so the second I got the chance to like get out, I was
93 like I gotta go as far as I can.

94 AW: And what's your earliest memory of Columbia College Chicago?

95 RM: Um....probably my first memory was my first day of Theater Foundations. It was my first
96 class that I had. And we all had to take off her shoes and sit in a circle and we all had to talk
97 about ourselves and then we like read a script and we had to like, we had to go around the room
98 and read it. It was wild. But it's the most Columbia experience I think that I've had was that
99 class.

100 AW: And so why did you choose to major in theater?

101 RM: I had had a conversation with my theater director in high school and he...he said like, what
102 do you want to major in, and I said, creative writing, And that's my major now. But um...he said,
103 well that's stupid you're so good at theater design. And I said, oh my gosh you're right. And so
104 then I--and I also just really liked theater. Um. And I liked the community and sense of--I liked
105 the collaborative art, but it's just not for me.

106 AW: So, you left theater because it wasn't for you. Can you tell me a little more about that?

107 RM: Yeah I just was really unhappy while I was doing it I didn't have any motivation to do it
108 after certain point. I felt like I wasn't really a theater person like, theater people are like, this is
109 what I was born to do. And this is the only thing that I can ever do, And I just never really had
110 that with it.

111 AW: I got you. So you changed majors from theater to creative writing. Can you tell me about
112 the transition?

113 RM: Um. Well the semester before I changed my major I thought about double majoring and so I
114 took up foundations to...a foundations in creative writing class. And I really liked it. So I kind of

115 got a feel of the department before I like, went all in. Um. But yeah the transition was pretty easy
116 for me. I started off with a workshop class with Raylen Hanson taught it. And she's incredible.
117 And she helped me figure out what I wanted to do. And just like gave me really good prompts to
118 start writing nonfiction.

119 AW: So what about creative writing were you most drawn to that was different from your appeal
120 to theater?

121 RM: I've been writing like my whole, whole life. Like when I say I've been doing theater my
122 whole life I've been writing my whole life. Like since I learned how to write. And it's always just
123 been my outlet. It's always been what I do when I don't know how to process things...I'm writing
124 about it. Um. And so I think it just made sense like, when I told my family back home that I was
125 going to change my major to creative writing they were like, duh, that's what you've always
126 been doing. So, yeah.

127 AW: Can you tell me more about...what was her name?

128 RM: Raylen Hanson.

129 AW: Raylen Hanson. Yeah, can you tell me more about her and how she helped you to uh, with
130 the transition?

131 RM: Uh, she gave little prompts for an essay and they were just like really short ones and I was
132 really scared when I started writing nonfiction because I was like. I have to write a book, but I
133 don't know what to write a book about. And she just kind of made it really small and focused.
134 And then if you wanted to, you could drag out the subject a little more or flesh it out. And that
135 made it really comfortable for me to get into nonfiction, just writing really small pieces. Yeah I
136 think that she just really helped when I would get stuck in something she could show me like,

137 well you mentioned this, so like why don't you run with that? And I'm like, oh okay. And yeah I
138 think she just really helped me figure out what nonfiction was.

139 AW: That's good. What appealed to you most about nonfiction versus like, fiction or poetry,
140 which are other programs in creative writing?

141 RM: I'm not smart enough for poetry. I don't get it, like the metaphors and stuff just don't come
142 naturally to me (laughs). When I read it, I don't really understand it. And when I write it, I don't
143 really understand it. And um, with nonfiction I had taken a class with Sam Weller my freshman
144 year um and I wrote about the Victory Gardens Theater um or the Biograph Theater and I loved
145 writing that. It was the most fun I'd had writing something in a really long time. Um, getting that
146 published and seen by people was so fulfilling. And so I was like this is what I want to do.

147 AW: Okay. What was a normal day of classes at Columbia like for you?

148 RM: Um, I've taken a lot of Workshop classes, which is essentially you...if you're having your
149 piece workshopped you write your piece and you all kind of sit in a semi-circle and either you
150 read it or the teacher reads it and you get notes from everyone in the class. And that's how my
151 workshop classes would go. Um, yeah and I had really small breaks between my classes and so I
152 was like running across campus to my other classes in those ten minute breaks. Or, I'm just
153 chilling in the creative writing building on 33. Yeah.

154 AW: What was commuting like um to your classes from your apartment?

155 RM: Um it's not too bad for me because I'm at the UIC Halsted stop, so I think it's UIC, then
156 Clinton, and the La Salle, which is where I get off. It's not too bad. It is a little hectic in the
157 mornings when there's the rush. So like, every single person in Chicago on the train. Um, and
158 you're like all just stuck in there, um. But it's pretty chill most of the time.

159 AW: Okay. How many classes were you taking before everything closed?

160 RM: I was taking five classes. I had fifteen credits.

161 AW: Okay. What has been the best part about living in Chicago?

162 RM: Um, there's always something to do I think. Uh, in my hometown, that wasn't the case.

163 There was nothing to do. Um and so when I moved here I was like, oh, I can just go to the park

164 or I could just go do something like all the time. There was always something to do. And

165 especially with Columbia, they gave us a lot of resources like with museums and different

166 events. So, yeah, there was always somewhere to go and like, see art which is great for me.

167 AW: What's been the best event in Chicago since moving here?

168 RM: Oh, um. I think my favorite thing that I'd done was my freshman year, my first semester, I

169 went and saw A View from the Bridge at the Goodman theater...I don't remember the directors

170 name but he had done it on Broadway the year before and it had won a Tony and it was the most

171 incredible show I've ever seen. It was so beautiful. And it was my favorite script so it was just

172 very fulfilling for me to see that, um, so that was I think my favorite thing that I've done.

173 AW: Well that sounds awesome.

174 RM: Yeah.

175 AW: Um, what has been the worst part about living in Chicago?

176 RM: Uh...I...Being really far from my family has been hard and especially since it's so expensive

177 for me to be here...I've been working like thirty hours a week up until this all started. So it was

178 really hard because I wouldn't be able to go home much because I couldn't leave work for that

179 much...for that long because I had to pay rent. Um, so I think just the cost of living and it being

180 so far from home is probably like the two big things that are the drawbacks for me.

181 AW: What has surprised you most about living in this city?

182 RM: I think what surprised me most is how easy I figured out like, where everything is. I think
183 like figuring out the train. I thought that was going to take so long for me to figure out, but it
184 really didn't. You just kind of get on and you get off and you transfer if you need to transfer. And
185 I'm not like as scared about crime as I should be, I think. Because I know that it is like a big
186 thing...and it's a big thing anywhere. But I thought I was going to be terrified all the time, but I'm
187 really not. I have got comfortable. I know where it's safe and where it's not, so yeah.

188 AW: That's good. Where do you think you're going to live after graduation?

189 RM: I would like to stay in Chicago for a little bit longer just because I do have...I don't feel like
190 my time here is quite finished yet. But after that, I would like to go somewhere warmer. It
191 doesn't necessarily have to be like a beach place, but just somewhere where the winters are a
192 little less, like long.

193 AW: When did you first hear about covid-19?

194 RM: I think my mom sent me like a Facebook article. I think that was the first time I heard about
195 it. She was like, you need to see this. Some girl in Chicago has like this virus. Or, whatever.

196 AW: When was that?

197 RM: It was probably in January.

198 AW: January, okay. What were your initial thoughts about it?

199 RM: I did not think it was a big deal even as it got to be more of a big deal. I was like, It's fine.
200 We're going to be fine guys. Like, it's just like, it's a facebook disease, is really what I thought it
201 was. I was like, it's fine. We're going to be fine.

202 AW: There were many rumors about Columbia cancelling classes before March. What was your
203 opinion on that at the time?

204 RM: I had a teacher who would bring up the Coronavirus at least every week of the semester.
205 And it, I, it made me really anxious. And so I would just like make a joke about it. Um, and I
206 remember he brought it up to me. He was the first person I'd heard that they'd gotten an email
207 from the university. It was like just talk to your students about it. It's not necessarily happening,
208 but just like talk about what that would look like. So we all just kind of talked about it. And I
209 remember that he said that he hadn't had a conversation with his students. Like, like of that
210 severity since 9/11 and that just like was when it changed for me like, like the severity of it was
211 when he said that and I was just like, Oh, no (laughs) that's serious.

212 AW: Yeah, gosh, tell me about your experience upon opening the initial email about Columbia's
213 canceled classes.

214 RM: I don't—I think I had to have been at work when I saw it because I remember telling people
215 at work and then I remember coming home and telling my roommate um so I think I had to have
216 been at work and I think that I was just, I really didn't expect Colombia to close so I was just
217 like, wow, like, I guess they care about us like that's kind of nice, but they like are like, Oh, don't
218 get sick. Y'all go home.

219 AW: So tell me about your job like right before COVID-19. What were their preparations for it?

220 RM: Um, we had been disinfecting like crazy like I had, we would like stand in the front of the
221 store with like bottles of alcohol and just like spray everything literally like a customer would
222 leave it would spray everything like we would, there was a rumor that someone that came into
223 our salon had been to China and like hadn't been tested or something so like we were disinfecting
224 everything we were going crazy and like, we were putting Jerm-x on all the time and just like
225 disinfecting everything we possibly could. And we had gotten like, emails from corporate office

226 that we had to disinfect all of our testers because it's a makeup store. We had to disinfect all of
227 our testers twice a day. So we were doing that and it was a lot.

228 AW: When did you become unemployed from Ulta?

229 RM: Um, I was still technically being paid and stuff. And I'm, up until like mid-March, I think.

230 And then they told us that we were going to like me and then other associates, we're going to be

231 furloughed, which essentially means that we can get unemployment benefits but once the store

232 reopens that we'll still have jobs so it's just like kind of like a temporary unemployment. But

233 yeah, I think I got told that again, mid March because I think I just got my last paycheck from

234 them this last week. So it had been like, three or four weeks before that.

235 AW: Okay. And what were your thoughts and feelings about that?

236 RM: I...um was just I kind of laughed. Like, I told my boss when she asked me like, How are you

237 feeling? I said, Well, you know, it's like the cards have been dealt. And that's what I keep telling

238 myself throughout this. Like, it's just the cards have been dealt, I really can't change that it's out

239 of my control all of this, so I really can't stress that much about it. Um. Yeah, that's kind of I just

240 was like, laughing. I was like, it's fine. Like, just one more thing. Like, it's cool, whatever. Added

241 on. I don't care at this point.

242 AW: Oh. What are your current living conditions like?

243 RM: Um they're okay. I'm just chilling in my apartment. I go out every once in a while to for

244 like a walk or to go get groceries. But yeah, I'm trying to like keep things clean, because

245 normally I only clean when people are coming over. And now it's just me, so I just need to keep

246 things clean for my sanity. Um, but yeah, it's been pretty okay.

247 AW: That's good. So you have roommates, how is your relationship different now than it was

248 before the shutdown?

249 RM: Um, before me and my roommates were uh like pretty close, and then two of them went
250 back home when the school shut down and the other one we just, her, I, her and I have like
251 different sleep schedules in the day. So like she's up at night and I'm up and during the day, so
252 it's just kind of like, it's like we're both living by ourselves, but we're living together.

253 AW: Did you take any precautions at home before the shutdown?

254 RM: Um, yeah, I went and got a bunch of groceries that I didn't need. I was like stocking up
255 because one of my roommates said, Well, what if they shut down the city and I said, Oh my
256 goodness. And so I went and got like a ton of groceries and like dry foods and stuff. And I would
257 disinfect like every single day now I don't do that as much but I still like do like a couple times a
258 week but like I was disinfecting every morning like it was a part of like my routine. Like while
259 my coffee was brewing I was like disinfecting the whole way.

260 AW: What financial worries do you have right now?

261 RM: um, I just applied for unemployment this last week, and I'm still waiting on that. But yeah,
262 it's hard just because I had like a steady job or I was making like, a decent amount of money and
263 I was like supporting myself. And I'm just really afraid about my tuition is really the only thing
264 that I've had to like, be like, Okay, I'm not saying this because like, I have to pay rent, and I have
265 to have groceries. So figuring out when I'm going to be able to finish off the rest of my payments
266 for the semester is really what's gonna, this just kind of weighing on me. Really. Yeah.

267 AW: Did you have any Spring Break plans before shut down and what were they?

268 RM: I did, I was going to go back home for the first, it's the first time for spring break that I've
269 gone home since I moved here, and I was so excited. And then that didn't happen. So yeah, but I
270 was gonna go back home.

271 AW: And how have you maintained contact with your family during this?

272 RM: Um, we do like FaceTime. And we'll do like Facebook group messages or like Facebook
273 group video chats. Yeah, and I—I've been writing letters with like my friends and stuff and I sent
274 all my niece and nephews like little Chicago postcards. So yeah, I'm just trying to like some
275 semblance of like communication and like what would be normal? Yeah.

276 AW: Right. What is quartin—uh quarantin? I read it wrong. What has quarantine like overall,
277 been like for you?

278 RM: Um, it was, I think I was in a deep state of denial for the first like, four or five weeks. In the
279 last couple of weeks it's really started to like weigh on me like the uncertainty of it all...and the,
280 just the severity and the like, reopening the news is like the worst part of my day like it just, it
281 makes me feel awful. And so I—I know I need to be informed but it's like how much information
282 do I need? Umm so yeah, I think trying to like weigh that has been rough. But I mean, I just keep
283 reminding myself that like these are the cards I've been dealt. I really can't control. I can only
284 control me. I can't control the situation.

285 AW: What are the news sources you use the most?

286 RM: Um, I stopped checking Twitter because it makes me feel awful and like I, the Coronavirus,
287 like trending whatever is usually like they'll post a bunch of like different news sources and I'll
288 like read those articles but those just make me feel awful. So I've just started to check like CNN
289 like in the mornings like I'll just like look, I'll just glance through because the headlines alone
290 just make my skin crawl so I try not to check the news as much because there is so much time I
291 feel like I should just be in the know but I think that it's not great for my mental health to know
292 too much.

293 AW: Right, right. What has been the hardest aspect of this quarantine?

294 RM: Um...I think maybe...I'm a really routine person I really love my routine and when I get out
295 of my routine I it takes its toll on me and I now that I have no routine, there's like nothing I
296 besides my zoom classes, which are going to end in the next couple of weeks. I don't really have
297 like a routine like I did, you know, like, I would get up, go to school, go to work, like I had, go
298 see my friends, like I had a routine and now there's, like, there's no normalcy. And that I think,
299 has been the hardest thing for me because I'm such a routine person.

300 AW: What has been a blessing during quarantine?

301 RM: Um, I, since I moved to the city, I, well when I was back in Texas, I used to song write a
302 lot. Like I would write lyrics all the time, and I would like I can't sing but I would like to sing
303 and now that there's like almost no one in my building. Like I feel like I can and no one's gonna
304 hear me. So I've gotten a lot back into songwriting. And I've a ukulele which I hate playing in
305 front of other people. I hate it. It makes me cringe. And so now that there's like not a ton of
306 people in my building, like I feel like I can play it. And so I think getting back into songwriting
307 and like just that has been like something that I really missed and like I've gotten to get back
308 during this time.

309 AW: That's really good. Have you gone out since stay at home policies began like aside from
310 grocery shopping?

311 RM: Um, I went on a walk a couple weeks ago that was like probably the longest amount of time
312 that I was outside like, I walked over to Taylor Street. Um, and like UIC campus and then I
313 walked to downtown like the Riverwalk, and it was it was a Sunday so it was obviously going to
314 be a little less crowded, but it was also you know, we're a stay at home order because we're in a
315 global pandemic so there was really no one out and it was just kind of scary seeing the city like

316 that. But no, I don't like go out and like see my friends or anything like on the low like, I'm like, I
317 like to follow the rules and so like I'm staying home.

318 AW: So how, how weird is it then when you go out to groceries or when you just go outside?
319 How weird is it to see the city so quiet and empty?

320 RM: Um. There's some times where it's quiet and empty I, I live in a neighborhood where it's a
321 lot of 30 something year olds and who all kind of think that they're immune. So they're all out all
322 the time doing their little jogs with their dogs and just kind of living life like it's normal. So it's
323 that's been really frustrating is I went to the park one day, or I walked through a park to go to one
324 of the grocery stores near here and it was filled. There was kids, there was people with their dogs
325 and there was just like a million people out and it was so frustrating to like, see that. And I'm
326 like, we're in a global pandemic, y'all like come on, like go home. Yeah, so I think that's been
327 frustrating. But when it is, like empty, it's really, it's like haunting like it's very scary to see a city
328 like that's normally so like, there's people out doing stuff all the time. And it's just like, no one
329 like I was able to sit at the Riverwalk, and there was like, not a single person like I didn't I could
330 literally like look every single direction and there was not a single person in my line of sight
331 which is crazy and living in a city.

332 AW: Right, right and there's no events anymore. So how does that affect your situation? Do you
333 like normally go to events? What's it like not having any?

334 RM: Um, yeah, it's kind of it's weird I, I'd gotten into like seeing more like, music like in shows
335 and stuff, right before all this happened and so not being able to do that has been. Um, it's like
336 sad. Like I follow a bunch of different venues on Instagram and like different small businesses,
337 um, and it's really hard to see them struggling during this time. It's just like, it sucks. Like, I

338 can't, I really can't do anything um...so yeah. It's really hard to see small businesses struggling. I
339 think that's the biggest thing for me.

340 AW: And how do you deal with feelings of depression? What are some coping skills that you
341 used to deal with anxiety from the virus?

342 RM: Um...sorry, what was the first part of the question?

343 AW: You're okay, um, how do you deal with feelings of depression?

344 RM: I'm not great, but I've, I've been going to counseling every semester at Columbia, since like
345 my freshman year. So my counselor and I finally like were able to get back in contact and her
346 and I started meeting we had like a meeting yesterday. And we're going to have meetings until
347 the semester ends. So I think that talking to her, she like makes me feel a lot better. She asked me
348 what I'm doing for self care. And then I say that I'm not doing anything. And then we talk about
349 what I do. And she's like, yeah, you are like, you're taking care of yourself like that's self care.
350 And then, in terms of like, anxiety, I really just I say it about 20 times a day, like just to myself
351 like these are the cards have been dealt, like, I cannot control the situation. I can only control
352 how I react to it. Um, But I mean, it's hard like I get behind in my classes because I'm so
353 disheartened by everything. I'm just like, what's the point? Like? I don't even know what the next
354 semester is gonna look like. I don't know what life is gonna look like, like, but I never know
355 what life is gonna look like. You never know what it's gonna look like. Regardless if there's a
356 global pandemic. You never know what's gonna happen. So I think just reminding myself that.

357 AW: Right, is this your second to last semester? Do you have one year left? Or what's your
358 current situation with that?

359 RM: The Fall semester will be my last semester.

360 AW: Okay, so the uncertainty is kind of an issue.

361 RM: Yeah.

362 AW: And you know, the graduation is going to be...

363 RM: Yeah.

364 AW: Okay.

365 RM: That yeah.

366 AW: So who do you talk to about these concerns?

367 RM: Um, my counselor and probably my mom like I, her, I went, well, we have moments where

368 we're like, really close and so I think that like right now, like I called her the other day, like I was

369 just and we just talked, she's also going through like dialysis for her like kidney issues and so

370 like, she was like getting a dialysis treatment and we were just like, on the phone talking about

371 like movies and stuff and so yeah, I think just like talking to her makes me like come back to

372 reality like I can get into my head and get so like, wrapped up in everything that's going on and

373 like she just kind of like grounds me talking to her. So I think that yeah.

374 AW: That's good.

375 RM: Yeah.

376 AW: Have you worked on any passion projects during this time? You want to tell me about

377 them?

378 RM: Um, I, there's some I like I was writing an essay about everything that's going on. I've kind

379 of dropped that off a little bit but um yeah, I feel like it's pretty hard for me to create right now to

380 be super productive. At least with like, like I just don't have the stamina to sit down and write

381 like an eight page essay right now like that's just not what I've been like capable of doing so I'm

382 doing a lot of smaller work like I'm writing a lot of songs and I'll just like write little sentences

383 and stuff and I'm doing a lot more like reading and stuff so that way I like have more inspiration

384 for when I can have the stamina to sit down and do like a whole project but there's a lot of little
385 things that are happening but not like a big like, this is my Coronavirus, like, work everyone.
386 Here you go.

387 AW: What's it like, um, balancing the school work now with your finals coming up in like a few
388 weeks, and then you also have like this whole pandemic going on, what's that like?

389 RM: Um, It's been okay, I've never been great at time management and now I have too much
390 time and so I don't know how to spend it. Um, and so it's been hard trying to like prioritize, like,
391 Okay, this is the time that I need to do schoolwork. And this is the time that I can, you know,
392 read and write and do whatever. Like, I have to just like make sure that I'm getting my work
393 done, which is just hard because I'm, again, like, what's the point like, but um yeah, I think that
394 prioritizing my time has been probably my biggest struggle with all with everything that's going
395 on with like, in terms of my schoolwork.

396 AW: Gotcha. What are some of your goals that you have for yourself during isolation?

397 RM: Um...sorry, give me a second...

398 AW: You're okay.

399 RM: I think what, my, one of my biggest goals was to start, like journaling more and reading
400 more. And I think that's something that I've been doing. I feel like I don't have time to like read
401 for pleasure, at least when, you know, life is just coming at me like a million miles a second. So
402 I'm like, during this time, I've been able to like read a lot more. Um, and yeah, I think that that's
403 really been like, my biggest goal for myself, just in general was to read more, and I think that
404 I've been doing that because of isolation.

405 AW: Yeah, that's good. Um, how are you keeping busy or entertained at this time?

406 RM: Um, I, like everyone else. I'm watching everything on like streaming services. I'm watching
407 the show Barry right now on Hulu. It makes me, I think I'm just watching stuff that makes me
408 laugh. Because it's so hard to laugh during the stuff but I think that it's important to just like, I
409 make jokes all the time. Like I'm a very like, funny like, person. Like I like to make jokes and I
410 like to hear jokes and so I just watch like comedies and stuff because they make me laugh.

411 AW: How has the pandemic changed your relationship with your parents?

412 RM: Um, I don't know if it's changed too much. My dad has reached out a little bit more than he
413 usually does. Because just because we're not like, super like, Hey, how are you? How's it going
414 like, that, in, recently like he'll, he'll check up on me. He asked how I was doing the other day
415 and I was like bad. And we kind of talked about it a little bit. He sent me like a Kacey Musgraves
416 song and I bawled my eyes out. So yeah, I think that it's made me a little bit more. Like we'll
417 communicate more purposefully now, like, we will actually, like reach out instead of just like,
418 oh, here's the thing I saw on Facebook.

419 AW: Yeah, that's good. That's nice, huh? How are you and your professors communicating?

420 RM: Um...uh...Via email. I'll email them and be like, Hey, sorry, I didn't turn in these
421 assignments. I was depressed. Um, uh like yesterday, I had to email Dr. McCarthy be like, Hey,
422 sorry, I didn't go to class yesterday, I didn't wake up until I'm good. My mental health has ruined
423 my sleep schedule. So sorry. Um, but yeah, like it's just I think just having like an open dialogue
424 with them about what's going on with me. Because like I have to because it's not like, I'm going
425 to see them in class, I have to be like, hey, like, this is what's going on. And this is why this stuff
426 is happening. So yeah, I think it's more important for me to communicate with them now, but it
427 was when I like wasn't seeing them, you know, like, once a week.

428 AW: Okay, that makes sense. Um, how do you think your life will change once quarantine/self
429 isolation is lifted?

430 RM: Oh, man, I'm gonna be so much more active and like, do so many more things. I feel like
431 I'm such a homebody. And now I'm like, I don't want to see the inside of my home. I'm like, I'm
432 a very independent person, and I'm very introverted. And so I like to spend a lot of time alone
433 and I'm going to be like, out doing stuff. I'm going to be out every single night going and doing
434 stuff making friends being like just living life like to the max I think and I think that's how
435 everyone's gonna want to feel. Um...But I don't see that hap—I don't think it's just gonna be like,
436 okay, everything's open. Like, it's definitely going to be like a gradual thing. But I think I'm
437 gonna, again try to like go to small businesses more than I do like big corporations just because I
438 saw how much like they struggled with everything. So I think that, you know, like, things like
439 that, like small changes to my life, like that, like, making a conscious effort to be less like
440 consumerist, I think. Yeah.

441 AW: From your news sources and like your personal like, views that you like what you've
442 encountered during this pandemic? When do you think things are going to open again?

443 RM: Um, I think that it'll probably be slow. I think that I was reading something from I think it
444 was the governor of California and he was like, talking to different phases and I think it's gonna
445 be like a phase sort of thing. Like, I think they're gonna open restaurants but it's like, you can't
446 carry out or like, I seen a lot of places do, like Texas just reopened. And they're at 25% capacity
447 for a lot of locations. And I think that's how it'll go. It'll probably be like 25% occupancy, and
448 then like 50%. And then, but I really don't think that anything should fully open until we have a
449 vaccine. And that's probably not gonna happen for like, at least a year. But I don't know, uh
450 science. They can, they, I think they've been working on antibodies and stuff. So maybe that

451 could open things up. By the fall. I don't really know. Um, but I'm just kind of taking every day
452 as it comes. Because I don't know. But I hope that in the next like, year, we'll have some sort of
453 normalcy, but I'm not expecting too much.

454 AW: Yeah. Um, well, let me figure out how to rephrase this question. How do you think the
455 pandemic is going to affect the rest of your academic career? What are your fears?

456 RM: I'm really afraid that Colombia's not going to open in the fall, which is kind of a double
457 edged sword for me, because one, I wouldn't like, the last time I saw my teachers and everything
458 was going to be the last time that I've ever seen them. But also I could go back home and not
459 have to worry about Chicago rent or having a job and like I could really just focus on my studies
460 for my last semester. Um...So yeah, it's really just kind of like, I think that's my biggest concern
461 is whether they're gonna be open in the fall because that's my last semester. And I know that if
462 you try to take time off of Columbia, which I think a lot of students are going to do, um
463 Columbia, you, you don't get your scholarships, if you break your education, if you like, take a
464 break in your education. Like if you take a semester off, you lose your scholarships, and I don't
465 think a lot of people realize that. Um, And like Columbia will make an exception, but I don't
466 think they'll make the exception if you know, like 2000 students are like, I don't want to go here,
467 like this semester, you know, so um. Yeah.

468 AW: What do you want to do after you graduate from Columbia?

469 RM: Um, I, I'm not sure just with everything that's going on, I would like to be a writer. But I
470 think I would like to write for like a magazine or something before I could come out with like a
471 book. I couldn't maybe freelance. I'm not really sure. I think I want to get a little bit more into
472 editing and publishing as well. My, my thoughts are kind of open with everything. I'm pretty

473 open to any career path right now. I've been thinking about grad school like it's just kind of all i
474 don't have like a set plan for post graduation quite yet.

475 AW: Right? What are you, Why are you interested in freelancing, what interests you about it?

476 RM: Um, I think that it gives me like freedom to because if I freelance I can kind of work
477 wherever and I think that's something that's always interested me like I don't have to, you know,
478 sign like a year lease and live in this place and like, go to work every day. It can just kind of be
479 up to me. I like would be my own boss. Like, that sounds nice. And I think just kind of making
480 my own rules, the amount of freedom that it comes with scares me. But I don't know, I think it
481 sounds like something I could, I could potentially sustain and make a living off of.

482 AW: what kind of topics and freelancing do you think you would be more prone to write about?

483 RM: I really, I've in the last semester, I've gotten really into writing about music. I think I would
484 like to do like music reviews or book reviews, um or event reviews if there are events ever again.
485 That, Yeah, I think that writing about music has probably been like what I wanted to do the most.

486 AW: Okay, and how do you think the pandemic might affect these goals?

487 RM: Um, I think it will postpone them, if anything. Ah, yeah, I'm not really sure how
488 anything's gonna work. Um like, I don't know. If just because everyone. There's so many
489 companies that have gone fully online like I don't know how they're going to be able to be like,
490 Okay, come to this office and work nine to five. Like, I don't know how they're going to do that
491 anymore because we've shown that it's not like we can do without it. So I don't really I have no
492 idea how anything's gonna work.

493 AW: Right. How have online classes changed your educational value?

494 RM: I have realized that I'm not an online learner. There are some people that they thrive on it
495 and that's great for them. I am not. I need the responsibility of seeing my teacher every day and

496 seeing their disappointed face when I don't do my homework and on time. I need like that in
497 person communication. Um like, Yeah, I just I need face to face I need to just like sit and talk
498 with my teachers and I need to, and like with my like, like, peers like I like, like they inspire me
499 more than I think anything like is just hearing like, what other people are doing, how other
500 people feel about work. And I think that just like the community, I miss, And I think that I'm
501 like, Yeah, I miss like the community of learning.

502 AW: What are your thoughts on potential tuition reimbursement?

503 RM: I have lots of thoughts. Um, I think that we should be reimbursed because it's not the same.
504 I didn't pay I'm not paying for an online education. I'm paying for an in person experience. And
505 that's not what I'm getting. I understand that they, like colleges don't have the money to just like
506 reimburse, like I get it. But I've heard some schools say that they'll reimburse for, you know,
507 Student Activity fees or different things that we're not using anymore. Like, I'm not using my U-
508 pass anymore. I would like to be reimbursed for that. Like it's different things like that, like the
509 recreation fees, like there's so many little fees that, for things that we can't have access to. So I
510 think that I it's unrealistic to expect them to reimburse us for the whole semester for them to
511 reimburse us like 50% but like, some reimbursement would be nice.

512 AW: And how would a reimbursement help you with your education? I know you mentioned
513 earlier that you're struggling a little bit with the finances?

514 RM: I have lots of thoughts. I think that we shouldn't be reimbursed because it's not the same. I
515 didn't pay I'm not paying for an online education. I'm paying for an in person experience. And
516 that's not what I'm getting. Um, I understand that they, like colleges don't have the money to just,
517 like, reimburse like, I get it. But I've heard some school say that they'll reimburse for, you know,
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519 pass anymore. I would like to be reimbursed for that. Like it's different things like that, like the
520 recreation fees, like there's so many little fees, but for things that we can't have access to. So I
521 think that it's unrealistic to expect them to reimburse us for the whole semester for them to
522 reimburse us like 50%. But like, some reimbursement would be nice.

523 AW: And how would a reimbursement help you with your education? I know you mentioned
524 earlier that you're struggling a little bit with the finances.

525 RM: Yeah, I think that, um, right now it doesn't sorry, there's a fly in the room. I think that it?
526 Sorry, could you repeat the question?

527 AW: Yeah, I was gonna say, um, so if they Columbia decide to tuition reimbursed, how might
528 that affect you with your financial situation at Columbia?

529 RM: Right. I think that it would help because that's my only debt right now is that I have like an
530 outstanding balance on my tuition for this semester. And if that was just like, a wash, that would
531 be great. Like, I wouldn't have this like extra worry on me, because I'm worried about it, like,
532 getting up to like my fall when I started to paying the fall payments, and so I think yeah, it would
533 be it would be a big burden lifted off, for sure.

534 AW: What do you wish Columbia did better in regards to the pandemic?

535 RM: I think that the way that all universities handled it was kind of weird because They, they
536 said, Okay, everyone stay put. And then they were like, Okay, everyone go home like everyone's
537 like, move and go do things like everyone leave. And that was just weird to me. Like, I get that
538 having a bunch of people in the dorms or whatever is not healthy. But also I just I don't know, I
539 honestly like I have no idea how they could have handled it better because these are
540 unprecedented times. So I think being I think some schools were like, charging people for if they
541 had to stay in the dorms like they couldn't have access to home. Like, I think that that's

542 something that all schools should have done is like given housing to those who like there's
543 international students like they just can't like, go home. Like, are they? I guess they had to, but I
544 think that wasn't fair. And I think that all schools should have given emergency housing to those
545 who couldn't just, you know, go home. So yeah, I think that's the one thing that I really think that
546 would have shown compassion for students. But other than that, like these are unprecedented
547 times. I've no idea how they I could have handled this differently.

548 AW: Right? What would you like to say to Columbia's President Kim, if you can say anything?

549 RM: Um...I think just that I think that I, it wasn't fair, because we're not all in the same situation.
550 Some people, they can't get the same experience learning at home that they can in school. And I
551 think being given the choice if they wanted to go home or to stay, I think that that's what I would
552 have wanted. If it were me, like if I lived on the dorms, I would have wanted to stay in the dorms
553 because I don't get the same experience learning at home that I would have in like my own space.
554 And some people just don't have the resources to, you know, move back across the country. And
555 I think that that wasn't fair to for students to do that.

556 AW: What do you think the government did? Well, as far as the pandemic goes,

557 RM: I'm...not I think our state government has done I think that our governor and has done a lot
558 of good things. federally, I don't think so I think that there should have been so much more done
559 earlier. And there's a lot of reasons why I think that wasn't done. But I think that that's what's
560 held us back in terms of like other countries, because I think that other countries are so on top of
561 testing and contact tracing. And that's the only way that we're going to be able to, like, slow this
562 down or stop this without a vaccine. And I think that that's something that our federal
563 government is lacking.

564 AW: But I think that state governments have really stepped up and I think that some states, I
565 think, has really stepped up and, you know, taking care of their citizens more so than the federal
566 government.

567 AW: What would you like to tell leaders in the federal government like what would you wish
568 that they would have done?

569 RM: Well, I wish that they would have listened to scientists and not made this a political issue. I
570 think that that politicizing this whole event is I think the biggest downfall of our government.
571 Because it's not a political issue. It's an issue of like health and communities and like, I think the
572 economy is being taken more severely than the citizens. And that's really disheartening to watch.
573 So I think that telling them that like human lives are more important than the economy is
574 probably what I would like to say.

575 AW: Hmm, what are your thoughts on the stimulus check?

576 RM: I got mine I love it. I think that I need more I think we I think need people need more
577 though because I'm just like one person. But even then, that's like a pretty big chunk of my rent.
578 Like that's, that covers my rent, almost. Like, I think I'd have like \$300 left after that. If that was
579 what I was using my rent for. And I'm just like one person, there's other people that would have
580 to use that to take care of other people and I think that it Wasn't it? I don't think it was enough.
581 And especially it wasn't enough if there's not a rent freeze or mortgage freeze.

582 AW: Right, right. So some of the smaller businesses have also been able to receive a sense of
583 stimulus check for their business. What's your opinion on that?

584 RM: I think that's great. I think that they have to be able to pay their employees and be
585 able to keep their business open. I don't think that corporations should have gotten a stimulus

586 check which I know that they did. I think that all that money should go to small businesses who
587 can't sustain themselves, like independently, which is why they're small business.

588 AW: Right. So what are your thoughts on the thousands upon thousands who had to file for
589 unemployment? How do you think that might affect the future?

590 RM: Um, I have no idea. I am one of those thousands of thousands and i don't know i think it
591 was really hard for my personally it was really hard for my pride. I kept putting it off because I
592 was like, I'm I will I will worker I've always been Working and so it was really part of my pride
593 to like, apply for unemployment. And I think that I don't even I don't know how that's gonna
594 affect things I don't really know much about the economy and how that stuff works but
595 I can't imagine it's good.

596 AW: Right? Right. How do you feel about your personal future?

597 RM: I have no idea I think that I'm, I'm doing work that's gonna benefit me in the future like I'm
598 taking care of myself. I'm still working on things and I'm, I'm learning still, which I think is
599 going to be good for the future, whatever that looks like. But yeah, I really have no i think that
600 this is really taken any expectations I have for the future and just like out the window like I have
601 no idea. I Yes.

602 AW: What are you most looking forward to when Ulta opens again?

603 RM: I'm...quitting Yeah.

604 AW: Why?

605 RM: I, I wasn't liking my job before and I...but I just I, yeah, I like I think that
606 I have I have enough money to cover the rest of my lease. So I don't think I'll return once
607 everything opens up, but I yeah, I just don't I'm not a fan of working for a big corporation

608 anymore. I don't think I think it was good when I wasn't financially secure. And but now that I
609 am I don't think that I'll go back.

610 AW: So what would be the alternative? Instead of going back to Ulta? Where would you work or
611 what would you do?

612 RM: If the school doesn't open up, I'll probably move back home and find some sort of things are
613 open in Texas so I could get a job if I had to, which I would have to. So I think that Yeah, like
614 working for a small business, which is what I would rather do like the benefits and things aren't
615 as great. But I think that it's, it's really more about like, my character now like, I think that this is
616 really shaken, like my values in terms of like businesses, I think is what the pandemic is done.
617 And I'm like, I want to work for a small business. I don't want to work for like a big corporation
618 anymore.

619 AW: You tell me more about those values. What are they?

620 RM: I think that big corporations don't need all the money that they have. I think that's not fair.
621 And especially if they're not gonna compensate their workers more with all the money that they
622 have. And I think that, like I've seen so many small businesses like open up like GoFundMe for
623 their employees, not even for them, but for their employees to like, help them sustain like a life.
624 And I think that's incredible. Like, I think that the way that small businesses like they genuinely
625 care about their employees, and with big corporations that sometimes feels like you're just like a
626 number. And, yeah, I don't like feeling that way. So I think that, and I don't like that other people
627 have to feel that way. So yeah.

628 AW: So a lot of big corporations like Amazon, Target, Walmart and grocery stores. They've all
629 stayed open, what would you like to say to some of those CEOs?

630 RM: First, I would like to say redistribute the wealth. But in terms of what's happening right
631 now, I think that it's not like if they're going to expect their employees to be working, they have
632 to be working. I saw someone had an interview with the mayor of Las Vegas, and he was asking
633 if she was going to go out and work in the casinos if she's expecting other people to do it. And I
634 think that's exactly right. Like, I think if Jeff Bezos was going to expect people to go out and risk
635 their health and their lives, like working in factories or working delivery that he shouldn't be
636 working.

637 AW: Mm hmm. That makes sense. Um, what aspects of life did you take from Granted before
638 the virus?

639 RM: um, I think just like going to like a coffee shop or going to the movies or like everything I
640 think I took for granted like just like being able to interact with people like I missed when I
641 would go to the store and like make small talk with like the grocery people like because I'm from
642 Texas and I have to do that everywhere I go talk to people and I miss just doing that like I miss at
643 work I miss like my regulars who would come in and I miss just like going to work.
644 So yeah, I think I just I miss human interaction. I think that's what I missed the most.

645 AW: What was the most significant change in your life due to the virus?

646 RM: Um, I went from working 30 hours a week at Ulta and then taking, like being student full
647 time at Columbia to like absolutely nothing. And I had a lot of like, social life stuff to deal with.
648 It was just like it all was gone like I had. I went from having no time to all the time and I think
649 that was the biggest like shock to me like I hadn't I kept being like, Oh, I wish life would just like
650 pause for a second and now I'm like, nevermind, resume resume, everything was the first thing
651 you're going to do once all of this is over. I'm gonna go hug my friends and my family. Like I'm
652 gonna get on a plane and just like go hug my friends and family because I miss them. Yeah, but

653 in terms of like, realistically, I will probably just like go sit in a coffee shop or something like
654 just something normal.

655 AW: Yeah, may 1 is tomorrow and summer is quickly approaching however, we're at the height
656 of this pandemic. So how do you think this will affect your plans for the summer?

657 RM: Well, my plans for the summer were already like thrown out the window. I had a subletter
658 for my apartment for the rest of the summer and she pulled out so I'm going to be in Chicago for
659 the summer most likely. And yeah, it's just I was really excited. I turned 21 this weekend. And so
660 I was like, so excited to have my first summer in Chicago where I'm 21. And like, I can go out
661 and do stuff. And now that's all gone. So yeah, I don't really know what my expectations for the
662 summer I think just like, I want to like write a lot more because I haven't been. So I think just
663 like holding myself, people like, Okay, I know, I don't feel creative, but I have to be creative,
664 like, so I think. Yeah, just doing that.

665 AW: Okay. And what is your biggest takeaway from this pandemic?

666 RM: Um, I think that I was talking to a friend about this. I was like that I think that the human
667 spirit is really shown, which is so cheesy, but I think that people really are just like being kind to
668 each other. And I think that's so important and so needed after everything that's going on. I'm
669 like, getting emotional but I think, yeah, I think everyone's just being really kind to each other.
670 And I think that that's what's been lacking in the world is just like kindness and empathy. And I
671 think that this has brought that back, which is, I mean, a double edged sword like, of course,
672 we're losing people every day and that sucks, but like, I think we just need people to be kind.
673 And I think that kindness is really shown in everyone, which is nice.

674 AW: What are your thoughts on the air cleanliness? I guess that has come about from less
675 pollution. I love it. It makes me so happy when I see like people will post like, I think

676 Yellowstone Park like the animals are like out and doing stuff which is just like incredible. I
677 think that's like it's really just humans but like mess everything up with
678 the world and it's just nice to see like nature coming back to life when we're all we all feel like
679 dead. We all feel like just like zombies walking around and like, but they're still like life and
680 stuff going on.

681 AW: Yeah, what do you hope people takeaway from all this, that changes in our society once
682 this is over.

683 RM: I sincerely hope that this radicalizes every single American and every single working
684 American, because I think that we've all seen how different corporations have handled this and
685 how our government has handled this. And I just hope that this wakes everyone up. And I hope
686 that this shows everyone that the consumer capitalistic, like society we live in, especially in
687 America is just like, not sustainable. And
688 I think that we've seen how other countries have handled it, or at least I have, and I am impressed
689 with them. And it's, I would like to see this like radicalize Americans to see that we need change,
690 especially with like climate and everything like even if we survive this Coronavirus, like climate
691 change is still such a big concern. And I think that this, I hope that this will radicalize people to
692 see that.

693 AW: So the 2020 elections are still as far as I know, continuing So what are you hoping to see
694 from that?

695 RM: Um, well, if this is still going on, I hope that they do mail in ballots, because people
696 shouldn't have to choose between their life and their vote or their health or their vote.

697 AW: But yeah, I hope that people see how our current federal government has handled things.

698 And I hope that people I hope, I hope people vote not like on I hope that there's not a lot of one
699 party issue voters, which I know that is the case for a lot of things, but I hope people see I hope
700 people look at plans and not at Parties.

701 AW: Huh, that makes sense. All right. Well, that concludes all of my questions, but there is
702 there any additional information or anything that is like weighing on your mind that you want to
703 talk about?

704 RM: Um, no, I think that's it. I think I said, I think I talked too much.

705 AW: Okay, well, I don't think you did, but okay. Well, thank you. I actually really enjoyed this
706 and I appreciate your willingness to partake in this interview with me. So, so this concludes the
707 interview for oral history project capturing quarantine 2020.

708 RM: Yay.