



Interview of Lawson McGrain

Interviewer: Makeda Duncan

Makeda Duncan: All right. This is an interview under the oral history project entitled Capturing Quarantine. My name is Makeda Duncan, and I will be interviewing, would you like to introduce yourself?

Lawson McGrain: Uh, I'm Lawson McGrain.

Makeda Duncan: And he will be our narrator. Today's date is May 3, 2020. Um, I am currently in Chicago, Illinois and Lawson, where are you?

Lawson McGrain: I'm in Olathe, Kansas.

Makeda Duncan: Um, can you tell me your year of birth? Lawson

McGrain: Yeah, I was born in 2000.

Makeda Duncan: And what year of college are you in right now?

Lawson McGrain: Sophomore expecting to graduate in 2022.

Makeda Duncan All right. And what's your major?

Lawson McGrain: Film.

Makeda Duncan: And, um, where were you born?

Lawson McGrain: I was born in Topeka, Kansas.

Makeda Duncan: And where were you raised?

Lawson McGrain: Uh, here in Olathe.

Makeda Duncan: So, we're going to start out, um, I would like to. I would like you to describe your childhood home.

Lawson McGrain: -- Well, I was, for the first five years of my life. I grew up in a ranch in Topeka, Kansas. Um, and I don't remember a lot of it because we moved when I was five. But,

31 um, I remember having a lot of fun there. With you know, we had a big open like, finished
32 basement. Um, and when I was a toddler, I really liked to swing so I had a swing set in the
33 backyard. And I had a swing in the basement, because I was light enough to, you know, have one
34 connected to like the ceiling that I could swing on. And I liked to listen to. I like to listen to Elvis
35 and just swing. So I have a lot of memories of my dad pushing me on a swing in our basement or
36 in our backyard. Um, other than that, I don't really remember it a whole lot. I remember that the
37 backyard was really huge. And there would be a lot of times where we would like in the
38 afternoons or so, we would go out and just see like big air balloons, kind of like floating over us.
39 Um-- but I mean, that's really it. I remember really enjoying my childhood there but I would say
40 probably a lot of maybe more of like the formative years of my life I spent in this house that I'm
41 in right now in Kansas City.

42
43 Makeda Duncan: So, growing up, who was usually in your home? Who did you live with?

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45 Lawson McGrain: I'm an only child. So it was just me and my mom and dad. Both of the
46 neighborhoods that I lived in in my childhood like didn't have a lot of kids. And then so I just
47 kind of had my imagination to keep me company. But yeah, it was just, it was just me and my
48 parents.

49
50 Makeda Duncan: Fast forwarding to high school, what activities did you take part in either at
51 school like an extracurricular or in your free time at home with friends?

52
53 Lawson McGrain: In high school?

54 Makeda Duncan: Um-hm.

55 Lawson McGrain: Well, the first the first half of it. I was really committed to athletics. So um I
56 played football and I wrestled. And I you know I worked out in the weight room every day. But I
57 really had I, really had kind of a passion for acting like that's what I wanted to do. So it kind of
58 took me a couple of years to try and balance wanting to do both. I felt pretty committed to my
59 relationship with like the athletic department at my high school. But I, I did really, really want to
60 kind of get involved with our theater department um and start, you know, doing plays and stuff
61 there. So it was really difficult to try and do both. And then when I kind of realized that I couldn't
62 really do both that I couldn't give, I had to give all of my attention to kind of one thing. As
63 opposed to try and like to give half of my attention to each I um, just had to kind of wean off
64 athletics and I started doing theater. And that became me, like favorite thing about high school
65 was doing productions there and an acting like doing we had an improv an improv troupe. That
66 we would perform on Sundays, like in a, like a small comedy venue in KC. And that was
67 something that I always looked forward to. So that you know that was most of my
68 extracurriculars.

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70 Makeda Duncan: So did, did that affect your decision in wanting to go to Columbia College?
71
72 Lawson McGrain: Um, it did. Because well, primarily, it was, film that drew me to Columbia. I
73 knew they had a good film program and a lot of resources available. But acting, acting was
74 something that, you know, I'd really enjoy doing and didn't necessarily want to give up. But I
75 wouldn't say acting was like the primary, the main thing that brought me to Columbia. It was.
76 Yeah, it was mostly just interested in film.
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78 Makeda Duncan: How did you learn about Columbia? Where did you first hear about it?
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80 Lawson McGrain: One of my one of my best friends in high school. We used to make a lot of
81 shorts together and stuff. And he's, he was a year above me and uh he told me about it because
82 he was thinking he was going to go to Columbia too and it's actually where he ended up going to
83 college. So I followed him there.
84
85 Makeda Duncan: And what, when you first arrived at Columbia, um just fresh out of high
86 school, what were your expectations? What did you think like, what was your perfect plan at that
87 time?
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89 Lawson McGrain: Perfect plan. Well upon getting into Columbia and it was awesome. I'd only
90 been to Chicago. Three times, maybe two times before move in. So it was, it was really, you
91 know, kind of awe inspiring the idea that I could just like have free time to explore the city um,
92 the amount of resources that Columbia had was, or has, was really exciting. Just as someone that
93 has never really been around like a lot of um equipment and stuff like that like back in high
94 school, and we would make shorts and stuff. We just had, you know, some like DSLR cameras
95 but that's really it. You know, um we didn't have a lot of crazy like lighting and sound
96 equipment. So just being able to work with all that was really, really exciting. And um yeah, it
97 was just, it was just really. I mean, it just seemed like a lot of opportunity was just kind of you
98 know, had been set in motion so that was, that was just a really exciting thing for me to just be
99 there and get to.
100
101 Makeda Duncan: So, how did you expect your lifestyle to change from going to your going from
102 your hometown to living in Chicago? I know you mentioned it a little bit. But what were like the
103 biggest changes that you noticed in the things you did?
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105 Lawson McGrain: Well, certainly there's a lot more walking. I mean, it's not a bad thing, but um
106 you know I wouldn't, I wouldn't say that where I lived before, and like where I live now, which
107 is the same place, but I wouldn't say it's rural. But the city itself is just so spaced out that a car is

kind of a necessity to live here. You can't really get around by just walking and like public transportation is just kind of central to the city. So when you get, to kind of the like suburb cities like suburban areas. The public transportation doesn't really extend out that way. So like a car is a big necessity here um so not needing a car was kind of a really cool thing, at least for me. I mean I like driving, but just being able to walk places and um I feel like you kind of perceive more of the environment that's around you. So that's really great. And then, you know, there's the there's the side of, excuse me, um just being more independent like the first time you're really kind of living on your own and figuring out you know how to support yourself. Again, as an only child, it's not really, I don't really have any problems or any anxiety that comes with really being alone or just like with myself. But you know, without having the I guess support from your parents that like when you need stuff. That just living on your own was an interesting you know, someone, you have to feed yourself and you have to be responsible for your own groceries and getting stuff done. It was kind of a transition for me that was it was it was meaningful and it was good just to become a more independent person.

Makeda Duncan: So I know you mentioned that you are an only child. Um, how did living on your own, coming to Chicago. How did that either impact your relationship with your parents: strengthen or weaken it?

Lawson McGrain: Um yeah it. I think it strengthened it for I mean, yeah, I think it's strengthened it. There like kind of a little bit before I moved out, I think things might have been getting like a little tense just because I think both my parents and I were just kind of ready for you know, the ship to sail. But then I think after a bit you know we were talking like every, you know, we'd have like a weekly call where we talked for a couple hours and just catch up with each other. And I think that made you know, when I'd come home and make that a lot more meaningful, because it would be time we were able to spend together. And um just the fact that it could be hard for um visits to happen during the school year without, like a break or like a long weekend. Um, I think kind of having that that extra distance kind of made the time we do get to spend together a lot more valuable for both of us.

Makeda Duncan: So what was um like, um sorry, what was your college life like pre-Coronavirus issues? Like what, just describe, maybe a week or a day in your life. Just average activities.

Lawson McGrain: Um, well, I tried to keep pretty busy with school or I should say school did its job to keep me pretty busy. But other than that, I was pretty close. I mean, I was really close with my roommates this past year. So um you know, when we weren't, or I guess when I wasn't like swamped with school work I do my best to kind of spend time with them and you know. Just kind of share the things that we enjoy like music and movies and stuff.

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148 Makeda Duncan: So what kind of um on campus groups or extracurriculars, were you taking part
149 in?

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151 Lawson McGrain: Well, I don't, I don't know if it uh I don't know if the campus really associates
152 itself with um The Black Sheep, but it was a fun thing I learned about through school. Because a
153 lot of people like a lot of the people that work that I worked with on it were Columbia students
154 on campus. And just getting the word about it through them early my freshman year. And The
155 Black Sheep was just kind of a satirical news source that you know, like to kind of talk about or
156 you know, poke fun at some of the stuff that was going on campus. So just kind of having that
157 creative outlet. Like my my role in it was you know making like video skits or sketches like on
158 the street videos um for them. So that was, that was really all that I did outside of school in terms
159 of like extracurricular activities.

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161 Makeda Duncan: Um did you have any extracurriculars or outside activities relating to your
162 acting career?

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164 Lawson McGrain: Um, yeah, yeah, yeah. One of my video manager for The Black Sheep and
165 one of our social team members wrote a musical this past summer that was about firefighters.
166 And one of the writers got a grant to put it on for their senior showcase. So this past fall I
167 auditioned for that and we put that on in less than two or three months. So that was a really
168 exciting thing to do. And was such a, you know, we had such a short time to put it up and you
169 know, get a performance out of it that rehearsals were pretty intensive and you know we had a
170 lot to do. But it was amazing and paid off. And it was definitely one of the more rewarding
171 things that I've done at Columbia.

172
173 Makeda Duncan: So since the shutdown of school a lot of on-campus activities have come to a
174 halt. So, um, with your involvement in The Black Sheep. How have the leaders of that group
175 accommodated to the situation with being at home, what's changed?

176
177 Lawson McGrain: Well obviously we don't we don't do video stuff anymore, which was my kind
178 of um that was my area so. We had plans to do a St. Patrick's Day video that's and that was kind
179 of an annual thing for us. But that's right when the pandemic kind of all started to hit but that was
180 still at a stage where things were kind of up in the air, you know, and whether or not it was really
181 safe to be out or not. Um, and they canceled the parade. But I at least was still pretty sure that
182 there would still be people you know in Grant Park trying to party and stuff. Um so I went there
183 with a camera just in case, just to see what you did anything that had been cleared out already.

184 No one was there. And then I think we made maybe one like quarantine video right right before
185 um they canceled classes and, um, or postponed classes and issued the move outs. But then after
186 that, yeah, there hasn't been any really anything going on in video and then social [media] team
187 has still been pretty active on social media and stuff. But that's kind of their own thing and I don't
188 really take part in any of that.

189
190 Makeda Duncan: So, um, you were just talking about your plans to film being, well, dampened.
191 What was your initial reaction when you learned about the corona virus outbreak? What did you
192 think about the situation?

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194 Lawson McGrain: When I first heard about it. It was probably a couple weeks before they
195 postponed classes. And it was, it was kind of a -- Well I, I actually the first time I heard about it,
196 it was on Instagram and it was in like a meme format and I saw, I just saw the word like
197 "COVID-19" and I had no idea what that even meant. So I just passed it off as, like, you know,
198 just another like another meme that was, I was going to be seeing a lot of here soon. And then
199 just wasn't gonna see a lot anymore and then learning about what it actually was just from news
200 sources and stuff. Um it it became, yeah definitely caught my attention more and was a little
201 concerning. And again, this is where it was maybe a couple of weeks before they postponed
202 classes. And it was, wasn't immediately scary to me. Just because there was so much confusion
203 about what it was and what its severity was. Like at the time I had read the, you know, wasn't
204 like lethality wasn't even remotely as high as like Ebola was or like as widespread so I wasn't
205 really cautious about it. Um, and then maybe a week later, after there was news about some cases
206 on Columbia's campus, I had a teacher that put up a global map of monitored cases all over the
207 world. And just seeing some of those numbers kind of made me realize how um severe this
208 whole situation was.

209
210 Makeda Duncan: I think it's interesting that you bring up that the first time you learned about it
211 was in a meme in a comedic platform. And so I'm wondering what ways did the media either like
212 social media, which isn't necessarily formal news outlets. Uh, how did social media and formal
213 news outlets impact your viewpoint of the situation?

214
215 Lawson McGrain: Uh, yeah, I don't know. I don't know if it really impacted my viewpoint, as
216 much as it just like muddled it because I think with, you know, with when you have things like
217 memes and you have, uh I don't know, just the way the kitchen sink that is Twitter. I think
218 there's just so much noise coming out of every you know, outlet that there is and it can just make
219 things really, really confusing. Um, and I think initially, that's kind of how I felt about this whole
220 thing. I had no idea. I didn't know if I should be taking it seriously or not, because there was just
221 so much that was being said about it. But I was just more confused than anything else um about
222 what it was uh. So I yeah, I just, it wasn't until I really kind of looked at what the CDC [Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention] was saying about it and then eventually when it got into, you know, like quarantine. Uh, you know, procedure that I kind of started to understand how this, I mean, how bad this was.

Makeda Duncan: And so, when you were in school, how did your teachers bring up the issue in class? You said one teacher showed a map. What were the other things teachers did?

Lawson McGrain: Yeah, there was there was definitely like a varied response to it among my teachers. Some um really didn't mention it at all until it was kind of the elephant in the room, you know. And that was kind of in the last week or so and then uh you know, I had, I had, I had a couple that just said, you know, I recognize that this is a thing, but for the time being, we're just going to carry on like normal and just not even worry about it. And then I, there were definitely two, one of them being the one that showed the map that kind of just took this opportunity to kind of apply it to what we were learning in class. And so like for example I had like one of my animal behaviors, teachers, um he just you know, you kind of talked to us about how how it could have started and how things like this kind of work, just having that scientific background in pandemics and stuff like that. Which was kind of interesting because at least it, it kind of rooted what I was hearing elsewhere in an academic setting that I could kind of think about it analytically and not really get distracted by all the other kind of social or political noise that came with the spread. And then um yeah, my, my screenwriting teacher who showed us like a map of the world cases, you know, just kind of stress to me how important it is to kind of monitor you know, just your surroundings and and look for trusting sources, I guess they can keep you updated on on how things are going. So you can just stay informed, you know.

Makeda Duncan: What were you doing um or, where were you when you learned about Columbia terminating in-person classes?

Lawson McGrain: Hm I'd just gotten out of was that a Thursday, a Wednesday, do you remember?

Makeda Duncan: I think it was April or, no sorry, March 11 I think they sent the email. I can't be sure. I think it was around that time.

Lawson McGrain: Oh, so that was, that was a. So we had just gotten. I had just gotten out of my oral history class, I think. I think it was a Wednesday and it. I remember just being like, really, I just made it back to my dorm and people were starting to um like I remember coming up to the front door and there were like people with their parents in the lobby. People with just like bags of stuff in their hand. Uh, and (sigh) I hadn't even read the email yet and I had sat down and just I'd seen a couple of friends of mine in the lobby and I'd sat down and just talked with them and they

262 actually gave me the news that classes were getting postponed, um. And I think at that point it
263 was kind of I don't want to say overdue. But I think people. I mean, I think people had an idea
264 that it was going to happen at some point, so I I can't really say I was surprised, but I do
265 remember going up to my dorm room and just seeing my roommates and we will just kind of in
266 this unanimous. Yep. Could have called that you know it's happening. So, it was just that kind of
267 feeling. They weren't great circumstances, but we knew they were coming. And when they did, it
268 was just not super surprising, I guess.

269
270 Makeda Duncan: So, what were your initial concerns or questions relating to school shutting
271 down?

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273 Lawson McGrain: Um definitely, I mean, definitely move out because that was kind of in the air
274 for a bit. I wasn't sure if: one they were going to let us go home, two if they were going to make
275 us go home, um and three, just how indefinite the postponing of classes was going to be. I didn't
276 really think that they would, like, cancel this semester or anything or cancel classes for the rest of
277 the semester. But I was kind of at least hoping that they would postpone them long enough to
278 kind of make a stable and suitable solution that just kind of tends to the needs of their students.

279
280 Makeda Duncan: So you're talking a lot about having to go home being forced to leave. Where
281 were you living before the closures?

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283 Lawson McGrain: Uh I was living at the Dwight, that's a just an on-campus housing building.

284
285 Makeda Duncan: And so you're talking also about your roommates, what what kind of issues
286 were brought up with them? What did you guys talk about amongst yourselves?

287
288 Lawson McGrain: Um, well, you know, again, it wasn't, it wasn't really clarified at the time, you
289 know how long things would be like this uh until there was like a solution in place or, (sniffle).
290 You know, if we left how long we would have to leave. So, you know, a couple uha couple of
291 them just talked about up and leaving for spring break right then and there and then just come
292 back at some point when you know maybe things settled a bit or they [administration] decided to
293 move out students. And then, you know, I had one [roommate] that just kind of upped and
294 moved out right kind of on the spot right before spring break. And we were all kind of spread out
295 enough that it wasn't really super convenient to move out. I think the closest one, closest of my,
296 the closest that one of my roommates lived this tool is maybe like a five hour drive, which isn't
297 like horrible, but you know, it's just kind of inconvenient and then the rest of us were spread out
298 for other than that. But it was it was my plan to just come home for spring break, as planned and
299 then just kind of see what decisions, Columbia would make following that regarding move outs
300 um or just residents in general. Um and, you know, my trip home for spring break, kind of got

301 prolonged because I was going to take train into or a train home and I guess they had traced
302 some of the cases that started in my county from the train. So that kind of worried me a little bit.
303 I'm kind of um influenced me to not make that decision quite yet.

304
305 Makeda Duncan: When you were living on campus, how did uh that benefit you? What were the
306 benefits of living on-campus for you?

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308 Lawson McGrain: As opposed to like living in an apartment off campus or something?

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310 Makeda Duncan: Um, yeah, I suppose. What were just some of the pros to um living in the
311 Dwight for you?

312
313 Lawson McGrain: Oh, well. It was, you know, it was a 10-15 minute walk at most from any of
314 my classes. So being just like right next to all the school buildings was really nice. And it was in
315 the south loop, too. So I just kind of had convenience of again, being able to walk everywhere. I
316 uh, you know, I guess, the security of on-campus housing. I so that was um-- You know,
317 especially in the in the decision making, of where to live between my freshman and sophomore
318 year, I wanted to live in a place off campus. But, you know, I didn't want to have to really risk
319 trying to find a place before the housing contract deadline. So then I would be in kind of a weird
320 state of limbo, where if I didn't find a place I wouldn't have anywhere to live. So it's been nice
321 for it's been nice for those reasons, sure.

322
323 Makeda Duncan: Um, so, before the closures and in-person class terminating. What were your,
324 um what were some resources that you utilized a lot on campus? What were the things that you
325 used a lot?

326
327 Lawson McGrain: Uh, the students and it was nice. It, you know, I used the I started to use the
328 gym there a lot before the pandemic and quarantine. It was also just like a really nice place to get
329 work done, a quiet place if maybe like too much was going on at home and I could go there. And
330 then you know the like the Career Center. That was really good, like the Advising Center. So that
331 was probably the school resource I used the most, um.

332
333 Makeda Duncan: Since being home, how have you um dealt with not being able to use those
334 resources?

335
336 Lawson McGrain: -- Uh, you know, just sending a lot of emails, I guess, for the more academic
337 stuff. Uh which I am one that I kind of tend to prefer if I have something I like to get or I need to
338 get worked out or a solution I need help solving or a problem, I need help solving, excuse me. I,
339 you know, I tend to like to call and talk to someone, or go in, face to face, which has kind of

340 been a, a challenge to overcome during this time. You know, I just, something about emails I just
341 don't like I don't like writing them. But, and then in terms of the fitness center, maybe like the
342 first week or two that I was home. Uh, I I have like a running trail or like a bike trail that goes
343 right behind my house. Uh, so I would use that to kind of get some exercise and stuff, but then
344 uh after the stay at home order was issued for my county there started to be a lot more people on
345 the running trail. So it's like, maybe, maybe I'll stop doing that. So it's also been a challenge to
346 just kind of find some ways to stay active within the house. Uh, so that's been that's been
347 something to put some brain power to.

348
349 Makeda Duncan: I know that you're a film major. So, how has um, the school shutdown
350 impacted your studies? What kind of, like, on campus resources or in person um teaching styles
351 have been altered?

352
353 Lawson McGrain: Um, hm. Well, my primary focus this year was in screenwriting so that class
354 has really transferred over pretty smoothly. Um because our, and it helps that our teacher's just a
355 really personable guy, but our Zoom meetings would just kind of carry on like a normal class
356 would and then. Uh, it's pretty great just to have, you know, if we write new pages we can kind
357 of read them to the rest of the class and just getting feedback like we would in any normal class.
358 And I think what's even nicer about it is that since the Zoom meetings are recorded, you can kind
359 of go back and like hear those notes from those people again. So you don't really have to, like,
360 remember, you know, or trust a note about it. Which has been really nice. But in terms of other
361 stuff. I think it's just been better to learn through practice, you know, you just try your own hand
362 at the things you've been learning and then kind of apply that to what you remember. You know,
363 learning in class with that more hands on stuff and then just kind of getting better through trial
364 and error with that.

365
366 Makeda Duncan: -- Uh, excuse me, I just want to jump back a little bit. I had a little ahead of
367 myself. Um, can you describe um, when, before you got back home in Kansas. Can you describe
368 your experience of moving back home relocating?

369
370 Lawson McGrain: Yeah. So I -- Just trying to collect my thoughts here. -- So again, I think I was
371 there were there were two of us. There were two of us in our apartment that hadn't left for spring
372 break. When they [administration] issued the announcement saying that they just want students
373 to vacate the dorms. And that they didn't want students to worry about what stuff they left
374 behind. Um, like try and take as much as you can with you home. But like, don't worry about it if
375 you can't take stuff home or if you've already left. Because we'll, you know, we'll still have
376 move outs at a later date. And kind of on both ends of the spectrum, there was me who just, you
377 know, packed maybe a big suitcase in a backpack with as much as I could and organized plans to
378 get home, and then my other roommate just packed everything and I think just tried to move that

379 right then in there. And since I didn't want to take the train, I had to go to a few different like car
380 rental places. And since I'm you know not 21 I had to visit a couple of them to kind of wager a
381 deal. And there was there was one kind of major car rental company that was doing like a student
382 discount that was letting students get home. Um, as long as you know they had like valid
383 insurance and license and stuff so that worked out really, really well and um I just put as much of
384 what I had in that car and went home. But then I think it was maybe like less than two weeks
385 after I'd made it home that they issued that they were giving us like until the end of the month to
386 move everything out. So I think that was I mean, it was, it was an. It was an inconvenience for
387 me just being an eight hour drive away having to just turn around and move everything out by
388 the end of the month, so like I couldn't imagine how uh, you know, people on coasts would deal
389 with that or you know people that were abroad or are abroad would would deal with that. And I
390 you know I, I think they were willing to work with people, which is nice. But again, I think that
391 kind of quick turnaround was really inconvenient, especially when you know I think, here, a
392 couple of weeks ago, they just pushed it back to a normal move out time again like mid-May.

393
394 Makeda Duncan: So were you dissatisfied, by the way administration was planning these move
395 outs or the way they communicated?

396
397 Lawson McGrain: Yeah, maybe a little bit. Again, I just, I kind of feel like it was just kind of
398 hastily done and not a lot of consideration to those who are kind of further away from campus.
399 Would have to, you know, go about it. But, um, you know, I, at the same time, I feel like I can't
400 really really complain because just me personally, I was able to get in and move my stuff out in
401 a, you know, solid, efficient trip so.

402
403 Makeda Duncan: Before we move on, do you have any other thoughts that come to mind that
404 you want to share about relocating that I maybe didn't touch on?

405
406 Lawson McGrain: No, I don't think so.

407
408 Makeda Duncan: Okay. Um, I guess we can get into, um. Things going on with you being back
409 at home. Um, so how did the um, the prevention, the sorry, the infection prevention restrictions
410 CDC guidelines in your hometown. How did they come up and do you know any differences
411 between that of the ones in um Chicago?

412
413 Lawson McGrain: -- Well I, I guess I don't really know what, I mean I haven't really been paying
414 attention. I guess to what the conditions are like in Chicago. Because you know most of the most
415 of the people I really like close there have kind of either located further out of the city, or just
416 like in different states in general. But when I was there to move out you know I know they still
417 had, you know, there were there were people wearing masks on the street, which was good. And,

418 you know, the, the housing building still kept like an occupancy limit. Which is pretty similar to
419 what was going on here [Olathe] (sigh) excuse me. But, how is it different? Well, I guess, from
420 what I hear from like teachers and stuff. There are a lot more people here that are still kind of
421 carrying on business as usual. But, you know, we were still at a stay at home order until late May
422 um, and, you know, that kind of includes like small businesses not being able to operate. And
423 there's like a social distancing rule in effect here, which I think is pretty common. But again, it's
424 not really something I'm seeing a whole lot of but I know it's in place.

425
426 Makeda Duncan: What kind of businesses in your area that you typically rely on have been shut
427 down or the way they work has to be changed?

428
429 Lawson McGrain: Right now, I think the only business, we really rely on is like the grocery store
430 that's near us and my dad works there. So that's kind of. It can be stressful, but just having him
431 there, kind of, I guess, makes it more. Well having him there already kind of makes things a little
432 more, like, easy going just to not really have to worry about getting groceries or, you know, like,
433 making the trip there. I mean, it's like a five minute drive, but just kind of the, the action of going
434 out and getting that stuff when just like when he comes home he can just bring him groceries,
435 which is super nice. Um, in terms of other businesses that we haven't been um. Well, I think
436 we've been super lucky to have, like for example, I have scoliosis. So, you know, even though
437 there's, there's a social like distancing practice, in effect, and like the operation has changed a
438 little bit. I'm still really grateful that I can like see my chiropractor if I need to or stuff like that.
439 But otherwise, we don't really, we don't really rely on a lot of other businesses, I guess right now
440 to get stuff. And I think we're just kind of trying our best to, you know, separate ourselves from
441 that for right now and just kind of try and live is like simply and excess for us we can kind of just
442 focusing on work and stuff, you know.

443
444 Makeda Duncan: Seeing that your dad is an essential worker. Um, what kind of actions are you
445 taking to, you and your family to try to keep the house clean and sanitary? What are you guys
446 doing to try to keep away the germs?

447
448 Lawson McGrain: Um, well I when the masks shortage peak was kind of at an all-time high. And
449 that's kind of when, you know, my mom kind of started stressing that you should be taking more
450 precautions, you know, with like a mask and gloves and stuff. So, um, you know, my aunt was
451 really nice and made him a mask that he can wear to work. And then I think in terms of other
452 precautions, you know, when he gets home he usually just like, leaves his shoes like the garage
453 outside and immediately just puts his clothes in the laundry room. And then, you know, it goes
454 up in like showers and just tries to get it as clean as possible. And just kind of trying to reduce
455 the amount of guess contact that like our groceries have going from the store to here. Like,

456 whether that be the groceries themselves or just like the bags. They come in. And so I think I
457 think we've been doing pretty good to kind of stay on top of that.

458

459 Makeda Duncan: Before the outbreak, what was your employment situation like?

460

461 Lawson McGrain: I worked when I was home [Chicago] I worked for a production company.
462 That handled like the staging of events of whether it be like a concert or like a corporate
463 presentation. And I would, you know, build stages or like set up lighting sound rigs, stuff like
464 that and so I would, I would have that job. And, you know, since it was production heavy and
465 live events were kind of the first thing to go with social distancing and stay at home orders. I,
466 you know, my, my boss called me and you know within like the first week of that all being in
467 place. Just to check in and, you know, tell me that we probably weren't going to be doing
468 anything for a while.

469

470 Makeda Duncan: So, um what is your. What were your concerns related to that, knowing that
471 things might be suspended?

472

473 Lawson McGrain: Uh yeah, I mean, kind of my biggest concern was whether or not I would be
474 able to find a job during this time, or if I would kind of have to just like hunker down and, you
475 know, ration my finances. Which, you know, made trying to cover the next two years of
476 schooling kind of scary. But you know, I think there are probably some good options out there
477 that I haven't found yet.

478

479 Makeda Duncan: Um, so have you had to file for unemployment or have you been able to?

480

481 Lawson McGrain: I have not yet because, again, I'm just, I'm trying to look for maybe some
482 efficient jobs. I can do still yet without putting you know too much of my own health at risk or
483 anything like that or without getting into any you know multi level marketing schemes and
484 things like that (laugh).

485

486 Makeda Duncan: Do you think that you'll be able to return to your job once you come back to
487 Chicago?

488

489 Lawson McGrain: Oh yeah I mean I I think as soon as I'm really looking forward to a time where
490 you know live events become like normalcy again because I think that's going to be I mean, I just
491 I can't imagine how good that's going to make everyone feel after going through all this.

492 Makeda Duncan: Um, -- um okay, so we're now we're going to jump kind of into remote
493 learning. So, um, When you first started, we began remote learning on April 6th. What were the
494 immediately, the immediate challenges you faced?

495
496 Lawson McGrain: Combating the dread of having to learn online, um, I again I'm someone that
497 kind of thrives better under face to face contact and interaction. So, kind of hearing the news that
498 a couple of my courses wouldn't even be like meeting on Zoom and they would just kind of be
499 like a weekly assignment structure was kind of a hard thing for me to feel motivated to want to
500 do it all. And then you know, of course, like it's I think it's just hard to stay again, motivated and
501 not go kind of stir crazy when you're when you're waking up, tuning into a class, sitting in the
502 same space to do homework. And then, you know, hopefully getting some free time and then just
503 going to bed to do the same thing all over again. And you know, I think, I think there's definitely
504 a difference when you can go to a designated space for learning and interaction you know with
505 with the peers and instructors. That really benefits, you know, the learning environment. And
506 that's definitely been something that I've been missing here.

507
508 Makeda Duncan: Um, do you feel like your concerns are being addressed and listened to by your
509 teachers?

510
511 Lawson McGrain: I, I would say that, you know, most of my teachers are definitely really good
512 about addressing any concerns that I have. Or if I have any problems at all they're, they've been
513 really good about, like, getting back to me in a timely manner. And again, just kind of helping
514 me solve whatever problems I'm having. But again, I think a lot of my big Picture concerns with
515 our transition into online learning have less to do with or are less in the control of the
516 instructor than with like just kind of online learning in general but I yeah I I would say that the
517 teachers that I have are really good about maximizing you know the online winning situation and
518 kind of helping address the concerns of their students.

519
520 Makeda Duncan: So do you feel like the education, you're receiving right now is worth what
521 you're paying for it from Columbia? Do you think that there are things that should be changed or
522 do you have any frustrations with that?

523
524 Lawson McGrain: Um, yeah, I mean I don't I don't I definitely don't think I'm getting everything
525 that I could be being on campus and getting to use like the available resources and class time that
526 we would normally have. And I, you know, I, I'm not sure I've been kind of juggling with the
527 idea that if fall 2020 and, definitely, if they extend extended to spring 2021. I don't know if I
528 would necessarily want to do a full year of schooling online. So I guess I guess in a sense of long
529 term I yeah I don't I don't think if I were to have to do another year of online schooling that I
530 would be getting a full resources that I'm paying for it all.

531 Makeda Duncan: Do you think that the school has dealt with the situation. Well, as far as
532 information, they've sent back to us or reaching out?

533
534 Lawson McGrain: Like what situation?

535
536 Makeda Duncan: Um just how for example, like Dr. Kim has sent out messages to faculty and
537 students. Do you think that the school is doing a good job at staying connected?

538
539 Lawson McGrain: I think I think they've done a good job, coming up with, I guess, solutions to
540 create a little more like ease, ease in the minds of families. I'm like, I really appreciated that
541 housing refund, um, you know, they had a solution of putting a temporary freeze on, like, any
542 payment plans. For tuition, which I think really helped, you know, some struggling families. So I
543 think those have been really, really helpful. I appreciate it. I think they were releasing a lot of,
544 like when everything was really up in the air, kind of that that week right before they postponed
545 classes and then the week following, I think they were really good about frequently updating us
546 with emails about the status of classes and school and, you know, the institution as a whole. But,
547 I don't know if I've really been seeing as much of it as of late. And I guess maybe that's just
548 because there isn't as much going on because we're kind of in a fixed point you know where we
549 don't really need any change or new things kind of until the end of the school year. But then
550 again, I think just kind of getting those updates more frequently than infrequently kind of puts,
551 again, just like more ease in the minds of students and families.

552
553 Makeda Duncan: So now that you're home. Um, what do you do in your free time to stay busy?

554
555 Lawson McGrain: I like to read. Been reading a lot when I can. And I have been practicing the
556 guitar. I'm in a music theory class right now. So just having something that feels rewarding
557 during free time, but also kind of lets me apply things that I'm learning in school to my free time
558 has been I guess really rewarding. But then other than that, I think, you know, even with online
559 learning. It's been keeping me really really busy, that free time, even in quarantine free time still
560 a bit of a commodity.

561
562 Makeda Duncan: So, um, I know it can be hard to with free time sometimes especially that we're
563 home not let negative thoughts or feelings get to you. So how have you been dealing with stress
564 and anxiety?

565
566 Lawson McGrain: Honestly, getting just getting outside really helps. I'm just getting fresh air.
567 Not seeing walls around me really really helps. I think a lot of the more negative feelings or
568 mental states that I've been in during quarantine have been less about anxiety and I guess fear or
569 sadness relating to the pandemic itself. And just kind of more about feeling just kind of so

defeated by the situation that I don't really want to do anything, you know. Um, so again, just kind of going outside and kind of seeing just like a blue sky, and no walls around me has been really good for just, kind of, you know, reminding me that. What, even if it's online school and I'm doing is kind of important to me and deserves focus.

Makeda Duncan: Do you have a person that you go to, to vent to or talk about your feelings with?

Lawson McGrain: Yeah, me and my mom are pretty close. And she's, she's a teacher. So she's been having to do the whole zoom routine and, you know, try and try and get elementary school kids to participate in Zoom stuff, which I feel like it's probably an impossible task. I couldn't imagine doing it. Which that's been nice to just kind of help me, I guess, understand where a lot of my teachers probably are right now. But yeah, it's, it's been nice to kind of have someone that's kind of going through the same thing that you are just in the house um, that you could just like talk to all the time, and even, you know, extending past school circumstances and you know, just talking about like things that we're seeing going on in other parts of the world, or other parts of the country. Just kind of like talk about those, yeah, it's been nice to do that.

Makeda Duncan: Um-- So, uh – sorry. Um, when you communicate with your mom, um, do you feel like this situation has been able to strengthen some of your relationships? Like obviously you're talking about your mom or. How do you feel like your relationships have changed since being distanced from people?

Lawson McGrain: Um, well, I mean, I guess. We're, we're certainly seeing a lot more of each other. So I think that just being in the space helps a lot. And again, I think us both kind of having to do the Zoom routine. And, you know, adapting to online learning has helped a lot. Just going through similar tribulations for school. And then, you know, like I said, when you get free time, even now, it's kind of a cherish thing that you just kind of want to enjoy when you have it. So just being able to talk to each other and figure out ways to kind of make downtime, a little more engaging and less repetitive and monotonous, um, has been something that has really strengthened our relationship. Which has been, yeah, it's been great.

Makeda Duncan: What have you seen in the media, on TV, in the news social media that gives you hope about the situation and what's to come?

Lawson McGrain: Um, I appreciate that a lot of I guess entertainers specifically has kind of taken on this. These situations is a welcome challenge to still spread, you know, hope and positive messages out to people. I think it's I think it's really amazing that we can still have like late night shows with hosts doing stuff from home. Like sitcom reunions doing like quarantine

609 themed episodes. I think it's fantastic. And I just, you know, it kind of like the whole the whole
610 message that um you know, the, the "Alone together" mantra is, I think especially powerful
611 because like when it feels you know when your social distancing or isolating and it just kind of
612 provides for the opportunity to feel a little more lonely than usual and separated from everyone.
613 So, I think what a lot of entertainers are doing, they're kind of doing their best to unite everyone,
614 and that makes me really positive for things going forward that it won't be as jarring when we get
615 back to the normalcy of in-person collaboration art forms and stuff like that.

616
617 Makeda Duncan: What kind of things were you looking forward to in the near future, possibly
618 going on around this time that had to have been postponed or cancelled?

619
620 Lawson McGrain: Again, where, where I worked, it would be really awesome to just work with a
621 bunch of people and kind of build something that you get to see get used and enjoyed by other
622 people and kind of just show, like, you see how your word kind of pays off in the engagement of
623 other people. So being able to, I guess work again was something I was excited to do. You know,
624 I've, I have a lot of friends at home. So I was looking forward to kind of seeing them all again
625 and you know, going on drives and hanging out. So that's been a little sad. I like to go to concerts
626 and I had, I had a few lined up that got cancelled. And I was really excited about them, but they
627 got postponed, and I guess I'm still looking forward to them whenever they happen again. Um,
628 but yeah, just kind of, most of the things I was looking forward to, we're just kind of gatherings
629 that I'm sure will happen at some point, hopefully.

630
631 Makeda Duncan: And what kind of lifestyle changes have you made as to prevent like,
632 contracting the virus or just to try to stay away from it?

633
634 Lawson McGrain: Yeah I well I just try not to leave the house if at all possible. Um, there have
635 been a couple times where I've just gotten so stir crazy that I've maybe gone on like a quick
636 10-15 minute drive but you know I try and just keep the windows up. Just whatever kind of
637 preemptive choices. I can make to kind of help myself and others around me uh. Uh, I was
638 talking about earlier like going on runs and just trying to kind of stay healthy, not having a
639 resource like the gym at school and stuff. But then again, after I started seeing a lot more people
640 out on the trail, and just people walking everywhere like on the street and on those trails and
641 even seeing like populated golf courses. When I would like, drive by golf carts being bumper to
642 bumper just started thinking, you know, maybe, maybe that's not something I should do anymore
643 just for my own safety. But you know, it's been tough to kind of even have to tell like extended
644 family like, you know, I'd really like to see. But maybe that's not such a good idea. So stuff like
645 that's been hard, but I think it's definitely been for the best.

646 Makeda Duncan: So going forward, um, how do you feel about the future. Let's talk about near
647 future, like, what, what are you expecting of this summer?

648
649 Lawson McGrain: Um, I feel that right now kind of so much of it's in the air. That I feel like my
650 only choices there just kind of go with the flow. So to say,, because we, well in my county our
651 lockdown status or whatever it is is lifted I think at the end of May. So at that point, I'm hoping
652 that I'll be able to just see more people. But if not, I guess, either way this summer to me is just
653 going to be about practicing you know the things I've been learning in school and practicing my
654 craft. I'm trying to become a better filmmaker better musician and either way, and that's going to
655 be my plan for the summer. So whether I'm social distancing, I'm isolating or I'm, you know,
656 seeing all of my favorite people every other day, I think I'm still going to be my plan, regardless.

657
658 Makeda Duncan: Even after social distancing restrictions are removed, like you said, in May.
659 Um, do you plan on still doing the mask thing, the gloves. What, how far will you go with that?
660 And how long do you keep that up?

661
662 Lawson McGrain: Yeah, I'd like to, I mean, again, it's I'd like to just try and do what I can to be
663 safe. But I try to, you know, I try and read like the CDC website anytime new information comes
664 out, or just like an order to stay updated on the status of everything. You know, Missouri, like a
665 state over, there are protests going on in order to get small businesses open and I think you know
666 that's even gone through and they're doing it. Provided that there's still like an occupancy limit.
667 But to be honest, seeing that kind of scares me. And I'm not sure how I'll necessarily feel about it
668 in a month's time. But I guess that whether or not that changes will kind of influence my decision
669 on how cautious I am kind of going outside. I don't think it'll stop me from, you know, at least
670 going outside. Or, like going on a trail or something like that, but it might. I might kind of
671 rethink just walking into a grocery store, something that gets a lot of hand and foot traffic
672 without like gloves or a mask.

673
674 Makeda Duncan: How do you think that technology is playing into all of this? We're constantly
675 being shown news media and it's kind of hard to avoid. How do you feel about your relationship
676 with technology right now in all of this?

677
678 Lawson McGrain: Uh, well yeah it's been really great just to get a sense of what's going on in
679 other places. You know, without it, I wouldn't have found out about protests [against] our living
680 situation. Or protests of quarantine or stuff until like a couple of days ago, because like the first
681 time I saw it on televised news and I know it's been going on for longer than that. But I don't
682 know. I think it's been just been really distracting. You know, just because I think a lot of a lot of
683 the news sources that are that are out, putting content can kind of contrast with each other and

they can be like incongruous and like not make a lot of sense. So it, it can be kind of overwhelmingly muddled just trying to figure out who's saying what and what's kind of. What kind [of news] should be believed, you know, but yeah. -- And just like in terms of not coming from a news source, just in general. Again, it's just been really distracting. Because it's easy to, you know, without a lot of social connection. Or with a lot of our connection being virtual now it can be really easy, I think, to just kind of dive into a lot of like social media or just media in general. So, especially with like school and a lot of priorities, I have, it's been it's been something that I've kind of need to put away while I'm trying to focus or else I can just find myself going down like a hole. But yeah, I think I feel super bombarded with various news sources, just trying to get like a new statement out there about what's going on. And sometimes I think they just clash. So just makes it confusing to keep up with.

Makeda Duncan: And I'm finally, how do you hope that future generations perceive this time in history. What do you think the major takeaways should be?

Lawson McGrain: Um -- Well I hope, you know, I hope they don't necessarily look at it as like a super resilient time for us. Because I don't. I guess it's impossible for me to know how I guess we're really going to come out of this, but you know, I think, just like reading about how other people's lives have been affected by this. It's not really something that just like happened and we bounced back from, you know. There have definitely been a lot of like detriments in, you know, like economically and socially, for sure, that just have made this a lot harder. So I don't, I mean it's an unprecedented time in history. So I hope that kind of retains that, I guess, notoriety for future generations. But a lot of -- sources that put out like status updates on kind of the way things are going, are normally like trying to have the most positive light they can and just trying to be as, you know --I don't, I guess. I don't know how to word this. I'm just trying to emphasize the progress that we're making. And I think maybe it's like future generations, where we're just kind of viewing it as like a string of like maybe like bookmarks and like the chapters of our time during like this Corona pandemic that it may just look like something that hit us. And then we just gradually got out of with ease and, you know, I might not be having the most difficult time dealing with quarantine and isolation but it's really, really affecting some people for the worse. And I just kind of hope that, you know, they kind of have a voice that they're heard and, you know, that gets documented as much as our progress does.

Makeda Duncan: Very true. All right, that kind of concludes this interview. Thank you so much for taking part in answering these questions. I really appreciate your time. Thank you. All right, well, I'm going to (recording ends).