

1 **Interview with Magdalena Naruszewicz**

2 **Interviewed by Nurrah Muhammad**

3 Nurrah Muhammad: Today is November 24. I'm Nurrah Muhammad. I'm in Chicago, Illinois.
4 This is for the project Capturing Quarantine: Student Life During A Pandemic, and I'm here
5 with—state your name and your location.

6 Magdalena Naruszewicz: My name is Magdalena Naruszewicz, and I'm in Chicago, Illinois.

7 NM: What month and year were you born?

8 MN: September, 1999.

9 NM: And what is your year at Columbia?

10 MN: I'm a junior.

11 NM: What're you majoring in?

12 MN: I'm getting my BFA in Dance.

13 NM: And your current housing?

14 MN: With my mom and my siblings.

15 NM: What are your preferred pronouns?

16 MN: She, her, hers.

17 NM: How do you self-identify?

18 MN: I would probably say hardworking, dancer, sister, and daughter, girlfriend.

19 NM: What is your place of birth?

20 MN: I was born in Chicago, and I've been living here my whole life.

21 NM: So you were raised—Where were you raised?

22 MN: Here, Chicago, on the Northwest side, by—before O'Hare. The airport.

23 NM: What is your mother's year and place of birth?

24 MN: My mom was born 1966 in Poland.

25 NM: And your father's year and place of birth?

26 MN: My dad was born 1967 and also in Poland. Both of them were born in the very north,
27 northeast (unintelligible)--(laughs) yes, northeast side of Poland.

28 NM: Okay, let's get into the interview questions. What is your earliest memory?

29 MN: My earliest memory—The first one that popped into my head right now was at some kind
30 of gathering when I was probably like three or four, maybe five, 'cause this was definitely before

31 preschool. I was dancing with my dad, on his toes and dancing to the music, and then I
32 remember my uncle kind of grabbing me and tossing me into the air. I remember having a lot of
33 fun.

34 NM: What is your most vivid memory?

35 MN: Definitely having breakfast with my family before church, 'cause that was something that
36 was very recurring, like it would happen all the time, every Sunday. Right before church, my dad
37 would get up and make us scrambled eggs, and they were the best scrambled eggs ever.

38 NM: What's the strongest memory you have of your mother?

39 MN: I would probably say—Strongest memory? Hm. I think it'd definitely have to be when my
40 dad got sick, how persevere—how much perseverance she had and support, not only for my dad,
41 but also my siblings and I.

42 NM: What is the strongest memory you have of your father?

43 MN: Wow, (laughing) this one's making me a little emotional 'cause it was so vivid. I didn't
44 think I was gonna cry (laughs). But I think it'd definitely be the last time I saw him, before he
45 passed, like--(sighs)--lying in the hospital bed, being intubated and not able to breathe, being
46 very, very weak. It's a very sad thing to remember your father by, but it just shows how strong
47 he was, given he was—he had six months to live but lived two years with cancer.

48 NM: Who was a person who was a strong influence on you and who you are now, and in what
49 way?

50 MN: It'd have to be a mix of my mom and dad. My dad probably because he was so supportive
51 of me and my passions and wanted me to be the happiest ever (laughs), but also doing something
52 that was sustainable and would support me and my future family. And my mom because of just
53 who she is. My mom being very strict but not in a bad way. She knows what I want, and she
54 always keeps me by my word and makes sure that if I say I'm gonna do something, (laughing)
55 it's gonna get done. And I think that's something that I have learned to love about my mom,
56 'cause she always keeps me accountable.

57 NM: What is or was your relationship with your siblings like?

58 MN: When we were growing up, we were always very—we had—it was very fun as a brother-
59 sister and sister-to-sister kind of relationship. But as we started growing, we became more vocal
60 with each other and opened up, and just in general, we would stand up for each other more. Like
61 when my sister—she—she's been struggling with her—she's been struggling with her weight
62 and stuff, and people have been giving her a hard time, and I understand where she's coming
63 from, because I wasn't in the best shape when I was younger. I was always much curvier and
64 fluffier, as you can say. And I've always—she's always been very open with me about her
65 struggles and whenever she needs help, and same thing with my brother—if I'd be going through
66 something, he'd help me through it or stand up for me when something was wrong.

67 NM: What is the most vivid memory you have of your childhood, and why do you think this?

68 MN: The most vivid one would probably be the breakfast one that I told you about, and that's
69 definitely because it was so repetitive. I remember that happening for (laughing) a long time. I
70 can't say exactly for how long, but it's definitely something that I remember vividly, like, getting
71 up from my bed and running downstairs (laughing) because I smelled the scrambled eggs in the
72 kitchen.

73 NM: In high school, who were your favorite teachers, and why?

74 MN: If we're talking, like, in, in high school, I would definitely say a biology teacher (laughs).
75 And his name—I don't know if I can name-drop (laughs), but his name was McDade, and I
76 know—he was very supportive after I had lost my father and—he always was very supportive of
77 me dancing. He was in charge of a dance group in high school, so he always understood what
78 being a dancer meant and the feeling of the—like, the sensation of being a dancer, like, within
79 the body. And he as very supportive of me following my dreams because he knew how
80 passionate I was, and he also understood where I was coming from very well when everything
81 went down with my father passing in high school. But if we're talking about in my high school
82 experience but not class-wise, I would definitely say my dance teachers, Sabina Barnak and
83 Agnieszka Barnak. They both have impacted me in different ways, but Sabina definitely sparked
84 out a lot of my creative and very emotional dancing that was very indulging, while Agnieszka
85 really brought out and focused on the conditioning and technical work which is something that
86 I'm very grateful for, given that when I came to Columbia, I was able to, instead of going to the
87 first-year classes, I was able to completely skip through that and go into second year, which put
88 me ahead by a lot (laughs) in college, and definitely opened up the doors of me actually
89 getting—being able to go through the BFA program without many problems.

90 NM: How do you think these teachers that you mentioned—how do you think they've affected
91 you as a dancer?

92 MN: They've really taught me dedication and creativity—no—you can't teach creativity, but
93 that it's a whole process and that it's never gonna come very easily, you have to kind of work—
94 you have to, it's not kind of, you have to work for what you want, and that's definitely
95 something that, through my training with them, I've learned to understand.

96 NM: What kinds of relationships did you have with your friends?

97 MN: In high school, (laughs) I was, like, a floater, I could say. I never had a set friend-group. I
98 did in the beginning, but that kind of drifted away once high school came to be and everyone
99 kind of found their own interests, because you're not always gonna be interested in the same
100 things as you were in elementary school. And that kind of slowly started separating, and I began
101 to make friends from within other groups, as well. It definitely was a weird experience, because I
102 didn't have someone that I could like fully, fully trust, because I was acquainted with so many
103 people and was always networking. But I just was a person that—It's kind of, like, hard for me
104 to trust people. So it's definitely something that can bite you in the butt but can also help you
105 find the people that you really, truly want to be surrounded with.

106 NM: How do you think making more friends would have made your high school experience
107 better? Oh—Do you think—Wait, (laughing) I'm sorry. How do you think making more friends
108 would have made your high school experience different?

109 MN: I honestly—Mm, I don't know, I've never thought about that. I definitely think that—I feel
110 like I would've went out more and, like, seen the world (laughs) quicker before I did get to
111 college, because I was, I could say, kind of maybe a late bloomer when it comes down to things.
112 So I would definitely say that I probably would've been invited to more things than I was, but in
113 the end, that's something that wasn't really important to me anyway, so--(shrugs).

114 NM: What kind of clubs or teams did you join in high school?

115 MN: So in high school, I was—My first—I think it was, like, halfway through freshman year, I
116 joined orchesis, and that's kind of where I started creating more, because that was, like, the
117 whole point of the club, to create movement and put it out in a performance type of scene, And it
118 was definitely a challenge, because I was so used to having choreography be put on me. And
119 then I ended up quitting that team because of the fact that there was no recognition for me as a
120 choreographer while other dancers were getting their recognition. So then I took a—I took a
121 chance and I auditioned for the poms team my senior year, and I got in, which was (laughing)
122 something that I didn't expect. Though, many other people did kind of see it coming, because
123 they know I'm a strong dancer, but I don't—I prefer to stay humble and always kind of doubt
124 myself. But joining the poms team was honestly the most fun I've had in my whole (laughing)
125 high school career. Just being able to travel and perform and compete was something that was so
126 new and different. It's definitely—I've gained lots of people that I enjoy to be around with. Sure,
127 I don't talk to them as often anymore, because we are at different points in life, but I definitely
128 am grateful for the whole experience.

129 NM: What were your ambitions when you graduated from high school?

130 MN: So when I was applying for different colleges, I had no idea whether I wanted to go for this
131 dance thing or if I wanted to end up being, like, a genetic, like—I don't remember what it was
132 called, it was so long ago. I was always interested in genetics and nutrition, and I was gonna go
133 into, like, the biochemistry area, which, now I'm thinking of it, that would've been a terrible
134 choice. But I applied to many schools for biology and education as well as dance, and when I got
135 my letters from all of my schools, Columbia was the one that I was most excited about, so I took
136 that and (laughs) ran with it and ended up coming here.

137 NM: Why did you choose Columbia College?

138 MN: Well, I chose Columbia because I deeply—like, deep inside, I always knew I wanted to
139 dance and I wanted to teach and perform. That was something that, like, literally lit—lights my
140 soul (unintelligible)--lights my soul on fire, like, it brings me lots of joy and it keeps me going,
141 and I've always wanted to share my experiences with younger dancers, as well as literally
142 anybody of age, any age on the spectrum. But I just always felt like I do have something to bring
143 to the table. Didn't know what it was until, obviously, I got to Columbia and kind of found my
144 style and, like, how I want to lead my way through.

145 NM: How did you feel about getting accepted to Columbia?

146 MN: I was so excited. Like, I cried, (laughing) that's how excited I was. My dance teachers,
 147 Agnieszka and Sabina, went to Columbia, and they always raved about how—how much they
 148 enjoyed it. And I've seen their performances because they invited me, and it was just, like,
 149 magical (laughs) for someone in high school going to, like, a college performance. It was—
 150 (laughing) It was quite an experience, but that's definitely—like, that whole dream kind of
 151 showed up and actually happened.

152 NM: Why did you choose to major in Dance?

153 MN: I chose to major in Dance because it's always been a part of my life, and it kind of feels like
 154 I owe it to my dad, but then again, I kind of—I kind of don't, 'cause I love it. But my dad always
 155 supported me and saw something within me and always pushed me to be the best that I can
 156 possibly be. So even if I was like, "Dad, look at this choreography that I created," he'd be like,
 157 "It's decent, you could do better." Like, he—he pushed me a lot with tough love, and that's what
 158 I needed. And so it definitely—like, trying to carry out that as well as my own passions—yeah.

159 NM: So you said you kind of felt like you owe it to him—to your father. Why do you feel that?

160 MN: I think it's because of (audio buffering) how much joy it (audio buffering)—like,
 161 performing and dancing, creating, stuff like that—but I remember—I remember when I visited
 162 him right before Christmas, before he passed, and I was like, "Dad, what do you wanna do?" and
 163 we were offering all these things that we can do to entertain him, then I'm like, "Play cards, or
 164 watch a movie! Or--" like, do something like that, right? And the first thing he said was, "can
 165 you dance for me?" And, um—So my mom played some random music, and I started, like,
 166 improvising and my sister joined, and it was just like a—one of those things that kind of struck
 167 me—um—because that was when I truly understood that people do want to see me dance, and
 168 they love to see the joy. And I think that I owe it to him because he was my biggest supporter
 169 like nobody else.

170 NM: What kinds of extracurriculars have you participated in since starting Columbia—since
 171 starting college at Columbia?

172 MN: I don't do any extracurriculars at Columbia. I—And anything outside of school—I don't
 173 know if work counts as one, but I began teaching at a studio nearby.

174 NM: What kinds of things would you regularly do before the pandemic that you took for
 175 granted?

176 MN: Definitely going out to eat and spending time with friends outside of home. I'm a person
 177 that, like, lives off of other people's energy, so going out and seeing things and doing things
 178 outside of my home is something that I lived for and I definitely took for granted, especially
 179 when quarantine began. Like, my mental health just went down a dark spiral. But, I mean, I
 180 guess now, (laughing) I kind of became a homebody because of quarantine. But it's not bad. I
 181 began to enjoy being home a little bit more.

182 NM: What was your relationship with your family like pre-pandemic?

183 MN: (laughs) We were close, but we all were kind of doing our own things, obviously. My
184 brother was working, my sister was doing school and dancing at the studio that we grew up at,
185 and I was obviously doing school and work and seeing friends and my boyfriend, so it was
186 definitely—we were all busy, because—if we were home, for example, my mom wasn't very—
187 (unintelligible)--she wasn't home often because she was working.

188 NM: What was your relationship with your friends like?

189 MN: We would see each other often, whether it was just a quick coffee run in between—like, if I
190 had time after work, or doing homework together at Starbucks, or just, like—we'd go places,
191 walk around the mall, enjoy each other's company.

192 NM: When did you first become aware of Coronavirus?

193 MN: I remember I was—I think—I'm pretty sure I was (laughing) in a ballet class when I first
194 found out about it. 'Cause I had been—prior to walking into that class, I had heard something,
195 but I wasn't quite sure what it was, I didn't quite understand the concept. And then, that same
196 day, I walk into ballet class and my teacher starts talking about it, and I was like, "Wait, hold on,
197 what?" And I needed an explanation, because I was so busy, I had no time to be on my phone,
198 because I would be communing—(laughs) communing—commuting to and from school, and
199 that's, like, an hour and a half, and then, right after—I wouldn't even go home, I'd go straight to
200 work, and I'd come back home after—and then after—Woah, hold on. Then after work, I had
201 rehearsals, and then I'd come home, like, ten o'clock everyday. So I was literally—(laughing) I
202 never had a chance to even Google anything, because I was always on the go. (sighs) I don't
203 know if that answers your question. (laughs)

204 NM: It does. Describe your transition to remote learning.

205 MN: It was difficult at first. I—I struggled with it very much (laughing) if I'm being honest. It
206 was very hard for me to focus. Sometimes it still is, but it's a lot better now. I'm a person that,
207 like, needs to be in-person and in the room, and I need different spaces for different things. Like,
208 home is where I relaxed. That's what it was—that's what I understood in my brain. But when
209 switching it was definitely difficult for me to transition. Like, class to work to—stuff like that.
210 And relaxation was definitely really difficult, because everything was happening in the same
211 room. And I quite couldn't understand that or set it apart, so it was something that I truly
212 struggled with, and my mental health—(laughs) once again, going back to that part—it was
213 definitely hard for me to adjust, and my mental health took a toll.

214 NM: How long did you think the shutdown was going to last?

215 MN: Oh, I thought it was going to last a month. I was—I was so sure that we were gonna stop
216 everything before it got really bad, and then it just kept on dragging out, and it got worse and
217 worse, which was something that was absolutely terrifying (laughs). But I think I got used to
218 being in lockdown, I guess you could say.

219 NM: How did you feel when the shutdown didn't end?

220 MN: I was so furious. I was so angry. I—I didn't know, kind of, how to understand why, because
221 nobody I knew had been affected, and I was like, "I don't understand. Is this even real?" But
222 eventually, as I started doing more research and trying to understand the whole situation more, I
223 started understanding the severity of everything that's going on in the world, and I definitely
224 gave myself more leeway, I guess you can say, because I was such a person that was so driven
225 and so hardworking that I never knew how to, kind of, give something up and not control
226 something, so that was—(sighs) It was a struggle, but it ended up being fine.

227 NM: How do you think COVID has affected the Black Lives Matter movement?

228 MN: Can you repeat that?

229 NM: How do you think COVID has affected the Black Lives Matter movement?

230 MN: Oh, I definitely think that, being in shutdown, a lot of people woke up and understood what
231 was actually (laughing) going on in society. It's something I, personally, like—It brings me lots
232 of anger, because I don't know how to help, yet I try, like, in all of my heart and soul, but one
233 person truly cannot make the difference, and so I try to talk to people and explain everything and
234 be very—and just learn, because you won't get anything done if you're talking, you truly won't.
235 You won't learn anything if you're talking, 'cause you have to have your ears open, and when
236 you're talking, they're completely shut. So I definitely think that a lot of people opened up their
237 minds and their ears to things that do not affect them directly, and I think that's why it all kind of
238 exploded, because we were all sitting there, kind of being very, very controlled, and I think that
239 that was like a—like a boiling pot that kind of exploded because everyone was kind of sick and
240 tired of everything, and I definitely think that it was (laughing) long overdue.

241 NM: How did the Black Lives Matter movement affect you or people that you know?

242 MN: So it definitely affected my relationships with people, because people that were not willing
243 to listen or help me learn or have a conversation with me, I—(laughs) As harsh as it is to say, I
244 really, truly did cut them out of my life, because I'm not here for negativity, and if someone
245 doesn't want to learn with me or have a conversation with me about something that is so
246 important, and if you are very close-minded, (laughing) I don't wanna talk to you. And that's
247 something that the Black Lives Matter movement definitely kind of brought out within me,
248 because it, like—(sighs) I'm getting really heated (laughs). There's just some people that don't
249 understand, and you need to have the open mindset to understand, and many people lack that,
250 and it's something that is very infuriating to me, and it's just disappointing.

251 NM: How did the announcement that college would close impact your living situation?

252 MN: So the fact that college—Columbia closed didn't really impact me, because I was living
253 with my mom and my siblings already, so thankfully I was—I didn't have to have a huge
254 transition of a whole living space, because I can't imagine how difficult that could've been.

255 NM: How did—(laughs) Oh, I'm sorry. What kinds of lifestyle changes did you have to make
256 during quarantine?

257 MN: I had to definitely readjust my thinking. Because I was always in the same space, I kind of
258 had to figure out something that helped me, whether that's, like, sit facing different directions or
259 find a different space in my home to take class or work so that my bed was for relaxing and not
260 doing homework and class and school. It was just—I had to figure that out. I also eventually—
261 like, this semester, I've been waking up way earlier, and it's been helping me with focus, so
262 that's definitely another thing. And, like, lifestyle-wise—(pause) Things that I do—I definitely
263 became more open to new opportunities that show up, whether that's me social-selling or me,
264 like, doing a photoshoot or, like, a video. Stuff like that. I've become more open to new ideas
265 and also more creative, like, content-wise with what I create. Not only for social media, but for
266 projects for school and things like that.

267 NM: In what ways did quarantine affect your mental health?

268 MN: So at first, I definitely had, like, a complete meltdown, because I was holding in a lot—a lot
269 of, like, stress and sadness and, like—like despair, I would say, because it was very hard for me
270 not to see people and not to hug people, because I am such a people person. And staying at
271 home, it was very difficult at first, because me and my mom butt heads all the time. I love her,
272 but we're always, like, head-to-head, and that was something that also took a toll on me, because
273 we were—we saw each other every day, all the time, 24/7. It was something that we had to work
274 out between ourselves. And at first, it took a toll on both of us, but eventually it got better, in
275 every way.

276 NM: How did you cope with changes during quarantine?

277 MN: I definitely spent a lot of time watching Netflix (laughs). I think I watched everything on
278 there. Spending a lot of time with my family and my boyfriend. He practically, like, literally
279 quarantined with us. It was just a lot of family time, and I focused a lot on mental health and
280 figuring out what works for me and how to kind of not only help myself, but others that are
281 struggling through the same thing as well. And I definitely, at first, stopped talking to everybody,
282 which was probably not a good idea, 'cause that probably added to the spiral of emotions at first,
283 because I am such a people person, I literally did the opposite. But eventually I started reaching
284 back out to friends, and we started Face Timing, and it was helpful to have that kind of social
285 interaction.

286 NM: How do you think interacting socially with your friends helped you through quarantine?

287 MN: It definitely helped me understand that I'm not the only one that's going through emotional
288 and mental changes, as well as physical, like, (laughing) my body changed. And that was
289 something that I struggled with very much, because before quarantine, I was at my best body
290 ever, I worked out consistently, and so going into quarantine and not being—not having that
291 space to get in the zone to work out, it was something that was definitely difficult. And me and
292 my friends definitely tried to keep each other accountable, at least motivated. Anything to kind
293 of be there for each other as much as we possibly could, given the circumstances.

294 NM: How was this summer different from past summers?

295 MN: It was definitely different, but not exactly, ‘cause I—there was—What did I do this
296 summer? I know that I was definitely dancing, whether that be at home or at the studio, socially
297 distanced (laughs) and masked, always. But I was fortunate enough to be able to go in and dance,
298 as well as sub a class or two. But it felt as if nothing was different, because I would go outside
299 and tan or go for a walk, like, I was very much so outside as I always was. Just the only added
300 thing was you had to wear a mask (laughs). So everything felt pretty normal to me, because I was
301 doing the same activities I would usually do, just with precaution.

302 NM: How did you feel about being quarantined this summer?

303 MN: The summer felt better than the spring, because we were able to go outside eventually, and
304 something started opening up a little bit, as long as you were wearing masks, and that was
305 definitely something that helped, because I’d be able to go through a Chick-Fil-A or a Dunkin’
306 drive-thru, and that kind of felt very normal to me, going to, like, that coffee drive-thru and
307 getting my coffee and bagel. So that was something that helped me a lot, because it didn’t feel
308 any different than normal life. Though, it was sometimes difficult, obviously, when there were
309 restrictions, like, when you couldn’t go inside to eat or do the normal things that you would want
310 to do. Like, on a date—like, you couldn’t go inside to bowl, or stuff like that. So it was just
311 something that was a little irritating but definitely understandable.

312 NM: How did your plans for the summer of 2020 change?

313 MN: I didn’t have any plans (laughing) for summer 2020, if I’m being honest. I just—just
314 wanted to enjoy my time off and spend it with people I loved, and I did do that, because I spent it
315 with my family and my boyfriend, so it was definitely—It brought me much closer to them. So it
316 was very full of joy.

317 NM: How did you learn about the killing of George Floyd?

318 MN: I was on Instagram, and I—someone, like, posted the recording, which is—which was
319 something that was terrifying to see—like, seeing somebody literally murdered on a recording
320 was traumatic. Definitely brought me into a lot of tears.

321 NM: What was your response to this?

322 MN: I was in shock that people can be so horrible. Because I am such a positive person, I always
323 tend to look for the good, so I was very, very, like, in a very bad way, shocked that somebody
324 can do something like that. And I began to do more research and talk to black people I knew to
325 understand the situation and to support them, because that not only impacted George Floyd, it
326 impacted the whole black community, and I may not know how it feels, I can begin to
327 understand and learn, and that’s what I did.

328 NM: How have you responded to the Black Lives Matter movement?

329 MN: I definitely began to learn and definitely didn’t want to speak for anybody, but I did post on
330 social media to spread the word of those kinds of things and talk to people about them, like,
331 those kinds of things, and, like—that’s when I started cutting off the people that were very close-
332 minded and negative and didn’t understand, and it was definitely an eye-opener.

333 NM: What're your media or news sources?

334 MN: As sad as it is to say, Instagram or, like, the TV news, whenever I have a chance to see a
335 glimpse of something up there. But Instagram is my main source of information, as I do have lots
336 of people on there that are very informed, and I feel that media—like, social media is such a
337 weird thing to use as news, because everything can be skewed. That's why any time I always see
338 anything anywhere, I end up researching it, and that goes into, like, a two hour spiral of me
339 researching a topic that I just saw on Instagram, so that's kind of—I—like, I'll see something on
340 Instagram, and then I go into, like, a—like, detective mode and start to research.

341 NM: Describe a typical school day for you before the pandemic.

342 MN: I'd wake up at 6 A.M., get ready, and it depended if I wanted to take the train that day or if
343 I wanted to drive there. Driving took a little bit less time, the train took more. The train was
344 cheaper, but I felt that driving there felt safer. So then I drove down there, got to Columbia, at
345 the Dance center, took class from 9 A.M. to 3:20 or five o'clock, depending on the day, and then
346 I'd either get in the car, the train, get back up to my area, and then—and I'd grab food on the
347 way, and I'd go to work, or if I ended class early, I'd go home and eat. After work, rehearsals,
348 (laughing) and then I'd come home. Shower, do homework, go to sleep. Redo everything the
349 next day.

350 NM: What is a school day like for you now?

351 MN: (laughing) I wake up at 8 A.M., which is so nice to say. I take class from nine to five—
352 3:20, depending on the day. And then I have a break in between my classes before I go to work, I
353 go to work, and I get out like ten—nine—9:30, ten, then I come home and shower, play some
354 Animal Crossing, or, like, go to sleep, depending on how I'm feeling that day.

355 NM: Why did you decide to return to college during a pandemic?

356 MN: (laughing) Because I wanna get out of college as soon as I can. I have many things that I
357 want to continue with, and I think that it wouldn't--it's not, like—it's not a terrible experience, as
358 much as I expected it to be, it turned out a lot better, and I actually prefer to take class at home. I
359 have a nice ballet barre, it's literally sitting right in front of me. And so it's—it's a lot more—it's
360 just more accessible and not as draining. I literally don't have to go—I don't have to wake up at
361 6 A.M., and that's obviously the goal.

362 NM: How do you feel about the way that school is currently going?

363 MN: I've—I've honestly enjoyed the semester a lot. It made me—I didn't take—I began not to
364 take dancing in the studio for granted, and I remembered how special it is and how fulfilling it is,
365 as well as having a personal practice where you have yourself accountable at home while you're
366 on Zoom. So, definitely, it opened up my mindset on what dance is and could be.

367 NM: How were you expecting this school year to go once you heard the pandemic would stretch
368 into the fall?

369 MN: I mean, this is exactly what I expected. I was expecting to be hybrid and then go fully
370 online, so I wasn't very shocked, because I did do my research this time, so I kind of felt it
371 coming, and I began to realize that that's the reality for right now, and I just kind of got myself
372 ready for it at the beginning of the semester. And I can honestly say that my mental health has
373 not been better.

374 NM: How has this school year met your expectations and how hasn't it?

375 MN: Can you repeat that?

376 NM: How has this school year—(background noise) [Interviewer pauses to address background
377 noise.] I'm so sorry (laughs). How do you expect—Oh, wait. How has this school year met your
378 expectations and how hasn't it?

379 MN: I definitely—I had a feeling—So last semester, I felt like I absolutely learned nothing,
380 because I couldn't focus, I struggled with being on Zoom, I had migraines, like, 24/7 because of
381 sitting in front of a computer. But—So I was scared that that's what was gonna happen again, but
382 I've learned that the time off from the computer and spacing out the things that you need to do
383 for homework as well definitely was something that helped me, like, kind of pushed that fear
384 behind me.

385 NM: How are you and your professors communicating?

386 MN: We've been communicating through email and Canvas, as well as during classes, like, they
387 make announcements and ask if there's any questions. Professors have been very open, which is
388 something that feels very new, because professors and teachers weren't usually like that before
389 we got to Zoom, but I feel like they're--like they're honestly a lot more accessible now, and it's
390 easier to get in contact with teachers and professors as well.

391 NM: What challenges have you faced this semester with remote learning?

392 MN: (laughing) Definitely finding a space to dance, because my mom has, like, a ritual, and she
393 has to drink her coffee in the morning in the living room, but I also prefer to take classes in the
394 living room, because that's the biggest space. And then now we have a dog, so our dog is
395 running around all the time, and my brother, he's just always in his room, so that's easier, but my
396 sister also enjoys to walk around in between classes, and that gets distracting. So the
397 relationships have to be put on pause, (laughing) and that's something that's so difficult, because
398 when I see my dog, I just wanna pet her (laughing) when she comes running to me when I'm on
399 that ballet barre. But I can't, so relationships have to be pushed away for class-time, and that's
400 definitely something that was a struggle, 'cause it's so enticing to start petting your dog or talk to
401 your family member when they have a question.

402 NM: What has been your experience with hybrid courses?

403 MN: It's been enjoyable. I honestly—Like I said a little bit earlier, I found, like, I was more
404 grateful for the moments I did have in the studio. But then again, when I was back home, I took
405 the corrections that I was given and I'd work towards them, and then I'd come back and I'd get
406 new corrections, which also helped me learn a lot quicker, because I'd be so focused on those

407 things because I was just told them, and I would kind of, like, grasp onto them and soak them in
408 like a sponge (laughing) I guess you could say.

409 NM: Describe your current living situation.

410 MN: I still live with my mom and my siblings. That's pretty much it. It hasn't really changed
411 since pre-pandemic.

412 NM: How have your practices to avoid getting COVID evolved?

413 MN: So at first, obviously, it was like, (dramatically) "Stay at home!" Like, I wouldn't go
414 anywhere. Like work, I had to work from home, everything, stuff like that. Then I began to, like,
415 go and get groceries for my mom, because we understood the—She is a little—She is older, and
416 so she's more vulnerable in that place, so then I began to take on the groceries and running the
417 errands, and, obviously, masked and social distanced, always. Hand sanitizer, always. Washing
418 hands—have always been happening, so when I heard people making, like, advertisements for
419 how to wash your hands, I was like, "This has to be some kind of joke." (laughing) You don't
420 know how to wash your hands?

421 NM: How would you describe your mental health pre-pandemic?

422 MN: I was doing well pre-pandemic. I was very stable, everything was going very well, and
423 then, all of a sudden, it felt like everything was kind of just chopped off and I couldn't touch it.
424 And it was something that was, like—that's what took a toll on me, because I felt like dance was
425 literally taken from me, like social interaction was taken away from me, so it was very difficult
426 to adjust once pandemic hit.

427 NM: How do you deal with feelings of depression?

428 MN: So I tend to keep (laughing) those kinds of things in myself—like, within myself, which is
429 so terrible, but I've, like—I'm grateful, because I have people around me that notice me and are
430 very observant. My boyfriend notices immediately when something is off and, obviously, helps
431 me through it and tries to figure it out, because I'm such—I'm a person that doesn't want to ask
432 for help, but he's always there and offers himself, which is something that I'm very grateful for,
433 because I've never had a person like that in my life.

434 NM: What are some coping skills you use to deal with the anxiety from the virus?

435 MN: I distract myself, whether that be improvising in my room or watching Netflix with my
436 siblings and our favorite movies from our childhood, spending time with my mom, and just—it
437 was just—I needed connections, and I'm a person that needs physical touch, so hugs from family
438 members are something that really, really helped.

439 NM: Who do you talk to about your concerns?

440 MN: There's two people: my mom and my boyfriend (laughs). My boyfriend's my best friend
441 and so is my mom, so they're definitely people that I talk to the most. My mom is very, very
442 busy trying to support us, so usually my first bet is going to my boyfriend, and worst-case
443 scenario, if he doesn't answer my questions, I go to my mom when she's free.

444 NM: How has the pandemic changed your relationship to your parents?

445 MN: Me and my mom got a lot closer. We were always very close, but we have grown to be
446 more understanding of each other and the things we do and why we do them and, like, why I
447 need social interaction. Like, she began to understand me more as a human being, as well as me
448 understanding her as a human being, and I think without the pandemic, that probably would've
449 not happened, because we were such busy people.

450 NM: How has your relationship with your family as a whole changed since before the pandemic?

451 MN: We all got a lot closer. My sister will come into my room and just sit down and be like, "So
452 what are we watching today?" Like, that's something that we—we never did, because I was
453 always on the run, and my sister would be struggling with homework and doing homework for
454 hours, and it's just—we had the time, finally, to work on our relationships.

455 NM: How has your relationship with your friends changed since before the pandemic?

456 MN: There're some friends that—Hm, let me rephrase that. I've—We've all begun to understand
457 that time is so difficult and that we are all literal adults, so it's very difficult to find time to catch
458 up, because if I'm free on a Monday night, my friends will be free on a Monday morning. It's,
459 like, always the opposite, and that's the true reality of how growing up is, and I think just having
460 grace and understanding is something that we all began to understand, and it became so evident
461 that that's something that was so needed within our relationships.

462 NM: How do you think the pandemic has affected or influenced the presidential election?

463 MN: I feel like people—(pause) Going back to what I said earlier, how people, like, woke up
464 during the pandemic—I feel like that's probably what happened politically as well, and people's
465 ideas and thoughts began to change.

466 NM: In what ways has the pandemic affected your views or choices regarding the election?

467 MN: It didn't really change (laughs). My opinions stayed the same, they just grew.

468 NM: How did you cast your ballot?

469 MN: I went to an in-person, like, ballot-casting—I don't remember—polling place! There it is.
470 And it was socially distanced with masks, and the people there were very helpful with, like—for
471 first-timers. Rules were definitely supported with how everyone was socially distant yet still
472 were very willing to help you understand where to go and how to do something if you didn't
473 understand.

474 NM: How do you feel about the outcome?

475 MN: (whispering) Very happy. Very happy. (laughs)

476 NM: How has the election affected your relationships with family members?

477 MN: My mom didn't really understand, because she is from, like—she is older, so it's very
478 hard—like, she has such morals that they're very difficult to change, but she's learning to
479 understand, and so she's learning, like, the differences and how it is going to be better.

480 NM: What about your relationships with friends?

481 MN: Many of my—Literally every one of my friends had the same ideas as me, because I did cut
482 out all of the people that were more on the opposing side that did not agree, and that was
483 something that was so relieving, especially coming to the election.

484 NM: What are some things about your childhood you wish you could change, and why?

485 MN: I honestly wouldn't change a thing. I think everything that happened happened for a reason
486 and taught me a lesson, so I—I don't think I'd change anything. (laughing) It made me who I am
487 today.

488 NM: What are some things you wish you could've done differently in high school, and why?

489 MN: The only thing that I would say that I would want to do differently is not making myself
490 feel guilty for my dad's passing, because I was in charge of all the donations and getting the
491 word out for help. Because I'm the oldest and I speak both English and Polish, I was assigned the
492 duty pretty much in my household to do those things, and I kind of held myself accountable, and
493 when he passed, I've always felt guilty. But growing up, it wasn't my fault, because I did
494 everything that I possibly could, so—(shrugs).

495 NM: What are some reasons you maybe wish you could've gone to a different college or
496 university?

497 MN: I don't think I have any. I am very, very happy I went to Columbia. It opened up my world
498 so much more. Not only training dance-wise, but knowledge-wise, I've learned so much from so
499 many people, and I'm very grateful.

500 NM: What aspects of life did you take for granted before the virus?

501 MN: (sighs) Definitely eating out and sitting and dining at a restaurant. I would do that, like—
502 Me and my boyfriend would go out, like, every other weekend, and we'd get sushi or try new
503 food places, and that was, like, our thing (laughs). But we were not able to do that, so that's
504 something that I took for granted, 'cause it's so enjoyable and creates such memories that you
505 can't really recreate.

506 NM: What are some things you wish you could've or think you should've done before
507 quarantine?

508 MN: I wish I'd traveled more. I wanted to go to—like, to—like, just sightseeing, anywhere
509 (laughs). That winter break before quarantine, so I think that—I don't remember what year that
510 was. But that didn't happen, because money began to get really tight, so that never really
511 happened. And so, once quarantine hit, I was devastated that I couldn't travel.

512 NM: [Interviewer gestures to interviewee to give them a moment then addresses background
513 noise.] I'm sorry (laughs). Where was I? How do you think you should've or could've used your
514 time differently during quarantine? Why didn't you?

515 MN: It was hard for me to work out at home. That was something that I struggled with a lot, and
516 I wish I would've figured out different ways that I found enjoyable, but I found myself shutting
517 down every single time I tried, and if I didn't enjoy it, it would just be like (hand gesture) "Shut
518 down, not doing that again for, like, two weeks," and then I'd come back being super motivated,
519 and then it'd happen again, because I'd be like, "This doesn't feel like it should. I don't feel
520 motivated anymore!" So that was definitely something that (sighs) was tedious.

521 NM: How would you describe your college experience during the pandemic?

522 MN: I would—Mm, I would probably say forgiving, because spring was absolutely terrible, but
523 fall really made up for it, and I found the joy in dancing again and found new ways of moving, as
524 well as creating and understanding and just being grateful for what I have, whether that's
525 dancing in my space or dancing at the studio. I'm just very grateful overall.

526 NM: What should Columbia be doing differently?

527 MN: I think they're definitely doing a lot to keep everyone safe, with the two-week quarantine
528 prior to coming—For, like, the classes starting, there was that two-week quarantine for anyone
529 that came from another state. And then I think that just being masked and socially distant, class
530 numbers being smaller, having the hybrid courses, alternating groups coming in every week, I
531 think that was very, very smart, because stripping everyone away from everything would've
532 been very, very difficult for everybody, and I think that they're doing the best they can to keep
533 everybody safe.

534 NM: What was the most significant change in your life due to the virus?

535 MN: No hugs (laughs). I'm such a hugger, so it was very difficult not to be able to go up to an
536 acquaintance or a friend from class and give them a hug. Again, physical touch is something that
537 is scientifically proven to help ease anxiety, and I think that's definitely something that not only I
538 can relate to.

539 NM: How has the pandemic affected you and those close to you?

540 MN: Thankfully, it hasn't directly affected us, it just kind of, like, the restrictions make our lives
541 a little bit more difficult when it comes to work. Teaching has been a lot more difficult.
542 Enrollment is a little bit more difficult, as well as just, like, that fear is always in the back of your
543 head, type thing.

544 NM: How has the pandemic affected your personal relationships?

545 MN: It really—It made my personal relationships closer, because whether that be checking up on
546 each other, having a random Face Time, that's something that definitely didn't happen as often,
547 prior to the pandemic, because everyone was so busy and always doing something and never at
548 home, because that's how our society literally works, and it's ridiculous.

549 NM: How have you changed since before the pandemic?

550 MN: I definitely grew a lot. I've become stronger mentally, physically, like, I can do push-ups
551 now. I made myself practice. But, also, I've been happier and more joyful and very, very grateful
552 and thankful.

553 NM: What are some things you wish you could've done differently during the past portion of the
554 pandemic?

555 MN: I would've told myself not to eat so many snacks, because I was snacking all the time,
556 because I was stress-eating, and that just added on to everything that was (laughing) going on
557 around me and, like, mentally.

558 NM: How do you feel about the future?

559 MN: I'm excited. I can't wait to see what comes out of this, whether that be creatively or just
560 what the world is gonna be like. It's just gonna be interesting to see.

561 NM: What else would you like to add?

562 MN: I think if this were to ever happen again, I would definitely want to—I don't know—make a
563 note-to-self or to others not to be so hard on yourself, because it is something that you can't
564 control.

565 NM: Well, thank you for doing this interview, Magdalena. I am going to stop the recording.