

**Oral History  
Capturing Quarantine  
Spring 2020  
Final Reflection**

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1. How did you feel when you read the email notifying students the oral history project would change from *Interfaith Chicago* to *Capturing Quarantine* due to the transition to remote learning?

I was slightly disappointed because I was excited to interview the interviewee whom I was assigned to; however, I think being able to look back at college students' personal stories about the coronavirus gives deeper insight for those who don't understand the fears and adjustments college students have had to make in these past few months. I am very grateful that my class was able to complete an oral history project so no matter what it ended up being, I was glad that this opportunity wasn't taken away from us—like so many other things. There are also so many sectors that have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic that having any documentation is something that is truly priceless.

2. What were your initial thoughts about participating in an oral history project documenting your classes' experience during the first months of the global pandemic?

There was so much uncertainty happening to me and around me that I understood for myself and others that it would be difficult trying to reflect back on something that was currently happening. I never doubted my participation in this oral history project. I knew that whatever my class did would be slightly different because it would be irresponsible to disregard a worldwide pandemic. My biggest concern shifting gears with the new project was being able to complete all aspects of the project to the best of my ability. I had to rely on the fact my computer would work, that I could be in a place that had no distractions and that the WiFi would be fast enough to conduct the interview.

3. How do you feel about the project now?

I'm truly relieved for the fast turnaround my class and I did. We created a whole new set of questions, a new biodata form and outline for the project. It felt like we did that twice since the interviewers also became the interviewee. To me, that was my biggest change, was becoming the interviewee. I was fully prepared to conduct and interview and transcribe it. I was not prepared to reflect on my experience as a college student affected by the coronavirus pandemic. I cannot wait for all the information to be put

together and published. Though it is slightly disappointing not being able to have an in-person celebration with our interviewee like my classmates and I were told earlier in the semester, I feel truly grateful getting to have this experience.

4. As an interviewer:

a. How did you prepare for the interview?

Along with all the paperwork prep, like the biodata form, questions and outline, I had to mentally prepare. In this situation, most of the things that my interviewee said, I could relate to. Things such as being displaced, not being able to focus on schoolwork at home, and being slightly pessimistic during this time were all relatable. I had to emotionally prepare for some of the hardships my interviewee was going to tell me. The hour leading up to the interview, I had my laptop charged all the way, my audio and video tested and made sure the other person in my apartment knew that I needed at least an hour of silence so I could focus on the interview.

b. What was it like to interview a classmate?

It was a nice experience because I knew that it would give my interviewee to share his story. I also knew that it wouldn't be the same as interviewing my *Interfaith Chicago* interviewee because that project required a lot more research. For *Capturing Quarantine*, most of the terminology such as "Zoom" and "social distancing," were words that I was already familiar with. Also, the follow-up questions came more naturally to me than I had thought because I was familiar with some of Columbia's policies so I knew of possible follow-ups.

c. How did you feel after the interview?

I felt relieved. I knew I asked all the required core questions and was ready to transcribe it. It felt like I had this gem of an interview that I needed to protect at all costs. From having it saved to my desktop to uploading it to my courses Canvas page, I wanted to make sure nothing could get in my way from having it fully completed.

d. What is the most important thing you learned as an interviewer?

I learned that silence is okay and to allow the interviewee to talk about what they want to. Though me as the interviewer facilitated the questions, my interviewee's answers ended up guiding me to ask the right questions. I also think as an interviewer, I had the mindset that if I were reading and listening to the final interview, what questions would I have at the very end.

e. What advice would you give to future interviewers?

No matter how much one might relate to what their interviewee is saying, if one goes into the mindset of not knowing anything at all, they will end up learning more things because it allows the interviewer to go in with an open

mind knowing that they will learn something brand new—either about the person [interviewee] or the situation.

5. As a narrator:

a. How did you prepare to be interviewed?

I knew what the project was about and what the end goal was, so I had to prepare for how much I was willing to share. I think of myself as a private person when it comes to intimate details about my life. I don't mind sharing happy things or surface level problems that I am facing, but if it involves deeper issues regarding my life, I don't typically share them with others because I don't want to burden others. Being on the other side answering another person's questions, I had to be in the mindset that they didn't know anything about my life so I had to fill in the gaps for them. The things I shared were updates like I would share with my parents; they were stories and details that were brand new to them.

b. Describe your experience being interviewed.

Being interviewed was very weird. I am a journalist so I'm so used to asking the questions. Even though I knew this wasn't a test, it felt like I personally was testing myself to answer the questions as articulately as I could. I also know that when I interview others for an article, it's very frustrating when someone starts a good quote and then it gets cut up because that's just how people talk. So for myself, I got in my head to speak in full sentences and make sure I gave enough detail about my situation.

c. How did you feel after the interview ended?

I felt relieved because after hours of thinking about what I would say, I finally got it off my chest. It was a lot easier than I had thought it was going to be.

d. What would you tell someone who is hesitant to be interviewed?

If one is hesitant to share their story, know they can share as much or as little as they'd like. Being interviewed allows the person to share their story that otherwise might not get out. Also, most likely one will be interviewed on a subject they know very well so it doesn't take much studying to talk about a personal experience.

6. (OPTIONAL) Questions about narrators' private lives and personal relationships were not included in the formal interview, how do you feel about this?

I allowed my interviewee to talk about his personal life as much as he wanted to, but we didn't talk about personal relationships as much. For myself, I talked about my private life and personal relationship because those two were actually the biggest two things that have been affected by the coronavirus. I figured that if my interviewee

wanted to talk about his personal life, he would've. That could have been a wrong assumption, but the questions were open ended enough that he could've elaborated on his personal life or relationships.

- a. How has your gender, sexuality, race, and/or ethnicity affected your experience during the global pandemic?

I am Asian, specifically Chinese. I've seen how people that I don't know around me have changed their attitude towards me. I remember as the pandemic started spreading to the states and it became the norm to wear face coverings, I was out shopping with my boyfriend. I must've not realized what was going around me, but my boyfriend tugged on my arm to pull me back. I looked at him because it startled me. Later he said that the man in front of us turned around and glared at me. I knew instantly as he said that, it was because I was Chinese. It only happened another time after that, but it really has been hard seeing other Asian and Asian American friends of mine being mistreated because of their ethnicity. This pandemic only reminds me of how out of fear, people turn to hate to find someone to blame.

- b. Exploring and developing new relationships is an important part of the undergraduate experience, how has this aspect of your life been affected?

When campus closed, I was slightly relieved to know that I could stay in my residence hall while I worked as a resident assistant. A few days after that announcement, I learned otherwise. My boyfriend of a year and three months, Braxton, had predicted that the residence halls were next to close but I was in denial. He offered me a place to stay with him in his apartment in Chicago for the time being even before I had learned I had to evacuate the residence hall. I was worried to go back home to my parents in Cincinnati because both my parents are at a risk of dying if they contracted the coronavirus. So, I ended up moving in with Braxton. He helped me move my essential items when I had to be out and then later helped me move out the rest of items from my apartment when it came time to move everything out.

My boyfriend is a Columbia student as well, so we had to coordinate when he would have a video conference for his class and when I'd have mine. I also had extra work that was put online like participating in virtual panels for Columbia's admissions department and interviewing sources for my work at the Chronicle.

The biggest thing the two of us had to navigate was how a couple of just over a year was going to live together and be around one another 24/7. Before the pandemic, we would hang out and occasionally spend the night at one another's places. But living together in a studio apartment was going to be a whole different ball game. We sat down one night at dinner before the official move-in and talked about how I could contribute staying there and other

lifestyle changes that we had to agree upon. It'd be a lie to say our parents were approving of us living together this early on. Both of our parents were worried about the strain it would put on our relationship and that if we got in a bad fight, where would I have gone. I even called one of my family friends who had lived with her now-husband before they got married to ask for tips. She advised me to work out a schedule of alone time and talk about financial contributions.

I'm really grateful to still be living with Braxton currently and for this summer. It would also be a lie to say that we never got on one another's nerves or fought because it does happen. We have both learned a lot about one another that otherwise we would not have known until later in our future together. I laugh reflecting on Braxton and mine's conversation about what was one thing we learned about the other living together. His answer was that he learned I have a specific spot of everything and that if it was out of place, I'd move it back. My answer was that he was very particular about his getting-ready for bed routine and very territorial about "his" side of the bed.

Ultimately, we both finished the spring semester strong as it is one less stressor we have to worry about at the moment. We still hold date nights and make sure to have alone time. I think it will really weird when the fall semester starts and I move into a residence hall again because I'll be used to getting a goodnight kiss or having someone help cook dinner with me.

c. How are you dealing with the absence of physical contact?

I'm living with my boyfriend, Braxton, during this time so I am not missing physical contact with him; however every time we go out, we bring our face masks and hand sanitizers. We also make sure to wash our hands when we get back and to change clothes just in case any bacteria got on our clothes. I also miss being able to safely give my parents and friends back home in Cincinnati a hug. I can video chat and instant message them, but it's really not the same not getting to physically embrace them.

7. Is there anything else you would like to include?

Dr. Erin McCarthy has been a wonderful professor this past semester; she has been very understanding about all of our classmates' new and unique circumstances. I want to thank Dr. Mac very much for this opportunity. She has opened my eyes to the amazing things oral historians do. Thanks for a great school year.