

Harri Bien-Aime COVID-19 Oral History Interview

Interviewer: Kailey Dresel

June 6, 2020

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START

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Kailey Dresel: Okay, so my name is Kailey and I'll be asking [Short pause for automated voice], I'll be asking you about fifteen questions today kinda just related about to COVID and your experiences. If you need me to slow down or repeat them anytime or clarify, just let me know. If you get kind of an echoing or repeat noise, just let me know and we can try and work through that, so it doesn't show up on the recording. Alright?

00:00:32.250

Hari Bien-Aime: Kay.

KD: So, the first question is when do you first remember hearing about COVID-19 and what were your thoughts about how it might affect you?

HB: [Long inhale] I think I heard about it first in March, I believe? And, at the time, I didn't have anyone to think about [long pause].

00:00:59.730

KD: Okay.

HB: Yeah, like, I'm just like, "Okay, this is like a little bit weird [unclear]."

00:01:17.408

KD: What was that?

HB: Like, I'm wearing headphones right now and it feels like it's kinda breaking up a little, for me.

KD: Yeah, it is – it – it's a little bit spotty. You were really clear at first and now it's breaking up a little. I don't know if it's the headphones or not, or if the mic sometimes on the laptop they have to, you have to turn it up. I've had a few other interviewees do that. Have you tried it without the headphones at all?

HB: [Long inhale] I (unclear) will stick with the headphones in order to hear clearly at least.

KD: Okay, I can kind of hear you. Lets just keep going and if it keeps getting patchy, we can try – I can try to call you again, if that's fine.

00:02:05.252

HB: Okay.

KD: Okay, so kind of what were your initial thoughts about COVID in the beginning?

HB: [Long inhale] My initial thoughts was that it wasn't too big of a deal, at least from when I gathered information-wise.

KD: Mmhm.

HB: And as time went on and I ended up going more into that, I was kinda confused – concerned as not only a student a student but also a minority that could potentially be immunocompromised.

00:02:43.270

KD: Mmhm, okay. So, now knowing what you know, is there anything you would tell your past self about it now?

HB: Stock up on masks, stock up on hand sanitizer. Like literally read up to what - on [short pause], like read up on what's going on, like basically [?] you know something big ends up going to happen.

00:03:17.100

KD: Speaking of masks and hand sanitizer, what – what were some things that might've been a little bit harder for you to get – have access or purchase throughout this time?

HB: [Short inhale] If I was still in Menomonie, it'd be like the hand sanitizer more or less cause, along with the masks cause, I happen to live in an apartment and its not that easy to like try and go to a place like Walmart and have it like have those materials.

00:03:50.740

KD: Mmhm. All right [long pause], what has – what has been one of – one of the most challenging thing throughout COVID for you or what have been your biggest changes you've had to make?

HB: [Short inhale] Learning from home.

KD: Mmhm.

HB: Like I wasn't literally prepared to be like spending the rest of my Spring semester at home and I was thinking there would only be a short period that was going to be at home, and afterwards I'd be like back on campus. It feels like – still like learning from home has become the most difficult challenge for me, especially because of the fact I live like a thousand plus miles here in New York City.

00:04:41.928

KD: Oh wow, okay, yeah. What has worked for you – for you know since it's been challenging learning online, is there any specific thing that has kind of helped you a little bit more online?

HB: Maybe not having to rush it all that much with my school stuff. Granted, I only had like one class where I actually had to be there online – online in a sense. But the other classes, it just feels like for them – all my classes taking it easy at the same time pace-wise with my school work.

00:05:20.560

KD: Mmhm. What are some things that you've done to stay healthy and to protect your mental health during this time?

HB: [long inhale] On the mental health aspect [short pause], on the mental health aspect, I've more or less have just been like staying at home, trying to go relax, and more or less like find time where I can just be like spend – basically just watch videos or listen to music or that sort of thing. But on the other hand, it just feels like – I forgot to mention with the class where I get to go at my own pace. It feels like – on one hand, it's been nice to [unclear] and I don't have the stress of the class room environment, but on the other hand it's just like [short pause] what am I going to do? Like literally basically (?) occupy myself in between my class time more or less?

00:06:28.946

KD: Yeah – yeah that makes sense. So what are you doing to stay in contact with your friends or loved ones? Are you – like what technologies are you using?

HB: Facebook and social media more or less. That's how I've been trying to keep in contact with my friends.

KD: Mmhm. Has it been challenging using more social media or do you find it kind of just easier or just easy to get into?

HB: Me personally, it's easier cause I have a decade worth of experience using social media.

00:07:10.150

KD: Yeah, mmhm. Okay, are you surprised by how some people are responding or how life has changed at all since COVID has started?

HB: Yeah, I'm really surprised. And especially like - constantly like during my period – during this period and it continues now and I'm going to hear friends that are like debating on if they should be like “I'm going back to school in the fall” or if they're going to be taking a gap year. And especially with today's literally announcement that classes will resume in the fall as is. It's like “Okay, that's going to be like we're leaving to go back to school.” At the same time, this is more questions like on what it's going to be like in this environment to be specific.

00:08:02.220

KD: Mmhm. Has there been any silver linings for you during this crisis?

HB: My time with family. Instead of being like away for school purposes, I'm like "Hey I'm at home with family."

KD: Yeah – yeah, I think a lot of people have said that and you know – yeah, mmhm. That totally makes sense. So is there anything that you took more interest in or any hobbies that you've been able to pick up or gone back that you may not have done for a few years or any new things- you've started to do since this all started, if you've had extra time on your hands?

HB: I think more or less just being active on Twitter and that's the activism is one thing that I've had time to do during this crisis. Another thing that I've had time do is follow politics albeit anything newsworthy in regard to the crisis. Like I've just had time to be like search the internet, read up [unclear], and even like lay basically as much like [unclear] be active, that's what I've more or less like had my decade to at least, outside of my craft stuff.

00:09:24.158

KD: Yeah – yeah that's awesome for sure. Yeah I think sometimes, you know, in life you get caught up and you – I mean I think I get busy and busy and sometimes I don't stop and I need to be better at being more aware and being more – yeah, showing more initiative when it comes to things like that, for sure. Are you – What are some things that might worry you about how people are responding to COVID or how it might affect you or them? Are you kinda – Are you hopeful about things?

HB: [Short inhale] To be honest, I'm not that hopeful on the near future that there is, especially when it comes like to the worry of potential second wave coming through, more cases, even more deaths like. I'm very very very afraid at least until a vaccine that comes along and who knows when that vaccine will even come. Maybe in 2021 or beyond that. I'm just like highly concerned for the future at the moment until like the announcement of the vaccine.

00:10:43.150

KD: Mmhm. For sure. You said that you've been on Twitter more and reading up on the news and everything, so how would you say the news coverage portrays things or do you see a difference in the way the news is saying things compared to how you personally see or experience things.

HB: From an American perspective, it feels like it can be mixed but going beyond globally- globally it feels like this – so it's more in depth, especially when it comes to the United States itself and how we're going to handle it compared to the rest of the world.

00:11:28.150

KD: Mmhm, for sure. Do you think that – what are some things you think might change when this pandemic is over, if anything in your opinion?

HB: [Long pause and short inhale] I think that a few things that come to mind is how we are gathered in spaces for one. Another thing could end up being like how we go like about like weather like it's right [?] for school like we can maybe as much be like doing our stuff from

home sometimes and in other cases it's like we can be there in person but and basically distanced out sort of way.

00:12:22.730

KD: Mmhm, mmhm. What are the things you miss the most about campus and the Menomonie community?

HB: [Short inhale] The quiet [unclear] environment. Probably my roommates or my apartment, my friends at school, the activities that I get to get involved in on campus, and even some of the professors, like seeing them in person is what I am going to miss a whole lot.

00:12:56.400

KD: Uh-huh. So this one is kinda a little bit more lighter. So if you were [unclear] for twenty-four hours with no chance of infection, how would you spend it?

HB: [Short inhale] I'm thinking hand shaking because we happen to be going to touch a lot likely so unless we're going to wash our hands constantly, I feel like some hand shaking would be one way we could go out and spread it. And another way could end up being like basically if we have a cold or flu or something like that.

00:13:40.280

KD: Mmhm. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience during this pandemic at all?

HB: [Long pause] It just feels like a whole new experience that's like opened up like new perspectives as a person at least because I never like had to deal with a college life from a distance perspective and maybe in the future I'll be open like for more of that but it goes and depends on what each school decides to go for. Not only just in Wisconsin, but the United States also. It does open like new perspectives and new ideas and new initiatives and how we should go and basically deal with future pandemics like this.

00:14:43.380

KD: Mmhm. Mmhm. Well I just want to say thank you for chatting with me and sharing your opinions and views on how its affected. I mean no one can ever foresee this kind of thing coming and it's definitely impacted peoples lives in so many different ways so it's really nice for me personally to get to hear everyone's stories but also when this is published in the Stout Archives [University of Wisconsin-Stout Archives] other people as well will get to know how different people were affected and so I'd just like to thank you for taking time out of your day to meet with me and I appreciate it a lot and I hope you have a great rest of your weekend.

HB: Yeah, same to you.

KD: All right, bye-bye.

HB: Bye.

00:15:33.378  
END