

Glenda Jones COVID-19 Oral History Interview

Interviewer: Kailey Dresel

May 29, 2020

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START

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Kailey Dresel: Start and we can - okay, so the first question was when do you first remember hearing about COVID-19 and what did you think about how it might affect you?

Glenda Jones: Well, I remember seeing it on the news, probably happening in China, and I kind of remember that there were some students at UW-Platteville [University of Wisconsin-Platteville] that had come from that part of China and so there was some concern just from other people that were faculty governance reps. And I didn't know at the time whether it was going to directly affect me or whether it would start to be an issue in this country. But I remember in the first week of March when the new chancellor was starting, and I think like a Wednesday or Thursday night, there was a Yes, I'm a Feminist event and I went to that and she was there and I was joking with her about pandemic - people had started buying a lot of toilet paper and stuff by that point and I was just saying something to her about it and she seemed kind of clueless about it like she hadn't been watching the news or anything. And the next morning, I had another meeting with her, and she said, "oh Sandi Scott is coming in and we're having a meeting, she has to brief me about the pandemic." And by the next week, it had become an emergency. So, it went from just a background of things happening to things happening really quick the first week of March.

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KD: Yeah, so by what you know now, what might you say to your past self like at that time?

GJ: Well, I would probably say that this is going to be one of the most difficult events of your life and you didn't - I didn't see it coming. And so, it's like you can maybe not - you won't know something really bad is about to happen.

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KD: Yeah, yeah. The next question is what has been one of the biggest changes, or the biggest change, that you've had to deal with throughout all this?

GJ: Just no definite beginning or end to my day. My kids are home from school. I have a son, who's eleven, just finishing fifth grade and my daughter is five, she was in 4K [Four-Year-Old Kindergarten]. Her school ended abruptly so, and they didn't have anywhere to go so and I'm a single parent, so we've had - you know, it's been a very tense situation. You can hear her in the background chirping like a bird.

KD: [Laughter].

GJ: I've been in Zoom meetings sometimes with different platforms, as many as nine a day, and so I've had to work from home, or on my phone or wherever I am, with the kids there and try to meet their needs. You know, I don't know how any of it has worked but initially there were a couple weeks where maybe I slept four hours a night at the most.

KD: Yeah, yeah that's hard. Are you –

GJ: There's no time when I am a parent versus when I am an employee versus when I was teaching my classes, just all this stuff had to be done and so many meetings kept piling on because we were just trying to keep the university going and deal with the dynamic changing situation and the financial crisis that ensued and all the – then we had to move to furloughs and lay – you know we're moving into layoffs. So, it's just been one major event after another without a break.

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KD: The next question is: Are you surprised by how people have responded or how life has changed since then?

GJ: No, I think there's a lot of people that are extremely cautious. For example, I don't – people don't know what to expect for the fall at this point. Whether or not there's going to be public school, whether or not we'll be face to face at Stout [University of Wisconsin-Stout], whether things are going to get worse with the pandemic, whether it's going to become better, whether we're going to get a treatment or a vaccine. We just don't know what to expect and people are very hesitant about being all-in at this point because they don't know how to plan for that kind of uncertainty. [Short pause] Repeat the question [unclear] again.

KD: It was just kind of like are you surprised by how some people have responded or how your life has changed? So, kind of like, you know, you said that a lot of people were consistent of [?]staying home, are you maybe surprised – are you shocked at how like, you know, fast everything changed so fast?

GJ: You know I guess I was really kind of surprised by the culture wars that have taken place. That some people began to think that it was their constitutional right to just be out in the world and contract the disease and whatever happened, happened. That life became so expendable. My dad is in an assisted living facility in Utah, he's eighty-seven. And they really had to change the way they do things there. They stopped having a dining room, he's had to stay in his room most of the time, they are not really supposed to out. I've really seen it affect them because if anyone there has an active case of COVID-19, a lot of them could die quickly.

KD: Yeah, yeah.

GJ: And I have a lot of other family that don't think we should be that concerned. Our, you know, relatives that don't think we should be that concerned. I'm starting to see people maybe loosen the restrictions a little bit. Most of the people that I know personally took it very seriously, wore masks. There wasn't – initially, for a couple of weeks people really did not go anywhere but I would say that I'm seeing a lot more people out now. There's a lot more people

interacting face-to-face without wearing masks. And my son had a Magic Penny Parade which was kind of like a fifth grade – the fifth-grade teachers came around and just gave the kids a gift and, you know, said goodbye and you'll be going on to middle school.

KD: Do you live in Menomonie [Menomonie, Wisconsin]?

GJ: And there was one, two, five teachers that came and not one of them had a mask on. And they were all hugging my son, so I took some pictures and put it on Facebook and some people commented to me like “does Wisconsin have a death wish or what?” Because it was interesting – we also went to my daughters 4K just to get her portfolio, her teacher did not have a mask on, and she was just asking “can we hug the kids.” I was kind of surprised that the people of the public school were not more cautious.

KD: Yeah, do you live right here in Menomonie?

GJ: Yes.

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KD: Oh, okay, interesting, yeah. What are you doing to remain connected to your friends or loved ones during this time?

GJ: What am I doing to what?

KD: To remain connected to your friends or loved ones who you might not be able to see at this time?

GJ: Well with my dad, he doesn't have this kind of Zoom technology but for a while I was calling him every single day. I didn't know how he was processing the virus, whether or not he was scared by it. He was concerned about long-term ability for maybe just be able to see his family again. He was like “if you can't come this summer to visit, I don't know if I'll be alive the next year.” He was actually making comments like that. So, I try to stay connected more by the phone. But with other people, I have, you know, used more technology. That's pretty much all that we have at this point. My kids are even on the computer doing Zoom classes. I don't necessarily feel cut off from people socially, I just feel that I've lost a lot of freedom to move around and to make choices. And some of that loss is due to the fact that I have to work from home and take care of my kids.

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KD: Yeah, yeah. What kinds of things have you done to stay healthy or to protect your mental health during this time?

GJ: I get out and walk everyday and play outside with my kids a little bit, or at least go outside and watch them. We're lucky enough to live in a neighborhood where they can be outside without interacting too much with other people.

KD: [Unclear]

GJ: We live in a neighborhood that – where we're not all on top of each other. The kids can ride their bikes outside and still encounter people but still be socially distant. And that's a lot different than people in cities that can't go out without interacting with people. So, I feel like that part of it hasn't changed that much for us but honestly, I don't know mental health issues. I will probably seek some counseling when I can like when the load lightens a little bit, and I can start [unclear] at it. Basically, I felt like I had to power through this, and I wasn't able to have a lot of self-awareness about what am I doing for my own mental health.

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KD: Yeah, yeah. So, you mentioned that, I mean, that you are a professor and you have been like, you know, learning and teaching during this time, so what are some challenges from doing that and what has worked for you?

GJ: Well, one of the – both of my courses – I taught two Women and Gender Studies' courses, and then half of my load is released because I am the Faculty Senate Chair. So, I think the most difficult thing about this was continuing to teach during this time because the things that I started doing for Faculty Senate became a twenty-four hour a day job. And the administrative part of all the things that needed to be done and changed and all the rules and regulations that had to basically changed just for us to get through this period, took up a lot of my time and it was very, very difficult to continue my course and all – my courses and all. But I – after Spring Break, I checked in with the students and asked them what's happened to you, what are your challenges during COVID-19? And then I really tried to work with people the best I could just to get it done. Some people chose the credit/no-credit option, not a lot, but there were some. And I just tried to be more understanding because I was hearing some extreme stories from students about difficult things that were happening, just how they were trying to get through it, their family circumstances. Just – a lot of it was unbelievable. Some of the students I had were Customized Instruction. One lady said that she and her husband had lost their jobs, they had six children, she was trying to homeschool. And, you know, just the circumstances were so extreme that I felt like I couldn't really have the same expectations that I had prior to COVID-19.

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KD: Yeah, for sure. But yeah. Has there been any silver linings for you in this crisis? Has there been anything that you can – that you think you'll take from it that might be something good?

GJ: Probably the first couple weeks when the kids were home, I realized that I didn't have family meals very often because my daughter would go to the table at dinner when I was making food and say "wow, are we having a party or is this a celebration because we're all sitting down to eat." It was kind of a pause, and I would hear her say more funny/sweet stuff, initially, because we were together all the time. I got over that. I would say that was a honeymoon period. Initially, everyone's like "oh this is great. You know, now we're doing what we should have been doing. We're spending more time with our family; we're not so engaged with work. This has been great; the outcome is great." Well, it – that got old, and it got really tiring because the crisis continued.

KD: Yeah.

GJ: And [unclear] just sitting down, eating dinner, and having a good time together, it was like “this is our new normal.” And we hadn’t figured out, yet it wasn’t a vacation, it wasn’t fun, it was like we have to figure out – this is our life now. And I would tell that to my kids because they want me to be entertaining them or engaging with them – [child screams] you can hear my daughter screaming in the background – and I would say “this is our life now. This is what I have to do for money. I have to be on the computer and got to do the things. So, you know, maybe there was – the first couple of days I could have said there was a silver lining, but I wouldn’t say that overall.

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KD: Yeah, yeah. That makes sense. What are some things that worry you about how people are responding or – I can pause for a minute, don’t worry.

GJ: You’re okay. [Long pause] There.

KD: Do you have – yup.

GJ: I couldn’t hear you.

KD: Do you worry about how other people are responding now or how that might affect you or are you hopeful about things or kind of how’s your reaction on that?

GJ: About how people are responding to COVID-19 now?

KD: Yeah, how other people are how – or, you know, how you see different people are responding in many different ways now. Does that worry you? Are you hopeful?

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GJ: Well, I think we have to learn to live with it and that we pull back to see if we can let science figure out what’s going on and to flatten the curve. And at this point, I feel like we’re going to have to be – we’re going to live with this, and this might not be the last time this happens, but.

KD: Yeah.

GJ: It does worry me that county-by-county regulations are different. Each state has a different plan and I guess they need to based on how – well the density of the people. Certainly, if you’re mostly living out in the country, you’re not going to be affected by it as much. But I don’t know yet, how we’re going to travel from state to state, what we’re going to encounter. I don’t know when it’s going to be – when or if – it’s going to be safe to fly again.

KD: Yeah.

GJ: So, I think I do have some anxiety about the future. Yeah, I don’t know. I know I’m going to have to engage with the world in a new way, I just don’t know what way it’s going to be.

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KD: So, are there any like specific changes that you think might happen after this pandemic is all over? Or are you kind of just still, you know that it's going to change but you're just not sure what?

GJ: I'm just not sure what, yet. I don't know what the long-term effects will be. I don't know if it's just us being more cautious for the time or whether this is the new normal.

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KD: Yeah. Are there any items or services that you've had a harder time purchasing or obtaining during this time?

GJ: Yeah, I did have a hard time initially getting masks, I think. I had bought some food – some rice and some supplies and stuff, initially, but I would go to the store the first couple weeks in March and find that a lot of the things were just gone. And other people would just call it doomsday shopping or pandemic shopping where a lot of the food was gone, or you'd see on the news with people who are just in long lines to buy things. I didn't experience that so much, but I did find that like I couldn't order online from Walmart; all the times had already been taken. So, I just mostly stuck with like my local Co-Op and tried to buy things closer to home. I would say we didn't really stop for a couple of weeks, initially. But still I would say there haven't been a lot of changes to what I couldn't buy. I think a lot of like hand sanitizer and things that we would have wished we had during that time were already gone.

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KD: Yeah. So, how does the coverage, from like the news coverage, differ from what you've personally seen or experienced, if you see a difference in that?

GJ: Sometimes when you see news coverage coming from New York, it doesn't reflect the experience that I have here in Menomonie. And I was initially on Facebook - my sister-in-law, who lives in Utah, had quit her job working as an assistant for an eye ophthalmologist, eye doctor, because she didn't want to be putting drops in people's eyes and up close to people. And then after a couple weeks, she started posting like "does anyone actually know someone that has a positive case of COVID-19?" Because I think, you know, she wasn't seeing what she thought she was going to see from it. And then she became kind of skeptical like maybe she had made a mistake and I started seeing that among a lot of people like this hasn't been as bad as we thought it was going to be so maybe we overreacted when maybe it wasn't as bad as we thought it was going to be because we did react in that way and that that's a good thing. But that, you know, kind of played with people's mind a little bit. I think it - I don't - one of the things I actually got rid of during COVID-19 was cable so I'm not seeing as much news, I'm not seeing a twenty-four hour news feed. And I'm not following it as closely. Almost everyday I ask Siri on my iPhone, you know, "how many cases of COVID-19 are there in Dunn County, Wisconsin. I think yesterday there were like twenty-five. So, it seems like it's climbing a little bit, but it's still pretty slow. So, you know, I'm not comparing us to some bigger cities where they're having a different experience.

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KD: Yeah. What are some things that you miss most about campus and the Menomonie community in general?

GJ: I think just being able to move freely. Just being able to go to work.

KD: Yeah.

GJ: Just being in a regular routine is something that I miss. Just being able to walk around campus. In my mind, for a lot of the times when I would have these Teams meetings, my mind kept thinking that everybody else was still there in their office or they were still meeting in those rooms, or they were still having classes and that I was the one that was somehow not there. And I couldn't picture that everybody was in some remote location because I had never been to their location before. And it took me a long time to figure out that, you know, the way I was thinking of them and the way I was thinking I was interacting with them, wasn't the case. So, it was like I really miss - miss just being together and the synergy of - it took a few weeks to get used to talking to people remotely, even if you could see their face.

KD: Yeah.

GJ: Because you didn't know how long to pause or wait or how long - if we should wait a minute because you couldn't see what was going on. And it just made for some long, awkward meetings this way.

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KD: Yeah. If you were granted a wish for twenty-four hours, with no chance for infection, how would you spend it?

GJ: [Laughter] Gee, I don't know, maybe go to Disney World.

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KD: [Laughter] Gosh. Is there anything else that you'd like to share about your experience during this epidemic? Or anything else you'd like us to know?

GJ: I feel like though it's been intense, that my family and I have been lucky to be healthy. I'm not sure that we didn't have - I'm not sure that I didn't have the Coronavirus the first week in March. I was very sick and had a lot of symptoms. And I haven't been tested for antibodies. I mean obviously, didn't die. If we did have it, I didn't know. There wasn't testing going on during that time. But I think - I don't know how it's all going to play out yet, whether people I know will lose their jobs, I know we will be furloughed so we'll be having a pay reduction, and I don't know how many students will show up in the fall. All those still be unknowns [?] so it's like will it affect my life permanently? Probably. Will it take a while to get back on track? Yeah. Will I ever get back on track? I don't know. Sometimes I'm not sure yet if reality has shifted in a way that it means that things are a new normal. And that's kind of where I'm at with this.

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KD: Yeah, yeah. If you have anyone who either works or go to the university that'd be a good person to reach out to to interview, you can send me their name or Heather's name too. We're just trying to interview as many people as we can. So, yeah. If you have any idea about that, for sure shoot us an email. But other than that, I just also wanted to say thank you for letting me interview and sharing and like thank you for, you know, you're a professor, you're working hard. And I guess it kind of like opened my eyes to like how different situations and different people like I don't - yeah, wow, you're a single mom and you're a professor and you're doing it all. So, I really do appreciate that. I am fortunate enough that I do attend Stout and I have had all just amazing professors and I am very, very happy to go to this school because I have never met one professor that doesn't go above and beyond for their students. So, I just wanted to thank you for that.

GJ: That's good.

KD: Because that's really big.

GJ: Good to hear.

KD: Yeah. Well, thank you for your time. I have no other questions for you. But yeah, thank you.

GJ: Okay, thanks for calling and if I think of anybody I'll let you know. You're interviewing students too?

KD: Yep, mmhm. Students, faculty, and yup, mmhm.

GJ: Okay.

KD: All right, thank you.

GJ: Bye.

KD: Bye.