

Interview with Maggie Morgan

Maggie Froh, Interviewer

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Macalester College

DeWitt Wallace Library

MF: [0:00] Hello, everyone, my name is Maggie Froh. And I'm here with Maggie Morgan, a friend of mine from Macalester College. And I'm going to be asking Maggie about her experience during the pandemic these last 12 to 15 months. So first, I'm just going to let you read through this oral history agreement and just sign your name if you're comfortable with all of this.

MM: Yes, that sounds good.

MF: Thank you. Okay, awesome. Okay, so before we get into the specifics of the pandemic. Could you just tell me a little bit about what your life was like before the pandemic? Where were you? Where'd you go to school?

MM: Yeah, so I was in Madison, Wisconsin. And yeah, that's where I was.

MF: And did you have a job?

MM: Yeah, during the year, I usually babysat for a family that lived next door to me, which had to end at the beginning of the lockdown, because of distancing reasons. So I had to stop that job.

MF: [1:19] Gotcha. And then, if you could just walk me through your typical day before the pandemic?

MM: Before the pandemic, my typical day usually consisted of me going to school, on the weekdays. And after school, I would have cross country or track practice. And I would do my homework, and then on the weekends, I would be out with friends. And, yeah, just kind of typical high school activities before the pandemic.

MF: And then do you remember when your school was closed? Or do you remember thinking that it would be closed for a long period of time? Or did you think that you would be returning?

MM: I remember, the week before school shut down. A lot of people were joking about how we weren't going to come back to school and school is going to close down, and I didn't believe it. And then once they announced it, I remember hanging out with my friends for the last time and we were joking, saying things like, see you guys in two weeks. And it ended up being much longer than that, obviously. But I remember a lot of people joking about it, and not thinking it would be serious. And I also was under that impression.

MF: [2:46] And then did your courses continue online?

MM: They kind of continued. I think a lot of it was optional, just because of equity issues. With not everyone having access to WiFi at home. So my classes continued, but it was mostly asynchronous work. We didn't do a lot of meeting online. So my classes, especially because we were second semester seniors, my workload went down a lot at that time.

MF: Yeah. And do you remember how your teachers handled everything?

MM: I think a lot of my teachers were pretty confused about what they should be doing just because they hadn't had to teach online before. And I think a lot of them didn't do a ton of online activities for us, just because they didn't really know how so I'm sure. During the next year of online classes, they were more prepared. But I think a lot of my teachers were a little stressed and unprepared for the situation.

MF: Do you remember kind of how your family members or close friends were reacting at that time.

MM: My family was really careful and a little nervous about the whole situation. My mom is a physician assistant, so she works in healthcare and was thinking about how she was going to see patients and she was also in a management position and had to figure out how to work with all of her employees. And my dad, I think, had some anxiety around actually getting COVID that was

something he was really worried about. So my family was very careful initially, being distanced and safe and I think a lot of my friends were the same way with high risk family members. So a lot of people I knew were being very careful and we're a little worried about everything happening.

MF: [5:00] So you obviously isolated with your family?

MM: Yes, we did that. We thought it was going to be for two weeks. And it ended up being longer. But we did isolate in our house and didn't see anyone at that time. Yeah.

MF: And how did that go for you?

MM: At the beginning, it was pretty fun. Because we weren't doing school the initial two weeks, they just had no school happening. And my brother was also in high school at the time. So he had no school. And we played a lot of basketball in our driveway. And it was kind of like a little vacation for us. So at the beginning, we handled it by pretending we were on spring break pretty much at home. So it was pretty fun, and then eventually became much less fun and a lot more boredom and stress hit us.

MF: You said you played basketball in your yard. That sounds fun! Were there any other hobbies that you picked up or things that you've learned during this period in lockdown?

MM: We did a lot of baking together. This is mostly my brother and I. We also had a week where we decided to learn how to do a handstand, which was not successful.

MF: [Laughs]

MM: But we had a lot of just random things we did to pass the time we watched a lot of TV together. And both of us run so we would go on runs together. And yeah, just kind of random things to fill the time.

MF: [6:41] Nice. And then how did you stay connected with your friends and family that didn't live with you?

MM: Yeah, I had a lot of facetimes with some of my close friends, where we would do a group call with six of us. My grandparents and aunts and uncles lived in Madison as well at the time. So we would later into the pandemic, we would see them distanced, and just kind of wave to them out our car windows in the same parking lot. And yeah, a lot of facetimeing and calling but not a lot of face to face contact in the beginning. But eventually, my friends and I would go on bike rides with our masks on and do more things outside together once it was warmer out. And we felt more comfortable doing that.

MM: [7:45] And then, did you have any family members that lived in other states or countries or friends that did? And just like, could you tell me about their experiences?

MM: Yeah, I have a lot of family in Iowa, in rural Iowa on a farm. And their experience was definitely different than ours, I think they kind of went about business as usual. They had sporting events for their kids and probably weren't super worried about it just because of the culture in the area in the small town size. So I think it was much different for them. I think they were a little confused why we couldn't go visit them during this long break they thought we were having. And I also had family in California that were very careful and worried about the pandemic just because of the culture there I think was much more much more careful and worried about what was happening.

MF: [8:51] And did your relationships with any of these family members changed during the pandemic?

MM: I wouldn't say so. I think because they lived in different states, we wouldn't see them often to begin with maybe a couple of times a year. Some of them maybe once every two years even. So I don't think they changed as much as the relationships with people we would see more often. But I think we reached out to them over the phone more than we would have normally and doing calls with them and stuff.

MF: Yeah, And then you said your mom was a frontline worker. How was that for both her and your family? How did you cope with all that?

MM: Yeah, so in the beginning of the pandemic, she did a lot of her calls online. She's a primary care worker so she could meet with her patients on Zoom a lot. And she would have faculty meetings on zoom. And having her doing work in the house definitely made it way more are crowded. Because she would usually be doing work in her office. So I think that was a little stressful at times. But she eventually got the vaccine as soon as possible and could go back into work and see patients. So I think she was a little stressed about how she could keep doing her work in the best way while at home. But she definitely figured it out online and did a good job. And now she's in person again.

MF: [10:30] Nice, nice. So would you say those earlier months in the pandemic were more stressful for your family than the later months? Or how are those different?

Maggie Morgan

Yeah, definitely. I think we found it hard to all be in our house at the same time, constantly. I think that was the hard part of it. My dad is a stay at home dad. And so I think he didn't have a lot to do with some of us doing school and work and usually he can do work in the house. But with all of us in the house, he felt a little cramped, I think, and we all did. I think that made it hard in the beginning. We were all driving each other a little crazy.

Maggie Froh [11:17]

Yes, definitely. And then I'm just going to ask a couple questions, and they might trigger certain emotions. So if you don't feel comfortable answering, that's totally fine. I just wanted to talk a little bit about mental health and ask, how did you cope with mental health during this time of extreme isolation?

MM: Yeah, I think mental health was something that was an issue that my family would talk about a lot before the pandemic. And I think, during the pandemic week, kind of talked about it less just because we were, it seemed like we weren't busy doing things. And I think we kind of ignored that that was an issue just because nothing was really going on. But I think that it definitely heightened mental health issues being at home all the time. I definitely felt really isolated and yeah, alone at home just with my family. And I know, my family members struggle with anxiety. And I think there was just a lot of emotions happening that we started to talk about less just because it was so constant with all of us at home all the time.

MF: [12:40] Was there anything that you did to kind of cope with that anxiety? activities?

MM: Yeah, yeah, I think I definitely, eventually started to do more things like journaling and getting out of the house by myself, even if that was just going for a drive or a walk alone. I think those things really helped. And eventually seeing friends from a distance was helpful as well.

MF: And was mental health ever a topic of conversation with your friends?

MM: Not really. I don't think it came up with my friends. A lot. I think it only came up in the ways of calling and saying, How are you doing? And someone's saying "oh, pretty bored." When under that, that might have meant? I'm feeling really alone and sad. But I think because everyone was feeling like that. No one thought that they could really talk about it, because it was happening with everyone around them.

MF:[13:46] Yeah, and did you experience any grief or loss during isolation? And if you're comfortable with that, Could you just tell me a bit about that?

MM: Yeah, so my family did not lose anyone, because of having COVID, I guess, during the pandemic, but my mom's cousin in law, which is kind of a distant relation, but we kind of treated her as another aunt pretty much. She committed suicide kind of in the summer of the pandemic, I think. I think she struggled with a lot of mental health issues before the pandemic and it definitely heightened during. And yeah, I think that really hit my mom the hardest because they were the closest. And I think that it was especially hard during the pandemic just because we couldn't go to California to go to a funeral or help with her kids that she had. And I think my mom felt a lot of guilt because of that. And yeah, that was just a hard thing to deal with. For her especially I think she felt like she couldn't really do anything. Because the pandemic was keeping us at home.

MF: Yeah, I'm really sorry to hear that I must have been really hard. And then moving on what part of the pandemic would you say was the hardest for you? Was it that period? Or was it more of the beginning?

MM: I think probably the summer was the hardest. I think, in the beginning, we kind of felt like we were on vacation still. And I think it felt good that everyone was isolating and staying home at the time. I didn't feel left out just because no one was doing anything. And I think later into the spring and into the summer, I saw a lot of friends and people hanging out and doing things like it was normal. But my family was still being really safe and staying at home. So I definitely felt a lot more left out and alone. And it was warm out. And it felt like I should be out doing things. And yeah, it seemed like no one else was taking it as seriously. So that was kind of a hard time of the pandemic just itching to get outside and do things with people but not being able to.

MF: [16:18] Yeah, yeah, I can definitely relate to that one. And then do you remember your transition to college kind of that summer, like leading up to it, and then moving in kind of what that was like?

MM: Yeah, my summer college decision was really confusing for me. I had a bunch of schools that I didn't get to tour in the spring. And I did end up going to Macalester, but I got off of the waitlist pretty late in May, I think. And so I wasn't super excited about going to school. And I was thinking about taking a gap year. And I just felt really uncertain about everything and didn't want to make a big decision when I wasn't really sure about it. And then after getting it off of the waitlist here where I was excited to go, I made that decision. But it was still really complicated to

do that, during the pandemic. And I think on the other side of that I was very excited to come to school and get out of my house, but was also a little worried that we were pretty much going to be isolating but in a dorm room instead of my room at home. So I was a little uncertain about it still.

MF: [17:38] Yeah. Do you remember what you were thinking like the first few weeks, or even days? Just what your initial thoughts were?

MM: Yeah, I think after getting here, I was pretty surprised at how much freedom we did have. And it was nice to just meet friends and hang out together outside, eat together, and do things that I thought we weren't going to be allowed to do. Everyone was still being really safe. We were all getting tested, but I definitely was pretty surprised at how much freedom we had despite the pandemic still happening.

MF: Yeah, and then you're also on the cross country team and the chat team. How was that experience? How was it at the beginning? And how is it now? How has it changed?

MM: Yeah, at the beginning, we ran in smaller groups. I think our running group was the first year women that were on campus. So that was really fun to get to know everyone. And we started to get to know St. Paul a lot better. I feel like we kind of loosened our COVID rules on our runs just because we were outside. And that was something that we could do. So that was kind of a nice escape to maybe take your mask off for 30 minutes of the day and be outside and get to go to some cool places. So that was really fun. And then this spring, we started to be able

to practice with the whole team, including the upperclassmen. So that was really exciting. Another way, but I think we started to be a little more COVID safe, especially with competition starting against other schools. So definitely changed throughout the year. But overall, it was really nice to be with other people and get to do that with them.

MF: [19:49] Yeah. And has it been hard for you to build relationships with other people on campus that are on your team?

MM: Yeah, I think it was especially hard in the beginning, just because we were kind of told to stay away from students on campus that weren't in athletics, just so we could stay in our smaller bubbles. So it was definitely something that was really hard in the beginning. And it's still hard now. But I think there's been more mingling of athletes and non athletes on campus. But I think it was especially hard in the beginning, just because of the rules put in place to almost separate the two groups. And living in a dorm with only athletes made it a little more prevalent. And it was a little difficult, but not as difficult now, I would say.

MF: [20:49] Yeah. And then how have your classes been? Have they mostly been on zoom? Or have any been in person or what have your thoughts been on them so far?

MM: Yeah, most of my classes have been on zoom online. And last fall, I had my chemistry lab in person. And I think there were only four students in my in person lab, which was really cool to have really small class. And then this module, I have had medical geography in person doing lectures and discussions. And that's been really nice. I think zoom school was definitely not as

hard as I expected it to be. And it's much easier when you're living with friends and can do your zoom school in your room, but then leave and do other things. It wasn't like doing zoom school, at my house in Madison. But I really liked having my classes in person. And I'm definitely excited to have them in person more. Yeah.

MF: [21:56] And have there been any like activities that you've wanted to do, now that you're in college that you haven't been able to do or things like that?

MM: Yeah, I think some things we've missed out on have been, obviously the cross country meets in the fall, and having club meetings in person, and there's not very many campus events happening, like dances and concerts and things like that, that would be really fun to go to. And just doing things in the Twin Cities that we haven't really been able to do. We can still explore, but things like concerts aren't happening, and we're not going into a ton of stores. So I think just exploring more is something we've missed out on a little bit. And yeah, there's just not as much going on right now. that I think would have been really fun to experience.

MF: [22:58] Yeah, yeah, definitely. And then just moving into like, the newer stage of the pandemic, kind of what we're in now. Have you felt like things have kind of been changing on campus or in your own circle? Have people been getting vaccinated? Have you gotten vaccinated?

MM: I have, I've gotten my first dose of Pfizer, and I have my next one, less than two weeks. So that's really exciting. And most of my friends at this point, I've had at least one dose. And I think in my circle, we've been pretty much as safe as we were before in the fall. But I think overall on campus, things have started to loosen up a little bit. sporting events have been happening, and students can go and watch in the bleachers. And now that it's warmer, a lot of people have been outside with each other. And I think more classes are meeting in person. And the rules aren't totally loose now. But I think they're definitely starting to become more relaxed, especially with people getting vaccinated and staying safe. Yeah.

MF: [24:19] And then is there anything that you kind of hope that happens these next few months or things that you want to do this summer?

MM: Yeah, I guess I definitely hope that everyone can get vaccinated. And that can be an overarching thing, because obviously, if you're vaccinated and someone else isn't, it's not as good as both people being vaccinated. So I hope that happens, and I know a lot of people under the age of 16 that can't get vaccinated right now. Like the kids I babysit. So I guess I hope that there's a way That younger people can stay safe and be vaccinated by the summer. And I think some things I want to do this summer, I definitely want to spend more time with friends in person and unmasked now that were vaccinated that I couldn't do last summer, like going on camping trips and go kayaking on the lake and go to the farmers market and do kind of things that I think we missed out on last summer. And I think we're going to visit some of my family, like the ones in Iowa. And just kind of check up on all those people that we haven't seen in a

long time. And yeah, I think just getting out and about, and it'll be strange to do those things. But once we know it's safe, I think that's something I'm really looking forward to. Yeah, that sounds really fun.

MF: And then, is there anything that you feel like you've learned from these past 12 to 15 months? That you maybe have not really thought about before? Or like, do you think that your views on anything have changed?

MM: Yeah, I think some things I've learned have just been that my relationships with other people are really important. For instance, some of my extended family that I wouldn't see very often, I wouldn't miss that much normal year, just because they live far away. And we don't see them often. But I guess, not even having that option makes me realize that I do miss them a lot and enjoy seeing them. And I think it makes me appreciate my friends a lot more and how much I rely on them. And even though I grew really sick of my family, by the end of the summer, I think I got closer with especially my brother, who I didn't spend as much time with while we were running around doing different activities. When we were both stuck at home, I think we got a lot closer. And yeah, I think just a big thing was realizing how important all of those relationships are and how much I would miss them if I ever couldn't have them again.

MF: [27:29] Yeah, definitely. Are there any memories that kind of sum up your experience, either when you were isolated with your family, or now in college, or any other period of the pandemic?

MM: Yeah, trying to think of some memories. I think one I have was, in the summer, I started to babysit my next door neighbor's again. And the kids that I would mostly babies that were five and 10, I think. And I could tell they were really going crazy at home. And so I would take them to places like the zoo and the parks. And it was really funny. To me to see this little five year old, I was babysitting, walk around the zoo with his mask on and the zoo had a one way path. So it was pretty empty around us. And I just thought it was really odd watching this little kid with a mask on kind of do this activity that should have been really normal for us like going to the zoo. But it looked just really weird. With it being empty. And yeah, that was just something that stuck with me as being a little strange. And another thing we did with my next door neighbors was we did a lot of movie nights where we would take a projector and projected onto our white garage door and sit on opposite sides of our driveway. And that was something that was really fun. And as our neighbors would walk by on the street, they would all stop and run back to their house and grab a chair. And we would just kind of fill our driveway in our yard and our street with neighbors walking by that wanted to join because no one had anything to do. And so that was something that we started to do. every couple of weeks that maybe we'll keep doing even in a non pandemic time, but was especially from then just because it was something we could all do together outside safely. So that was something else that really stuck with me.

MF: [29:52] That's really sweet. I love that your community was able to stay together. Well thank you so much for letting me interview you today.

[End of interview, 30:06]