

Interview with Helen Radovic

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Audio Transcript

[00:02]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How have you been.

[00:06]

Helen Radovic: I've been good, how are you.

[00:08]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Good, thank you for asking okay.

[00:23]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Think back to right before the COVID-19 pandemic, what were your plans and was there a drastic change from before compared to now?

[00:36]

Helen Radovic: Wait, so what were my plans before the pandemic and how has that changed now. Okay before the pandemic I had plans to go to Bosnia to visit my family for the whole summer and to have an internship there, and kind of help people learn languages and other stuff that, and I was super excited about it, and that was going to help me kind of determine if I wanted to do. Maybe work in Bosnia after I graduated so obviously that couldn't happen because of all the restrictions and now I think my plans now are more just take whatever opportunities come here in Minnesota and try to make the best of them and try to figure out what career paths I want to pursue.

[01:26]

Marvellous Ogunsola: So you are graduating in 2022, right?

[01:30]

Helen Radovic: Yes, okay um.

[01:35]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How did that make you feel did, the change?

[01:40]

Helen Radovic: Honestly, I kind of just went along with it, I knew that there wasn't anything I could do to change the situation so I tried to make the best of it. I mean I was really sad, I think, for a period of time, I think we all were but I don't think that being stressed about it or angry about it would have helped, I think that would have made it worse, so I tried my best just to find other things to entertain myself with.

[02:11]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Before this interview, I asked that you're bringing three things. Did you bring them in?

[02:22]

Helen Radovic: I did! And you said, one of them has to be a photo, correct?

[02:25]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah.

[02:27]

Helen Radovic: Well, yes. I brought my flute. Do I have to explain it?

Marvellous Ogunsola: yeah.

[02:36]

Helen Radovic: I brought my flute, because this was the first year. I think I've ever had time to actually practice music. So in my downtime I would practice, and I feel like I got a lot better,

and it was also something I just played as a form of stress relief to kind of calm myself down. Okay, I also brought a shoe. [laughs]

Marvellous Ogunsola: That's cool.

[03:08]

Helen Radovic: Because literally before this year, I didn't exercise at all but I think being stuck inside of my house all the time, I got so bored. [laughs] And I'm like okay, maybe I should go outside sometime. So I ended up going outside a lot this year, even in the winter and I hate the cold so that was good. And then, the third thing I brought. I think this is pretty common but I brought my phone because it was my way of staying connected to everybody and also, it helps me to see what was going on in the world, because if I was at Macalester, it would be a lot easier to engage with organizations and see what's going on, talk to people and organize, but I felt like all of it was happening through social media and through my phone and having that and having a way of staying connected to people was so important to me, even though I'm usually not super about using my phone all the time, but this year, I learned how to do it so yeah. I also have this [Shows picture of food]. This is a meal that my friend and I cooked when this was over a winter break and it was really meaningful to me because I've never had a close connection with another Bosnian person and she's also from Bosnia so we cooked traditional meals together. And we were in a pod together and It was a lot of bonding that I hadn't experienced in a really long time.

[04:38]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Do you feel as though combination made it possible for you guys to make that bond. Will that bond have been possible if there was no quarantine?

[04:49]

Helen Radovic: That's a good question. I don't think it would have been possible because I think during quarantine we really had to choose really small groups of friends and just stick with them; and we had to have open, honest communication all the time to make sure, who are we seeing? Are we both safe? And that kind of conversation and commitment don't really happen outside of dangerous times, you know? And also, I think outside of COVID, everyone was so busy with their lives, everybody had so much going on that I don't think we would have made time for each other like that.

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah. Do you have any quarantine fun or positive stories to tell?

[05:38]

Helen Radovic: I don't know if it's positive but I think it's [pauses] I guess it's fun. I don't know I feel like a lot of people had this problem, but, at the beginning of quarantine when everybody was still scared, nobody knew what was going on, and all of my hair supplies disappeared. And at that time, my hair looked like a sheep, it was just growing in every direction and I didn't know what to do. It was all so embarrassing because I still had to go to class and I'm like.. [gestures to heart]. So I went to Target and I bought the last hair clipper that they had, and I spent all my money on it was so embarrassing, but it was the last one left and I'm I'm just gonna buy it. And I tried to cut my own hair at home and Marvelous, oh my God it was so bad. Half of my head was bald because I accidentally had it on the wrong setting, but the other half was just [gestures to hair]. I was like "NOO!". Yeah so for the rest of the summer, I just wore a hat that I had all the time.

[06:39]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah, that's just like me. Now, I just use my scarf.

[06:44]

Helen Radovic: Yes, it suits you.

[06:48]

Marvellous Ogunsola: That was fun. Do you have any quarantine horror stories to tell.

[06:54]

Helen Radovic: Oh! I guess that was the horror story [laughs].

[06:57]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah [laughs].

[07:01]

Helen Radovic: horror stories [pauses]

Marvellous Ogunsola: It's fine if you don't have one.

Helen Radovic: No, I think that was it.

[07:15]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How was your school and personal life affected.

[07:21]

Helen Radovic: Ooh.

[07:23]

Marvellous Ogunsola: By the pandemic.

[07:24]

Helen Radovic: That's a big question. How was my school and personally affected? [pauses] I think I grew closer social bonds with a smaller number of people because I had to be really selective. I don't know, I guess, because you don't....when you're on campus, you see people all the time, and you barely have time to have one full conversation. But somehow during quarantine, I would call one or two people consistently and I felt that we really bonded. But I would see, I was in contact with less people in general. So I think that's how my social life was affected, I think it's good because I prefer smaller groups of people. I'm kind of socially awkward so that's okay, but um, what's it, how was my school life affected? Yeah, so I think it was a lot harder to focus being at home and not having a separate study space where I can focus on things, and there were constantly distractions like my dog, my dad, the neighbors' children screaming at two in the morning. I don't know it was just constantly little things that were distracting. So I think that academically, I was more negatively affected, and it was harder to focus over a computer but I'm trying to think of a positive. I guess it was nice not having to go into a class and so yeah, I had a good experience. It wasn't that bad.

[09:15]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Were you in...Did you choose in-person classes, when you could or no?

[09:24]

Helen Radovic: I would, I would actually prefer having a few online classes. I think a good 50:50 in the future would be perfect for me, because I think going to four in-person classes is really stressful. It's a lot of social contacts. But I really liked the experience of being in the comfort of my own room and going to classes. So I actually didn't mind it, I know that is kind of an unpopular opinion, but I also do miss in person, I would probably go to one or two in person classes.

[10:01]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What was your location? Are you in Minnesota right now? You said you are staying at home with your family.

[10:13]

Helen Radovic: yeah i'm in Minneapolis.

[10:19]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Okay next question. Have you experienced any feelings of loss throughout this pandemic. It doesn't have to be losing a person, it could be a loss of self or loss of control or normalcy or even a loss of the future as you saw it, and how did that make you feel?

[10:48]

Helen Radovic: I might have to think about this one.

Marvellous Ogunsola: That's fine. Take your time.

[11:00]

Helen Radovic: Thank you. I honestly know. I feel like I went in the opposite direction in a lot of ways. I found more clarity about my future and I found more clarity about who I am and the things that I enjoy doing, but one thing that I think I did lose was my connection to the community and my connection to my generation at Mac. Like it's one thing reading somebody's posts on Facebook, or whatever, but it's another thing actually seeing them, and you know, chatting with them and seeing how they're doing. And I'm just that type of person, I really like face-to-face communication so that was really hard for me and I did feel like I was losing a connection to people in my generation, a little bit for that reason, because...um yeah I don't know, I just prefer checking in with people in person, so it was kind of hard. But yeah it wasn't anything severe so I would say I was okay.

[12:01]

Marvellous Ogunsola : How do you feel your communication styles with people change, considering if you were not interacting in-person to them?

[12:11]

Helen Radovic: [laughs] Yes. In so many ways, I make jokes with my friends all the time, about how I feel like I'm a different person. I just feel more relaxed in conversation, I-- I'm less anxious and I'm less rushed and I'm more genuinely interested in what other people are saying to me because I want to know how other people are doing so, I would say that that is how my communication style changed. Yeah I think that comes along with just taking a lot of time to myself, too, so I can recharge and then give other people, the energy they need.

[13:01]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What are some lifestyle changes you can point to now? For example, how did your diet change? What was your self care like?

[13:14]

Helen Radovic: I walk a lot. I never used to walk, I never used to exercise. I walk now almost every day, even if it's for a few minutes. Just to get outside and get some fresh air. My diet did change. I...something about being at home all the time made me realize that I was intolerant to a lot of food so like lactose, gluten. I had a lot of time to explore different recipes and see what works for me. And I had time to cook for myself and I feel so much better. I have more time to read, I guess. I read one book but that's more than I've ever read for fun. [laughs]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What was the title?

[14:09]

Helen Radovic: It was called Atomic Habits. it was by this one dude that was basically like.... he was the person that told me that I need to walk every day so it's why I'm walking every day [Laughs].

[14:27]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you watch anything.

[14:30]

Helen Radovic: Oh yes. I did. I watched a lot. Watched a lot on Netflix.

[14:42]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Can you talk about what you watched?

[14:51]

Helen Radovic: Yeah. I.... I think one thing this year that was different from the other years is that on TV, I went out of my way to find cultures that I wasn't familiar with, and watch TV shows about different people and different lifestyles. I watched a lot of French dramas and Turkish dramas. 1 and Chinese dramas. I don't even know, the names of half of them anymore, but also, from a lot of communities that I'm not a part of in the United States. Like a lot of African American communities, and right now I'm watching the show called *Black Lightning* and it's honestly, the best show ever and I don't know why more people don't talk about it. But I think before, I feel like didn't really have time to explore different things and I don't really have time to watch TV, so I just kind of. I don't really watch on TV, but this year, I've been doing a lot of that so..[shrugs].

[15:52]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What are some hobbies you have developed through this?

[16:12]

Helen Radovic: Yeah.[Pauses]

[16:16]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Or if you didn't. It's okay if you didn't develop any new hobbies.

16:21

Helen Radovic: I feel like I have. I'm just blanking. I... I guess, is walking a hobby? I don't know. I guess walking, hiking, going through nature, something I did not used to like, and now I kind of like it. And baking, I know that's a common one for people in quarantine. I've just been baking a lot of cookies and brownies, and all this different, interesting stuff. Um, chess. I got into chess for a week.

[16:58]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you watch Queen's Gambit?

[17:06]

Helen Radovic: Yes! Yes! I got into chess for about two weeks after I watched the show. I was like, I'm gonna be a chess champion, this is happening.

[17:17]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah. My next question is... Let's talk about mental health. How have you been?

[17:32]

Helen Radovic: Actually, I've been really good this year. I know, maybe other people, like a lot of other people have been struggling. I've watched that happen, but I think I've actually been doing, mentally better than I have in the past, and I think it's just because I have a little bit more time to care for myself and do stuff... yeah. [nods thoughtfully]

[17:58]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you rely on any resources to keep you sane?

[18:06]

Helen Radovic: That's a good question. No, I really just relied on my friends. Like a few of my closest friends, I did go for a really long time to the meditation practices that Macalester has on

Mondays and Wednesdays, and that helped me so much. To just take time to focus on my breathing and to kind of get rid of the anxiety a little bit.

[18:36]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Are you still going to go there after this is all over? Are you still going to use those resources after all this over?

[18:45]

Helen Radovic: I really hope so, I really hope so... I'm going to try to cut down on my activities, so that I can really make time, yes.

[18:56]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you experience anticipatory grief? Anticipatory grief is the “mourning that occurs when you or someone you know is expecting a death”. So were you experiencing grief before anybody got the virus or before anything bad happened?

[19:20]

Helen Radovic: Yes, yes, I was. I was super paranoid that one of my family members was going to get it, and especially my dad. Because I don't know. I feel he's kind of weak, I feel like he wouldn't be able to do... you know? So yeah, I was always stressed. I was stressed for my family and my friends.

[19:51]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How did you cope with that or did that feeling go away?

[19:57]

Helen Radovic: I don't-- It didn't go away, I think the only time it went away is when I got the vaccine. And now it's back a little bit because, I don't know if the vaccine protects against all the variants and I'm--[laughs]. But yeah, the vaccine helps.

[20:26]

Marvellous Ogunsola: I was going to ask, how do you feel about the vaccine? Do you have any strong feelings or do you know people who have strong feelings about the vaccine.

[20:36]

Helen Radovic: Yes, um I have very anti vaxxer people in my family I don't know where that comes from really but my dad and my aunt. They both live in Minnesota. And they tried to convince me multiple times not to get it, that if I got it I would grow a monkey tail, it was really stupid. I was just like Okay[laughs]. But I acknowledge that they were scared of it, so I just tried to listen to them in your home. So when I got it yeah that was a big deal, but then they saw that I was okay, except now anytime I'm tired, my dad is it's because of the virus. But somehow I convinced him to get it, so he got his first dose, so I think that he has changed his mind over time, I feel... I feel a little bit nervous about it just because it's such new technology, and I know that there are always risks associated with taking vaccines, but I think that I made the calculation in my head, that there are much more benefits than there are risks. So hopefully we'll all be okay.

[21:53]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Okay. What is your outlook on how this school, Macalester has handled the pandemic?

[22:08]

Helen Radovic: Hmmm. What is..., how do I feel about the future?

[22:17]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How'd you feel about this school handling the COVID-19 pandemic in the meantime.

[22:23]

Helen Radovic: I honestly am impressed; there are other schools that didn't do anything. I was watching, all of my friends got COVID and I think that the precautions that Macalester took were pretty extreme when you compare them to other colleges and universities, but they really earned my trust, relating to the vaccine, I felt that's something that they really got right for the most part. Obviously there are always things people can improve but I thought they did really well.

[23:03]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What is your outlook on how this nation, America has handled the pandemic?

[23:13]

Helen Radovic: I don't think it did very well at the beginning, I'm gonna be honest, I think we could have done better, we could have had more restrictions and I think if we had had that at the beginning, it probably could have saved a lot more lives. But I am super grateful that we got the vaccines so fast and that this year, so many lives have been saved because of the vaccine rollout. I know, back in my home country, they still don't even have one vaccine so just in comparison to, you know the other countries in the world. I'm really proud of the fact that we were able to save so many lives.

[24:01]

Marvellous Ogunsola: On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe did you feel in America during the pandemic.

[24:13]

Helen Radovic: Okay, at the very beginning, I did not feel safe. So zero is for not safe, I was a four. I was at a four, I don't live with other people. I just live with my dad so I'm clearly not in a dangerous situation, but I thought, if you walk into a grocery store, you would die, I think I was reading, so many things, it was very stressful. But I think, as it kept going on, and I was wearing masks and people in my life were wearing it, I felt very safe. I felt about a seven. Maybe seven or eight.

[24:49]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you shame or judge people for going out despite quarantine limitations or bans?

[25:00]

Helen Radovic: Not really, that was their decision, I feel that everyone could have made the decision together, I just probably--- I would have liked to know. I mean it's good for me to know because I probably wouldn't have wanted to hang out with them after that, and I did not shame

them, I was like, you know you can make your own decision. But if I felt like they were really putting people in danger, maybe I would say something, because yeah[shrugs].

[25:32]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How do you feel life has changed for the better or for the worse since the onset of COVID-19?

[25:43]

Helen Radovic: I think one way it's changed for the better, as our society has finally seen everything that's always been wrong with it, but somehow the pandemic made all of that really clear. So, student health I think has finally been prioritized and the inequalities in the education system. Like students, not having access to Internet at home or computers and the COVID kind of exacerbated those issues and finally schools were like, okay, we need to take action to help you know. So I feel that it helped to-- maybe the politicians, I guess, to take more action against certain inequalities, but it was also negative. But also on the other side of that, I think that COVID definitely increased inequality the same way, because it targeted communities that were not able to handle it as well and were receiving less support in terms of medical care and so on. I think it both helped and [hurt]. I'm curious to see what the impacts are in the future, I hope that all this aid that people have been getting and stimulus checks all that I hope that keeps going. I hope that the government helps people, yeah.

[27:25]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How have you felt about the protests happening during the pandemic? The protest of racial injustice.

[27:31]

Helen Radovic: It was conflicting for a second because I was afraid that the people out there protesting were going to be the ones affected by COVID the most because they were all- they're all fighting for their rights but also in close proximity to other people so that was one of my fears, but on the other hand, people are well aside, I would say, they were pretty separated. I feel pretty positively about them, I do think that protests really helped in government change and, if you keep putting pressure on a government, eventually they're gonna crack and they're gonna

start doing things and I think we've kind of seen that the change so I had a bit of a very positive view on it, I know other people, maybe didn't but yeah.

[28:22]

Marvellous Ogunsola: During this pandemic, have you felt apprehensive about your financial future?

[28:35]

Helen Radovic: No because I'm at home living with my parents, but I have felt apprehensive.... about the possibility of getting a job after this if it keeps going on, but because I graduate in a year, I haven't really had to worry about it too much, it has been kind of hard to find a job for a lot of people but it's not something that worries me a lot.

[29:14]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Just a moment. Did you have any Apps that you found that were life saving or entertaining or that keep you organized.

[29:34]

Helen Radovic: Like phone apps?

[29:36]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yes, phone apps, or even websites.

[29:42]

Helen Radovic: I think YouTube ok YouTube and Tik-Tok. I had to delete Tik-Tok because it got too addicting.

[29:55]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Do you feel like you got addicted to your phone?

[30:01]

Helen Radovic: Sorry, can you repeat that.

[30:03]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Were there any feelings like “I have gotten too addicted to my phone”?

[30:14]

Helen Radovic: I think earlier in the pandemic, I was on my phone for like, the whole day. It was really bad, especially... yeah yeah I really had to cut down on that because it was taking a toll on my mental health and ways that weren't productive to society, I don't know. I felt that taking a break from my phone a little bit helped put things in perspective it helped me have one on one conversations with people and talk about important things that help, you know.

[30:52]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah. Did your relationships with professors change as a result of this format of courses: online learning.

[31:06]

Helen Radovic: um I think. He yes, yes, yes, yes, it did um. I felt like I got to know my professors a lot less. I don't know because I was always too awkward to go to their online office hours. It just felt weird. And when we were in person, I would just hang out after class or go to their office hours but yeah, so I do think it was affected, but at the same time, I don't know. I don't know what-- I think that at the same time, I do think that professors made an extra effort to reach out to students this year and check in with us and make sure we were doing okay, so I saw a more human side of them that I hadn't seen before.

31:59

Marvellous Ogunsola: What are some lessons you've learned about yourself from this pandemic?

32:08

Helen Radovic: I think the number one lesson I learned is that to help others, I have to help myself first. And I realized as my relationships with people were growing stronger. And that the

reason for that was because I took time to care for myself, so I think that was the number one lesson I learned.

[32:30]

Marvellous Ogunsola: How did celebrations like Christmas or your birthday change?

[32:43]

Helen Radovic: Yeah my birthday was just me, myself and a cake, and my dad which is kind of weird. I usually and it was my 21st birthday. Normally, my friends would be over, and so it was a little bit more depressing um I don't know and, especially, right now, because it's Ramadan. I would normally be fasting with people, and it would be a huge celebration with family and friends and it's just so sad because none of that is happening so it's kind of like, what's the point? I don't know, it's hard to find the joy and celebration, sometimes, with all this going on.

[33:24]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What has your relationship with news been like? Do you follow it, or do you know it.

[33:35]

Helen Radovic: I do follow it quite regularly, just not right before I fall asleep. I'm so all angry, the local news I'll read the international news and then I check updates on some of my favorite social media sites and influencers like social justice accounts, just to see what's going on, and if there are things I can help out with. yeah just how to help.

Marvellous Ogunsola: Okay, this is my second to last question. What moments stood out to you throughout all these it could be personal or just general?

[34:22]

Helen Radovic: moments stood out. I think the first semester, when I was teaching I was a preceptor for a French class that have like-- I would have one on ones, with all the students in that class, and it was so beautiful hearing about their transition into the dorms and hearing how

they're doing and we found a way to stay connected. Even though we weren't in person, I think we feel like we're more connected than we would have been in person, so that was really beautiful and also with you guys looking at people in French Tutoring now, it's a good feeling, it really is. And I think another moment yeah the other moments that stood out to me were just going on a walk with friends and being in nature. Yeah things I never would have done before, but.

[35:21]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Lastly, what are you looking forward to doing once all this is over.

[35:29]

Helen Radovic: Going to a bar with friends, having drinks. We are all 21, but we still haven't had that experience, so I feel I want to get that opportunity to just be yourself. Sorry, that's not interesting.

[35:46]

Marvellous Ogunsola: No that's a nice thing to look forward to um. Yeah, thank you for meeting with me.

[35:55]

Helen Radovic: Look, it was really fun. Thank you, what class is this for?

Marvellous Ogunsola: Medical geography.

Helen Radovic: Oh that's exciting. Well, good luck.

[36:06]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Thank you, I'm gonna stop recording now.

[End of Interview, Part 1 of 1, 36:10]