

## Transcript of Oral History Interview with Ben Yrad

**Interviewee:** Ben Yrad

**Interviewer:** Cameron Mitchell

**Date:** 09/19/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** unknown

**Location (Interviewer):** unknown

**Transcription Equipment:** Otter.ai

**Interview Technology:** Zoom-recording

**Abstract:** Per the interviewer: "This story is important to us because everyone has been affected by the pandemic in their own way. It is critical for us to document these struggles and triumphs so we can look back on how we reacted to this pandemic and how we should react to the next one."

**Cameron Mitchell 00:07**

Okay, so today we will be interviewing Ben, he read on his COVID-19 experiences. Ben, can you give consent to be interviewed today?

**Ben Yrad 00:17**

Sounds good.

**CM 00:20**

And what is the date and time?

**BY 00:23**

The date is September 19, 2020. It is 3:58pm.

**CM 00:28**

All right, perfect. All right, we'll get started right away, then. Where were you when you first heard of COVID-19? And what were your initial thoughts?

**BY 00:39**

My dad liked to watch the news every night over dinner. And my parents, my family made it a point to have dinner together every night. So, it was late January, early February, when it made the news for the first time. And we were talking about it. And I turned to my dad, remember saying specifically, this wasn't going to change fundamentally the way we lived? Which was extremely wrong. In retrospect. Yeah. Yeah.

**CM 01:03**

Okay. How did your school respond to COVID-19? And how did the student body as a whole react? So.

**BY 01:10**

This is interesting, a lot of a lot of us had mixed opinions on what exactly was going to happen. Our, our, our high level bio teacher, um, he's also I mean, I wouldn't call him a virologist, or anything, but he was just really interested in studying viruses and pandemics and such. And he said to us, way back in February, that if we closed down once, we're never going to open back up again for the year. And we thought that was ridiculous, obviously, at the time, and we we studied it. Basically, every day, we just tracked it, we tried to move it, and even then it seems like really far away, just like in other continents and such. Um, and then we got our first case, and, like in the US, and things started getting a little bit more serious. And then a few weeks later, there was a math test that Friday, and none of the kids felt ready for it. And we were really like pushing our math teacher to try and move it to Monday. And there were of course, rumors going around that we weren't going back to school the next week. And my teacher was like, No, no, like, I literally cannot move it to Monday, like I'm not allowed to, and that, that started that, you know, that put up a few alarm bells in our heads. And then the next week, we weren't in school. Um, and then they said it was going to be two weeks. And then at the end of the two weeks, they said it was going to be a few months. And then you know, midway through there, they said we weren't going back.

**CM 02:42**

Interesting. So how did the student body feel about not going back as a whole when you guys finally got that message?

**BY 02:47**

I don't, the grades never really intermingled, but the seniors, we were all pretty unhappy about it, honestly. You know, we we were obviously disappointed about you know, prom and our sports seasons and such being in jeopardy, but we also just really wanted to be in school for last year. Um, there were there were some people who were like, you know, I, I'm okay with this, like, online school will be fine and all that stuff. But the vast majority of the seniors wanted to be in school.

**CM 03:21**

What did you lose from not having sort of that second half of your your senior year and did your school do anything in order to make up for that or replace some of the things you may have lost?

**BY 03:32**

Ah, I mean, lost senior trip, we're going to go to the Poconos. And then I went to a magnet school, I tested into it and I played sports or what we call my home school, which is where I would have gone had I not tested into the school I did, and I lost my senior Captain season there. There was no prom. The school did a good job with graduation though. They tried their best and we ended up all being able to graduate together with social distancing and masks, of course, but we graduated in person, which was more fortunate than a lot of high school students got

**CM 04:09**

CM: Huh, did you have a big class or were you a very small magnet school?

**BY 04:13**

We were there were 70 kids in my in my in in migrate, and then there was probably less than 300 in the entire school so that I think that really helped as far as graduation went. I was probably the only reason that we were able to do it because we were so small.

**CM 04:28**

When quarantine hit Did you have a daily routine that you sort of got into or was it different every single day?

**BY 04:36**

I mean, it wasn't great. I woke up around 11 stared at my work didn't do it watch like TV or YouTube or play games and and they got around to it maybe like that night. And then I usually went pretty late. And then or early depending on who do you look at it and then I get up late again. You know, I actually did. My cousin's in California who had been really close with since I was little. They were also locked down, obviously. So we haven't been able to talk a lot the past few years, just because, you know, we're all busy. So I actually did end up calling them ally, we played a lot of games together. And it got to the point where, like, every day around a certain time, I would give them a call. And they would always pick up because obviously, none of us are doing anything. Yeah.

**CM 05:27**

CM: All right, that's nice. Okay, so did you did you notice any drop or rise in your grades when you were during quarantine? Or did they stay relatively consistent with have

**BY 05:38**

definitely a significant rise, I don't want to say that senior year at the magnet school was like, intentionally easier than the first semester or the second semester is unintentionally easier than the first semester, but the magnet school had it set up so that we had enough credits to graduate, like midway through junior year. And then we took all of our essential classes besides calc in the first semester, so really, my only difficult class in the second semester was calc, um, which was like, okay, so it was harder to learn online. But it was easier to do the assignments online, if that makes sense. Just because, uh, you know, like tutorials and such, were just right at my fingertips because I was already like, on my laptop, um, my grades went up. But I also think that's due to just the fact that the classes weren't to neccesarily as difficult as they would have been had been in person, which isn't really the fault of my teachers or the school. It's just how the system worked.

**CM 06:36**

CM: Mm hmm. Did you almost find that your school was underprepared for teaching online and the sudden need to switch to remote.

**BY 06:43**

I actually thought it was suspicious, how well prepared they were all the Google classrooms are already set up. Everything was already, like pretty much up and running. And they had emails going out to all of us with what we needed to do pretty much the day we started, like, pretty much the day. I don't think it was that Monday, I might have been that Wednesday or something like that, after the Friday that we that it was announced we wouldn't be going back. So, I definitely thought that they knew before we did that we would be closing down, which would make sense. But you know,

**CM 07:12**

When did you When did restrictions start to get loosened up? In southern jersey? And when did you start to sort of leave your house and interact with people again?

**BY 07:21**

Oh, man, uh, it's, it's kind of tough just because time, like, time feels so weird with with everything being the same for so long. But I think for me, I think it was around May, like mid-May, that things started to loosen up. I initially I was a little a little skittish about going out. But I had not seen my friends in so long that I kind of just, you know, went with it. And we all we all wore masks and stuff, obviously. But we really only went to like parks and such we didn't really do the things that we had enjoy doing before Korean, like our favorite restaurant that we would go to every weekend. It was like this little cafe that we will always just go to and sit for like four hours and talk. It was closed, obviously. So we really, you know, go for hikes and stuff and just do all the things that were sanctioned by the state, but it didn't really matter what we were doing just because we hadn't seen each other in so long. Yeah. Yeah.

**CM 08:20**

Well, okay. Thank you for taking your time, of course to take the interview. Thank you, of course.