

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Erika Knox

Interviewee: Erika Knox

Interviewer: Andrew Small

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Location (Interviewee): Boston, Massachusetts

Location (Interviewer): Boston, Massachusetts

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Abstract: Erika offered the story of her personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and her thoughts on the broader situation affecting the world.

Andrew Small 00:04

All right, starting up for the day today is the 20th of September 2020. My name is Andrew Small and I'm a second year Asian Studies major at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. And I'm joined today by Erica Knox, fifth year history major also at Northeastern, and today we'll be discussing Erica's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and her opinions on the general state of America and the world at the moment. This interview will be uploaded to the COVID-19 archive project as a testimony for those living through the pandemic. Erika, I just wanted to check if you consent to this interview being uploaded and used as an oral history narrative.

Erika Knox 00:39

Yeah, I'm totally fine with that.

Andrew Small 00:41

All right, awesome. Um, let's kind of start at the beginning of things. Where were you in mid-March when kind of lockdowns went in place and universities decided to shut down.

Erika Knox 00:52

Um, so I was an resident's assistant on campus at Northeastern. Um, so I was living on campus and I worked for the university. Um, but yeah, when everything went in, like when everything happened in March, mid-March, I was actually in office hours as an RA, um, when I got the email that we all had to leave campus, which was a lot, because I had residents coming to me asking what they should do how they need to get home, like, I think we had, like 72 hours to leave at that point. Um,

Andrew Small 01:34

Did Northeastern provide you specifically as an RA, like, any kind of instruction on how to deal with residents in that situation, or

Erika Knox 01:42

Not in that situation right away. Um, they didn't, which was a lot of hand on, like the a lot to give to all the, I think 250 RAs [residence assistant], that had to deal with not only like supporting their communities, but also like going back and like having to find their own way home. And the, like, my manager, like, my supervisors were so supportive of everything I was actually able to leave pretty soon after everything happened. But I had originally planned to stay because they'd said, we were not going to get kicked out. But I have like, I had the privilege to be able to go home. I'm not from that far away from me. Which was good.

Andrew Small 02:28

So you went back to Maine, we're in Maine, did you go back to it after?

Erika Knox 02:32

So, I'm from New York, Maine, which is an hour and a half, I would say from Boston. And I just went back to live with my parents, um, which, who I hadn't lived with for more than a month or two weeks since I think I was 19, I'm 22 now. Um, yeah, so it was interesting.

Andrew Small 02:53

Um, in terms of where you were in Maine, and like the state of Maine in general, how severe or kind of intense were the lockdown orders where you were?

Erika Knox 03:06

Maine had a pretty good, I would say, our governor had a pretty good response to the pandemic. At first, we were in lockdown, and people weren't allowed in the state. Um, I felt like it was such a different experience, though, because I'm so used to being in the city around so many people. And I moved back to like, it's I'm not from a rural town. It's a tourist town. So, like, in the winter, it's, I think, 10,000 people in the summer, it's 30,000. Um, but like I was at home with my parents, we didn't really leave. I went to the grocery store once a week. Because both of my parents are like an at-risk population. They're older, they're 62 and 63. Both with [redacted] like, issues.

But I feel like I really didn't see anybody for the first couple months. Like, I was home, like, even like I would go for walks and come back. And like, everyone in the grocery store, I think 75 people are allowed in at a time and it's a huge grocery store. I believe they were pretty effective. At first, we watched the main the head main CDC every day he'd come on at two

Andrew Small 04:23

And what was that transition like to like online learning? In your experience? Like how did how did that feel kind of changing the everyday way that you went to classes and stuff?

Erika Knox 04:37

Um, for me, it was very hard. I'm someone that's used to like, I love school. I love going to class. I don't do work at home and usually like going to a library or just being not like where I rest. I also was taking guitar class at Northeastern, so I had to like, learn how to play the guitar and like a class of 30 like over zoom, which was pretty hard, but it was fun. I was in the middle of my capstone as well. So, I had been doing research at archives that I then didn't have access to, obviously, because everything shut down. Yeah, um, but for the first few months that I was home, like, all I did was really like, focus on schoolwork and I'd like watch TV with my parents or like, watch documentaries, and go for walks. As things lifted in Maine, and I'd like stopped, like, passes stopped. I feel like that was a harder transition.

Andrew Small 05:35

I think that personally I have, I found that the, the word anxiety has somewhat kind of defined this whole COVID era in the situation in general. Just go without, I mean, just within the boundaries of what you're comfortable with, did you feel any specific anxieties in the early months? And has that continued at all?

Erika Knox 05:59

Um, yeah, I definitely did. Um, I so when I first got home, actually, my mom was extremely sick. And she tested negative for COVID. But she got the test on March 14. So, it was really early on. But she tested positive for [redacted], or like one of the [redacted], which is still really scary, because she, like, has like a [redacted]. So, like, she was sick for about a month, and like, she'd never had the [redacted]. And I feel like if you've never had the [redacted], or like something like it, it's really debilitating. Um, and my dad was still going to work. So, like, I was home and taking care of her. But I was so nervous about getting her sick when I first came home, because once like, they said, like, go home. Like, I couldn't like quarantine from my parents that much like I could, and I couldn't like I could stay upstairs, but like, my mom needed me to, like, take care of her. Which was different. I felt like I was so nervous about like going anywhere, or seeing anybody, or like getting my parents sick, like even, like, I have really bad allergies. So, like, I'd get a sore throat from allergies, and be like, oh, like, do I should go get tested? Or like, is there a way for me to go that test or like, I don't want to get you sick? And they would have to calm me down from that and be like, you're fine. Like, it's allergies. Like you need to? I don't know, I felt like I needed to focus on other things or like, go for a lot of walks, that would clear my head. Yeah. But like, if I didn't have my parents to call me down, I feel like I would have just been a nervous wreck all the time.

Andrew Small 07:35

Yeah, yeah, that's understandable. So, this can actually be kind of our last question. But broadly speaking, just in terms of the kind of state of America and state of the world right now. What do you think? Do you think there will be any kind of permanent changes to our daily life and kind of the structure or social systems kind of guide our society right now, if there's anything that comes to mind, just in terms of looking forward to post pandemic, America, um,

Erika Knox 08:11

I definitely think the pandemic has brought up a lot of issues that this country has, like, continuously swept under the rug with having to do like, with racial discrepancies and health care, or just just how this country is set up for. I don't like healthcare in general, I think, one right now, um, people's access and like, what they can and can't do, and how much of this country is like built for people with money and not like lower income people. But there's also the social aspect of like, not being able to go out and do things that we were so used to before. I feel like we've definitely got to change like, I can't see in the next year or two or five, like being comfortable going into a crowd or like, going Can you imagine going to a concert right now? I know the movie started opening gap, but like, I and I love going to the movies, but I could never do that without having like, something at stake behind it.

Andrew Small 09:13

Um, that's an interesting way of putting it.

Erika Knox 09:16

yeah, I don't. Yeah. Yeah. I feel like we're the way that I am going to act like in public and the way that I see things has definitely shifted from like, how I thought back in February. If that makes sense.

Andrew Small 09:33

It does Yeah, I get that. Um, all right. Well, thank you so much for speaking to me today.

Erika Knox 09:42

Thank you.