

## Transcript of Interview with JS by Shanna Gagnon:

**Narrator:** JS

**Interviewer:** Shanna Gagnon

**Date:** 07/07/2020

**Location (Narrator):** California

**Location (Interviewer):** Danville, California

**Transcriber:** Shanna Gagnon

**Abstract:** The Oral History interview with JS focuses on life during the COVID-19 pandemic. JS shares their initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak. JS reflects upon their shifting feelings about the pandemic as new knowledge surfaces. JS shares how the individual experiences of this pandemic and the mounting death toll impact them personally. Throughout the interview, JS emphasizes the importance of face masks and how masks have become a political and polarizing issue. JS describes the impact of COVID-19 to their employment, as well as the employment of others close to them. And finally, JS discusses life at home during quarantine and the feelings that can arise as people shelter-in-place.

**SG:** Okay. I think all of our systems are recording. Yours is recording, correct?

**JS:** Yes. I'm not doing a screen record but I could add that.

**SG:** I think we're good. [laughs] Okay. So we're going to get started and thank you so much for doing this interview. I really appreciate it. Can you start by letting me know what the date and the time is?

**JS:** Okay. So, it is July 8th. Is that correct?

**SG:** I think it's the seventh.

**JS:** It's the seventh. Okay. Cancel that. It's July 7th and it's 8:17 a.m. Pacific time.

**SG:** Thank you. So I'm going to start with some background questions and there are about three questions in that section, and then we'll move on and I'll let you know what, what topic we're moving on to as we move forward. So, and you just let me know if there's any question that you feel uncomfortable answering, that's completely fine. Or if you, you know, want to give more detail outside of what I asked that's okay, too. So, the first section is background. And the first question is when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

**JS:** Oh, well the first, the first period was the worst for me. I became terrified and really upset. And then I, well I didn't really feel like I needed to hoard toilet paper because we had a lot from Costco, you know, those giant Costco toilet paper things? So we had that. But I was so worried that there wasn't any cleaning supplies or disinfectants. And I particularly became obsessed with rubbing alcohol because that's what I use at work. And I knew that that was really good. I hadn't gotten sick in so long and we used rubbing alcohol to disinfect everything and that I couldn't find that anywhere. So I kept calling different stores and trying to get that to, to survive, you know,

because I - we didn't know how bad it was going to be. And it was going to sweep through and kill everyone, and if we're going to have to literally stay home for a month. And just – oh, and I bought a lot of beans and rice, on the advice of my coworker. Which you couldn't find either because everyone else had the same thought, just the non-perishables. [laughs] And I remember on Amazon. Well, Amazon kind of shut down because we have Prime and it's a two day, but then it was like a month and, you know, delivery, so it was like, oh that's going to be way too late. But I did order a can of beef stew on Amazon [laughs], and I was waiting for that can to come. This was [laughs] my whole plan was to have canned goods and all I could get was this one can [laughs] of beef stew. And it finally came, long after the panic subsided. But, um, that was funny. So when I first heard about it, yeah, I was really scared. I didn't know what was going to happen. Cause we went into quarantine and in California - or in L.A. – before, before the big outbreak, so we're waiting for it all to come and kill us, you know, that's how it felt. And then New York had that big ship come in [the USNS Comfort, an 1,000 bed hospital ship]. And then they, they used - they converted this gigantic convention center called the Jacob Javits center to hospital beds. And that was terrifying. Luckily, none of that had to be used. So, that was good. But the beginning was definitely the worst for me.

**SG:** So, have your thoughts changed since then?

**JS:** Well, yes. Thank heavens. I saw that it isn't going to kill everyone. And, analytically in my mind, it really affects people who are very old or very sick with preexisting conditions and nursing homes, like, you know, that kind of sick. And, but even they survive and it only kills very few people. I mean, I don't want it to kill anyone of course. But in terms of being terrified for myself and my family, it's much less frightening. Even if they do contract it, which it would not be fun at all, potentially. At least it's - we'd get over it and recover. I have a family member who was on a ventilator for two weeks. He just came off a couple of days ago, he's 70, and he is going to be okay. But you know, again, they don't know the long-term damage to the lungs and the brain they're saying – and... So I'm a little bit more relaxed, but still very vigilant and very cautious. I would never go to a crowd situation like people are. You know, I didn't even go protest even though I felt the cause was, of course, justified. I did not go protest because I was in quarantine. And I hadn't worked for three months. I just went back to work last Thursday. And that's a whole story in itself - that was good and bad. But I feel better now, but still, I'm not going to be less vigilant.

**SG:** I have two follow up questions. Were you able to find, or how did you sort of rectify getting the supplies that you need while you're in quarantine?

**JS:** Well, I asked everyone, where can I get rubbing alcohol? Okay, so I went to - someone said my local hardware store had it. Well, they didn't but they were very nice and they helped me. They brought – they showed me this Lysol spray stuff, and it even said coronavirus on it. Of course not this mutation, cause that hadn't been out yet. But they said, “this will be good, get this.” So they had a limit of one. And then they said, “Oh look, there's two different kinds - one is Lysol, one is Ajax or something - you can get one of each.” So that was my starter kit. [laughs] And so then, I called them every day to see if they had the rubbing alcohol. And then finally they did and they saved one for me. And then on Facebook, people were networking as to which store had which supplies. So I was able to get some that way too. People shared information. But I

really was very conscientious about accumulating disinfectants and rubbing alcohol and spraying the packages and everything. But now they say there's a very low chance of getting the virus from surfaces. So all that crazy disinfecting went down.

**SG:** And then my second follow up question was about your job. And, we'll come back to that later. So I just wanted you to know, cause it sounded like maybe there was perhaps something more that you'd be willing to share with us. So I'd love to just remind ourselves that later in the conversation, when we get to the employment section, if you're willing to share, I think that could be an interesting component of your story to capture.

**JS:** Yeah. Thank you. We'll do that. Yeah.

**SG:** Okay. And then the last question in background is, um, what issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

**JS:** Oh, okay. Yeah, we talked about this a little yesterday, the deaths of people. Each death that I hear about on the news *really* affects me. And it's kind of unusual because I don't usually have that reaction to people that I don't know dying. Yeah I'll go, oh man that's such a shame I am so sad, when I hear about anyone dying. And then if I read - I read first person accounts and more so I think because of our internship that we're on for the corona archives, cause we're trying to collect all the, all the things that we can. So one of my interests is the first person stories. So I read about nurses and what they're dealing with, and it's - especially a month or so ago in New York - and I'm from New York so I'm really interested in New York. And, then people who have had it or people who were still struggling with it - I'm collecting their stories, their stories, strangers from Facebook. I get permission to grab their screenshots, and their texts, their stories, and just, I just feel so involved in it. I just feel like I follow all the news really closely. It's kind of all the news I want to hear about. And, I don't know - I guess - what was the question? How's it affected me?

**SG:** What issues have most concerned you about the pandemic?

**JS:** Okay. So yeah, the death. And then the second issue that concerns me is people not wearing face masks as a political statement. That infuriates me because it's scientifically a hundred percent across the boards, this will reduce the risk from 85% down to 5%. And why people wouldn't do that because it violates their constitutional - their civil liberties - it just, it just makes me so furious. And that - and I never engage in social media fights - I never do. I never post about politics or argue with people about their politics. I just silently disagree in my head. [laughs] But with the mask I'm finding myself getting really heated and wanting to call the police. [laughs] This person is breaking the law because in California it's a law. [laughs] I'm calling 911. I won't do that. But, anyway, it's an issue for me and I feel like people are really being selfish. Even a friend that, you know, has that attitude and it's, I don't know how to do anything. I just don't respect it.

**SG:** Okay. Before we move on to the next section, which is employment, are there any other issues about - that you think are really concerning that you want to talk about in regards to the pandemic?

**JS:** No, I don't think so. I mean. I don't think so. I think just getting educated on it, being outside is so much safer than being inside, and the social distancing and the mask is really important. And people - it's not sustainable, people aren't doing it. So, no, I don't know. I think that's all.

**SG:** Thank you. Okay, so we're going to move on to the employment section and just like the last section, there are three questions in this section.

**JS:** Okay.

**SG:** So the first question is has COVID-19 affected your job and in what ways?

**JS:** Well, I have been very lucky. I mean, extremely fortunate. I have a job at a public college – a community college - so there were programs instituted for... And I have a union also that had - I had two separate programs, one from... I guess it was the state, I think the state. And then one from the union, where I was able to - I was quarantined for three and a half months from March 17th until July 1st with full pay. And I used my vacation time, which is fine, I was lucky to have that. You know, I have a great job and a great situation. And so, then we had a program where we had to do training, which was really good. We had to take two classes per day - online video - to enhance our skills and then we could qualify for full pay. I think that was the program from the government. And so, that lasted for more than a month. And then I went back. Okay, so now, so I had the three and a half months of quarantine and it wasn't really a vacation. It was really important to, you know, I can't say - it wasn't torture or anything, or prison or anything, but it wasn't like, woooo! I have three and a half month's paid vacation. It wasn't like that. I was being very conscientious and strict helping – doing my training, anyway. So then I went back July 1st and I knew it was going to be empty, but wow. I had no idea the effect it would have on me. And I mean, I, I think the people who have been working through the virus are used to it, I guess, but there's no one there. There's a total of maybe 40 people on campus. It's a big campus. And it's reminding me every minute that we are in the middle of an apocalyptic situation. And, I I go, part of my job is I deliver things, whatever comes in to people all over the campus who aren't here, but none the less I deliver to their offices. And so I'm traveling the campus all the time and I just can't believe it. Like, everything's dark, the chairs are on the desk, the labs were all closed, and it's - there's maybe two people for a gigantic building in the whole thing. And it's usually - on the pathways, you know - I drive a little, I call it a microtruck, it's a cart but I prefer microtruck [laughs] – and there is no one on the path. There's construction happening, but if it weren't for them it would be completely empty. And it's just like so sad. It just reminds me every day that we are in this serious situation. And it's not opening for fall for sure. So that takes us through the year of 2020. And I don't think it's going to open in the winter either because flu season is coming as it does every year. And I can't imagine that's not going to be anything but worse. So that... So that's my job. And I'm - I was really thankful to - to have some place to go. Like that was really nice to see people. Of course we can't touch each other or anything, but man, it would be so nice to feel someone. [laughs] So, yeah, everyone's in masks and everyone is in gloves and masks and it's just weird.

**SG:** Will this be this, the 40 people that you mentioned that are, are back on campus right now? Will this be the same 40 people that - even if the campus doesn't open up - will still be returning to campus in the fall, in the winter, potentially in the spring?

**JS:** Yes. They're the ones who can't work remotely. Everyone is working remotely. Everyone. Except about that 20 to 40 people. We were trying to count them, cause one of my coworkers said, "Oh no, there's more than 50." And I said, okay, name them. And we didn't even get to 30. So anyway, yeah they're the crew, the skeleton crew that's been there the whole time. I'm the new one who came back and everyone was glad to see me. That was really nice. And even the UPS driver yelled out my name across the hall, "J.J.J.J.S.S.S.S.!", that made me feel so good. And, you know, everyone is - it's just such a nice place to work. That is great to go there, but I don't have that much to do cause everyone's home, so...

**SG:** Have there been conversations about when the campus does reopen, if some of these positions will remain remote?

**JS:** Well, no, if the campus reopens I think everyone will be back. But the big discussion is layoffs because we're anticipating, well, we already have really low enrollment and will people feel safe coming back? I mean, I know the pandemic in 1917 through 1919, it ended eventually and people like, you know, a hundred years later, we never even give it a thought. So how long was that going to take before people... I mean classrooms, as you know, students sit very close to each other. And I don't, I mean my idea is to build Plexiglas barriers that you just attach to your desk and that's seems like perfect because then each student is isolated. You don't even have to do it on both sides. We do it on one side and then the front for the teacher. And that would cover about everyone - you know, do you get my vision? They would fit together, like a puzzle. It's just two pieces on each desk and then everyone's protected. Everyone can see everyone. But I don't hear any talk of that. [laughs] They need to consult me. [laughs] So yeah, so I'm not sure. That's the big discussion is layoffs. So our president said, that's going to be the very last resort. We're going to do a pay cut of 10% that's for sure. And, you know, that's okay. I mean, that's going to be hard, but everyone - "We're all in this together" as they keep saying - and we're all going to have a hard time but not as hard as some people

**SG:** Have you - outside of your specific place of employment - do you know other people that have had their employment effected by the pandemic?

**JS:** Almost everyone, almost everyone. My husband's job has been completely slowed down. His - he does print brokering - which is like a valet service for printing. He does like a contractor, he puts all the art together, then the mailing and the binding and the printing and all of that, you know, so people don't have to bother with that. So he's like a contractor for printing. So all of his clients have closed. Basically. But they've been doing a little bit of work now and then. And then we have these good friends, which broke my heart, because they have - the husband's a musician who makes his money on tours. And their other business is Airbnb, which completely shut down for several months, so... And they have two little kids. And then my son's business is - everyone is very minimally functioning. I mean, we're lucky to have any business, that's how I look at it, cause some people don't have any.

**JS:** And then, what was it called? Not a stimulus check, but the check from the government for \$1,200. It doesn't even pay rent in our area, not even close. So I'm sure the same at your area too. So people who would be renting or mortgage, it definitely doesn't even begin to cover it. And then my son has two kids, so they got the top \$3,500 or \$3,200. But again, if that lasts a month

it's a miracle. So, yeah, it's difficult. And then, you know, the rent forgiveness, it's not a forgiveness program, it's a rent deferral. I don't know how anyone's going to pay five months' rent or three, whatever it's going to end up being by January. So, I'm just really worried about the hardships that are coming and that are already here.

**SG:** Okay. So we're going to move on to the next section and we have about a little less than 10 minutes, so we'll just get as far as we can get and then that will be enough. Okay. So, the next section that we're going to talk about is family and household. So the first question in that section is how has COVID-19 affected you and/or your family's day to day activities?

**JS:** I would like to say, what day to day activities? [laughs] I mean, at first, at first we didn't know what to do with each other - with ourselves - with our time. I live with my husband, that's all. And we're just kind of looking at each other - luckily I had school, so I was able to study and put more time into that. So that was nice. But we had nothing to do. There was no shops that were opened, nothing was open except a grocery store. So we had the big event of Trump's press conferences that ended up being around two o'clock. That was our big event of the day to hear what he had to say and what the doctors had to say. We were really listen for what the doctors had to say during those. And, then after a few, after several days of that, my husband said "I've gotta get out of here," so he wanted to drive around and look at the lines in front of the grocery stores. [laughs] That was our big, our big plan. To drive from grocery store to grocery store looking at lines. And that is what we did. [laughs]

**SG:** Did you snap any photos?

**JS:** Yes. Yes. I did

**SG:** Put 'em in the archive. [laughs]

**JS:** Yeah. Costco was incredible. That was like a seven mile line. But yeah, so that was what we did at first. And then we got the idea, well, we're gonna go on a drive cause the hiking trails were all closed. You too? I don't know. But...

**SG:** Yes.

**JS:** ..we couldn't do anything, like nothing. You couldn't go to the beach. So we drove to the beach a few times to think that would be fun, but that was really, that was not fun. That was frustrating because I wanted to get out and walk and go on the beach. So we didn't do that. We didn't do that more than a couple of times. But then we drove up this road, it's called Angeles Crest. And it goes up and over to the desert actually, ultimately. So we did that. That was kinda nice because we stopped, we could stop the car by the side of the road where they have those lookouts and all, and just kind of look at the scenery and see people doing that. So that was nice. So that's what we ended up doing. But then all of a sudden we got really busy with our time. And our time got filled. And then we did socially distancing, distance visits to our kids where we sat outside 30 feet away [laughs] and talked. And so that was nice.

**SG:** So you mentioned that your time ended up getting filled back up after a little bit of time in quarantine. What was filling your time?

**JS:** You know, I can't even remember. I knew you were going to ask me that. [laughs] First of all, I have studying, which I do... I take a lot of time studying and it's my priority in life. And so there's that. Then, I don't know what else we did, but I got really busy. Well, I did start dance classes over Zoom. Cause I used to love to dance. I still love to dance but I used to love to actually dance in classes. And I don't know what else I did...but a lot. I just had my day filled all of a sudden. I didn't even have time for the Trump press conference before too long. [laughs]

**SG:** Can you describe what the social distancing was like with your family when you did start to engage in that type of activity?

**JS:** Sure. So we would set up chairs. My son had a deck and they say sat on the deck. Which is maybe two feet above the ground and on the furniture there. And they put two chairs - or however many guests they had - on the lawn about, I'd say 10 feet away. So we couldn't move from those chairs, we just sat and it was fun. We had fun. And then we just sat across from each other in the yard, in the backyard. And then other visits were standing up in the front yard, far away from each other.

**SG:** Next question. And then this actually, I'll have one more question after this and then we'll be at our time limit. What have been the biggest challenges that you have faced during the COVID-19 outbreak?

**JS:** Personally for me is, well let me tell you first of all, that I am a real home body and I love staying home, but this is even a little much for me. And I - like I'm - like you don't really see that I'm an introvert but I am. And that's what I mean is I like staying home and I like reading and I like researching genealogy and I like researching on the computer and I like writing. These are quiet, introverting - introversion activities. If you know what I mean. So at first I thought, oh this is going to be great. Now I don't have to go anywhere and I can spend all my time doing these things I like to do. And... -what was the question? Sorry.

**SG:** The question was - no, you're absolutely fine, those are all valuable pieces of information. The question was, what are the biggest challenges that you have faced?

**JS:** So then there'd be - so lately, like after a few months of this, it got really bad. I'd have days where I felt so sad, and so, like isolated and this is never going to end. I am just doing this forever, blah, blah, blah, whatever. I'm just lonely and sad and I'm not really a lonely person. As I said, I'm really happy with myself. I am comfortable in my own world and I have so much to do to entertain myself. I love crafts and I love all those things that I mentioned before. So... But then the other feelings kept... So I think I'm an exceptionally good candidate for quarantine. I'm not going crazy and having mental health, not having mental health issues. So I eventually started feeling isolated. I'll just say isolated. That's a really good word. And I can only imagine how people who don't have that self - I don't know - confidence in just like, I don't know how to call it that comfortable in my own world and enjoying things by myself because I think most people don't necessarily enjoy being by themselves. That concerns me for them. But for me, I'm

okay. It was only a few days now and then. And then when I went back to work, that handled all of that.

**SG:** Okay. So my final question for today is, is there anything else that you'd like to talk about or share before we conclude our interview?

**JS:** Well, wear your mask. God damn mask, put it over your face. And, you know, just, I don't know. I mean, just want to tell people to follow the guidelines. They know what they're doing. It's not something they are doing to oppress the people or gain - to curtail your civil liberties, you know, like people... They're, you know, the right wing people are saying, "no, one's going to just," or "we have freedom here, we have self-determination and no one's going to tell me what to do." But this is a little different. Public safety comes above that. And I that's what I like to say about that. And I think that's all.

**SG:** Thank you so much. We really appreciate your contribution to the archive and your oral history. This was great. Thank you.

**JS:** Yeah. Thank you.