

## **Transcript of Interview with Ashlee Harper by Preston Long**

**Interviewee:** Ashlee Harper

**Interviewer:** Preston Long

**Date:** 05/07/2022

**Location (Interviewee):** Phoenix, Arizona

**Location (Interviewer):** Hilo, Hawaii

**Transcriber:** Preston Long

**Abstract:** Ashlee Harper is a single mother and high school history teacher in Phoenix Arizona. Ashlee recounts the struggles of adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic, the hardships of teaching virtually, and the acclimation back to in-person teaching. She also describes how Covid-19 affected interactions within her personal life as well as how it greatly impacted the development of her students.

**Preston Long 00:03**

Okay, today is May 7, 2022. The time is 9:30 Hawaii Standard Time, and the location of the interview is on Zoom. I am Preston Long, the interviewer. I am located in Hilo, Hawaii, and I'm interviewing Ashlee Harper, who is located in Arizona. Can you please state your name?

**Ashlee Harper 00:34**

My name is Ashlee Harper.

**Preston Long 00:37**

And where are you located?

**Ashlee Harper 00:39**

I'm located in Phoenix, Arizona.

**Preston Long 00:43**

And what are the primary things you do on a day to day basis?

**Ashlee Harper 00:49**

So I am a high school teacher. So that takes up a lot of my time, during the week, and even on the weekends, too, I'm at work most of the time. I'm also a single parent, my son is almost nine years old. So when I'm not at work, I'm usually at home doing something with him or for him.

**Preston Long 01:16**

Do you have any extracurricular activities outside of your teaching job?

**Ashlee Harper 01:24**

Oh, wow. I have to think about that. Honestly, I think that teaching in the last couple of years has become so demanding that I don't have too much free time anymore. Generally, if I have free time, and I'm just trying to do something, I like to do things that don't require a lot of thinking. If that makes sense. I like to watch movies or read and generally just try to relax when I can.

**Preston Long 02:06**

When you first learned about COVID, what were your thoughts about it?

**Ashlee Harper 02:11**

So when I first learned about COVID, I was actually at work. I had heard the phrase "Coronavirus" a lot. And I had a lot of students that would make fun of it and make jokes about it. My students are teenagers, by the way, most of them are fifteen and sixteen. And I remember it was about a week before spring break. And a few teachers were talking about how it was a serious thing, because to be honest, I didn't really think about it too much. And they were just saying that they bet that we wouldn't come back from spring break, which did end up happening. But at the time, I really didn't think that it would be a big deal at all. And so obviously, that's changed now. Basically, we extended our spring break from one week to two weeks. So everyone at the time was like "it's gonna blow over in two weeks." And I thought the same thing because I'm a history teacher, I know about pandemics but it- it didn't really seem like something that was going to be years long to me. And so when they finally announced that schools were going to be shut down virtually, or shut down to become virtual. That's what kind of changed everything for me to see how serious it was.

**Preston Long 03:48**

So COVID affected you pretty, pretty greatly. How else did it affect you?

**Ashlee Harper 03:53**

It affected me a lot because work became entirely virtual. And so I had to change the way that I had always planned things. I had to change the way that I had always worked. Everything had to become virtual when I was so used to doing things on paper. So I had to be home the whole time. In addition to that, my son was in school. And so his school became entirely virtual as well. So really, I had to be teaching him and helping him because he was in kindergarten at the time. And I had to help him do things in his room and then I had to run back to the living room which had become my classroom and help my students and talk to my students. And so immediately that's kind of what had impacted me the most was just everything was just work and school and the school day even went longer just because there was so much that I had to help my son makeup just because virtual learning is so difficult for little kids, in my opinion.

**Preston Long 05:12**

So what did- what changed? What was the biggest aspect that changed in regard to like the people around you, during COVID?

**Ashlee Harper** 05:24

Do you mean the way that people acted when it happened?

**Preston Long** 05:28

How about, like how you communicate with friends and family, for the most part.

**Ashlee Harper** 05:35

Okay, so I didn't really see people too much. During the first few months, I think that, really, Arizona had a way of dealing with restrictions and things to where there wasn't really many. So my state didn't have too many restrictions, they had a lot of encourage- encouragement, so things that they think that you should do. So I never really felt too restricted. But the way that I would mostly talk to my friends and family was on the phone, FaceTime happened all the time. And there would be a few times where when my friends and I wanted to spend time with each other, we would go hang out somewhere outside, but we would be distanced from each other, we wouldn't be too close. I remember I would go to the park a lot too, and I saw other people they would be hanging out or meeting like in the backs of their cars, like where they would all be pulled up next to each other. And so my friends, and I would do things like that pretty often as well.

**Preston Long** 06:57

Were there any specific pandemic-related memories that stand out to you?

**Ashlee Harper** 07:03

I think that probably pandemic related memory that I have was just when everything turned virtual, for work. So what happened was, my high school immediately needed to become virtual. And the teachers only had about three days to prepare, before we needed to do all of our classes virtual. And of course, we had never dealt with this before. So no one knew what to do. The students didn't know what to do. I have a large population of students that do not have WiFi at home, they did not have electronics at home. And so it was really difficult to get all students able to finish out the school year, we still had, I believe about eight or nine weeks left. So what ended up happening is they made a schedule to where we would be meeting with our students. But it was completely optional for students. And so I had to be online and ready for them to come see me on Zoom every day. But they didn't have to. So their grade could not go lower than it already was, it could only improve. And if I'm remembering correctly, students couldn't fail that year either. So really, it was because we weren't sure if all students were going to be able to have the same access. A lot of students had younger siblings. So anyway, I remember having to just wait at my kitchen table every day to make sure that any students didn't need any help or anything. And in total, I usually have about 180 students on average. And in total, I would have maybe six a day, come on, and even less would turn in work. Most students would they- when they would come on Zoom, they really just wanted to talk. They didn't want to do any work or learn anything. They just wanted to kind of hang out and talk to me. And I think that that is super important to kind of think about

because I think that that really hit me at the time with just kind of how serious it was and also how it's affecting kids. Just given that they really just wanted to talk to their teacher like that they didn't have anything else that they really wanted to do. And I think that looking back on that memory that explains a lot because even now, two years later, I can see a lot of social and emotional growth that never happened with my students now, that I think was directly affected by the pandemic.

**Preston Long 10:11**

Okay, and my last question is, do you think- what are some of the biggest challenges when it comes to distance learning, or teaching during the pandemic?

**Ashlee Harper 10:26**

I'm speaking specifically about my age group, given that my students are fifteen and sixteen years old. So we are no longer doing distance learning. But I had to do it for quite some time. When the pandemic originally started, like I said earlier, everything was optional, but then what happened was for the 2021-2022, school year, what happened was, we started the year off completely virtual for a month. And then we went into in-person learning. However, students with a legitimate reason, I'm not sure the qualifications for it, but a legitimate reason could stay home and continue to do virtual learning for the year. So I had to teach students in person and virtually at the same time. And I think that the biggest challenge was motivation. A lot of my students with their age group and everything else, it's so easy to turn on Zoom, and walk away. And when I had my students in person, again, that's what a lot of them did. Teenagers naturally like to push boundaries and test things out. And it's impossible to give consequences over Zoom. You can't do a lunch detention over Zoom, and so if they weren't going to turn on their cameras, there's really nothing that you could do about it. And the motivation went down so low, and it's still affecting students, even though we've been in school all year, and the school year is almost over. We have one of the highest amount of failing grades that I've ever seen in school, and I've been teaching for six years. And I've talked to students about it, and why they're not motivated, even though they're in person. And a lot of them have just told me that they just became so used to not having to do anything and being able to do whatever they wanted whenever they wanted. And so we are seeing a lot of planning and trying to adjust to accommodate that now.

**Preston Long 12:49**

All right. Thank you, Ashlee. Is there anything else you wanted to add to this interview?

**Ashlee Harper 12:55**

No, nothing else.

**Preston Long 12:58**

Alright. Thank you so much.

**Ashlee Harper 13:01**

Alright. Thank you.