

Transcript of Oral History by Morgan Ward

Interviewee/Interviewer: Morgan Ward

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Abstract: In this monologue, Morgan Ward discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic affected her work, school, and personal life.

Morgan Ward 0:01

Today's Thursday, April 15, 2021, and the time is 9:56 AM. My name is Morgan Ward. I'm a secondary education and history major at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. I'm a member of the Notre Dame women's rugby team and a member of the St. Mary's history club. I'm from a rural and quiet town in northwest Indiana called Wanatah, the population is estimated to be 1200 people. We have a stoplight, a gas station, a bank and a post office. And my best tip of advice for anybody who wants to visit Wanatah is don't blink when you get into town because you will definitely miss it. The town is small and it thrives off of agriculture. And you will definitely get stuck behind farm machinery on the roads. But you'll always hear birds chirping, and you'll see some of the best sunrises and sunsets because of the open fields. When I first learned about COVID-19, I thought it was nothing serious. I thought that the US wouldn't really be affected, and we would continue living our normal lives. Well, I was definitely wrong. I was home for spring break for about three days when St Mary's sent out the email informing us that we would extend spring break until further notice and that further notice was sent out. And we were told that we would continue classes online for the spring semester. When I was told I wouldn't be returning after spring break, my thoughts definitely changed, and I knew things were getting serious, and my life was going to change. The biggest issue that I had at the time was whether or not I would return to campus in the fall of 2020 to attend in person classes. And since I was home, I definitely took advantage of working part time at Bed Bath and Beyond. I've worked there since I was 16. And COVID didn't really have any major effects on the job until April 4th when we were put onto a furlough status that lasted for eight weeks. And during that furlough, I did not collect unemployment; I was not paid by the company. I was a dependent on my parents at the time, so I couldn't collect unemployment. And when the furlough status ended in June, I was one of the first employees to come back to work part time because I did have seniority over other people. Since I am studying education and history, my end goal is to be a history teacher at the middle school level. And I believe COVID has changed what teaching is going to look like in the futures, and COVID has definitely caused a higher teacher burnout. And there isn't just shortages in the state of Indiana; there- it's across the country. And I think that future employment opportunities for teachers are going to be pretty open because they're needed and they're going to be needed. But we need people who are going to be good teachers. And COVID, it definitely has affected not only teaching but has affected careers all across the board. I have a friend who's a plumber pipe fitter for a local union. And they have seen higher layoff rates than any other time. The work has definitely slowed down and isn't as strenuous as he was telling me about. But COVID definitely has affected employment and our economy. And my family, we live on 12 and a half acres and there's six of us. So there's definitely space for us to go out and do things but we weren't allowed to be social with our friends and other family members. My daily activities definitely decreased. I didn't see my friends everyday like I wanted to, I didn't

see my significant other everyday like I wanted to. Going to go get coffee at Starbucks wasn't an option at the time anymore. So I resorted to doing daily activities at home inside the house like cleaning and keeping up with the laundry, taking care of animals. And these were things that I did on a daily basis anyways, but it was more of just putting in a little bit of extra effort to make things tidier than what I usually would have done them as. So my family, there are six of us; my mom, my dad, and then I have three younger teenage brothers, and we're fortunate enough to live on 12 and a half acres of property. And when the weather was nice, we definitely spent our days down at our pond that we have fishing, kayaking, throwing water toys into the pond for the dogs to chase. And we sadly hopped on the trend of watching Tiger King, endless hours of TikTok, making banana bread and tons of new homemade meals, and occasionally played Family Feud, but that always turned into some type of argument with somebody. I personally found myself watching a lot of YouTube videos about fitness and weight loss and obsessing over neo-traditional country bluegrass folk music singer Tyler Childers. COVID affected my relationship with school because it created many difficulties as to communicating with professors. I personally am a person who needs to be in person to communicate versus email, Zoom, FaceTime, or whatever it might be. And I found myself participating less in my classes through Zoom, because I got distracted by other things, whether that was watching TikToks on my phone or texting my friends. And I wasn't paying enough attention. Because learning through online classes like that was difficult for me. Since living in a rural town, we followed- personally, my family, we followed CDC guidelines the best that we could. If CDC wanted us to wear a mask out in public, we did that. If we were told we weren't supposed to go and see people, we weren't going to see people. And as for the community members of Wanatah, they definitely followed the guidelines, but as time went on, I noticed less social distancing, less mask wearing and there- there became a lack of decency from the community members. And since the guidelines weren't being followed, I figured that this was because people started to go stir crazy in a sense because they were tired of being locked up in their homes, wearing a mask, not socializing at local sporting events, holidays, family get togethers. And everybody was abiding by the rules. And then quickly, you see everybody, it was more of like a monkey see monkey do situation where, well, if he's not going to wear a mask, I'm not going to wear a mask if I go into the grocery store. Self-isolation and flattening the curve are two ideas that were new to me when the pandemic had started. But it was something that we put into our vocabulary as a family and make sure to follow those guidelines the best that we could. My parents made it very clear that until the governor of Indiana gave us the okay, then we would be allowed to see friends, significant others and other family members. But we made sure that it was only one to two days a week. And it was only specific people that we were going to be seeing. And I'm definitely lucky enough to have friends and family who all share the same ideas as my family and I and we all made sure to keep one another safe and kind of just keeping our- our circles tight at the time. So from about March to November, mid-November, my family did not experience COVID at all. Nobody in my family was sick. Occasionally there was a couple like, allergies and colds that we got, but nothing was ever COVID. And I came home at the end of fall semester in 2020 for Christmas break, and it was a week before Thanksgiving. And [REDACTED] who is 18 tested positive, he experienced mild sym- symptoms. And we all thought it was more of just strep throat, but it turned out to be COVID. And since I returned home a week before that, I kind of had to self-isolate, quarantine, and social distance from him by staying in the lower half of our home. And I- my plan was to return back to part time work at Bed Bath and Beyond again, but I had to put that on a two-week hold until everybody in my family was kind of safe to go back out

into public and see everybody again. And some primary sources that we were getting our news from during the pandemic, we switched back and forth between Fox News and CNN, and we watched a lot of Good Morning America because it's just something that was comforting to us in a sense and The Today Show and Facebook and Instagram, and we- we looked everywhere for information. Now, we know a lot of those sources probably aren't valid and weren't good sources, but I think a lot of people kind of did the same thing. Looking into my future, I- COVID has affected all aspects of life, and COVID-19, I feel as if I grew closer to my family and my friends because of COVID. I learned from this experience that I depend heavily on social interaction with people who mean the most to me, and I greatly appreciate the efforts that everybody in my family and my friends, we all took to keep one another safe. Just so that way at the end, there was good be light at the end of the tunnel and we could see everybody again. And I think not only for my small community but our country and the rest of the world, we were all affected. And I think it's important that we keep good communication between not only our own country but other countries and the populations of those countries. And as a leader, I want to see a better job of communicating and taking actions promptly because I think it'll help create less chaos in future events that may occur.