

Transcript of Interview with Lauren Pease by Ashley Tibollo

Interviewee: Lauren Pease

Interviewer: Ashley Tibollo

Date: 04/25/2021

Location (Interviewee): Williamsville, New York

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Abstract: Lauren Pease is a mother of two and currently a stay at home mom. Lauren begins the interview by describing how she was worried, fiscally, when the pandemic started as her and her husband were unsure if he would lose his job and how they could make ends meet to support their family. She then talks about how relieved they were when they found out that her husband would be able to still work full time, remotely, especially since not everyone in his office was able to do that. After the financial aspect was taken care of, Lauren talks about how her next concern was her children being able to interact with other kids their age. Next Lauren describes how schooling went for her kids during the lockdown and the challenges that came with remote learning for an elementary school aged child. Then Lauren talks about how she primarily receives her news through NPR and that she felt that the state of New York was cautious and handled the pandemic pretty well and kept people mostly informed. Lauren ends with how she thinks that there needs to be a central way to release information to help combat misinformation as some people do not check their sources of information. She says that if the US has good information coming from the top down, it would be a lot easier for people to understand and be informed.

Ashley Tibollo 00:00

Okay, we are recording. My name is Ashley Tibollo. It is July 25, 2021. It is 2:05pm. We are at a mutual friend's house in Williamsville. And I'm here with Lauren Pease. Lauren, please remember that any answers that you give will be included in a publicly accessible database. Is that okay with you?

Lauren Pease 00:31

That is perfectly fine.

Ashley Tibollo 00:33

Okay, so Lauren, could you state your name and say what the primary things you do on a day to day basis are?

Lauren Pease 00:42

My name is Lauren Pease. I live in Williamsville. And on a day to day basis, I am a stay at home mom. I have a six year old daughter, and a one year old foster daughter. So is that good enough?

Ashley Tibollo 01:01

Yeah, that's good. And when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

Lauren Pease 01:11

[children laughing in background] My thoughts were, "How are things going to change?" Specifically, I was worried about my husband's job because I'm a stay at home mom. So everything- the reason we moved here was because of my husband's job, and I was worried about finances. [child talking]

Ashley Tibollo 01:35

Okay, sorry, we just had to pause the interview because of our screaming children. So you were worried about your husband's job?

Lauren Pease 01:43

Yes.

Ashley Tibollo 01:44

And you were saying because you moved here for it?

Lauren Pease 01:47

Correct. So it just- Specifically, I was worried about his job. And like, if we happen to lose it, you know, your mind just kind of goes to the worst case scenario. So I was worried like, are they going to remove our foster daughter if he loses his job? How are we going to make ends meet? And they were talking about all of the products flying off the shelves at the stores And that made it all very real. Because for a while, it didn't seem real until they started closing the schools, I feel like.

Ashley Tibollo 02:25

And was his job affected at all by the pandemic?

Lauren Pease 02:30

Yes, he he started working from home. And I guess like, like a lot of jobs, it seems like they just they tried to do the best they could working from home. But there was a lot of downtime and people didn't know what they needed. He works as a video editor. So he works at a post production house. And so things just kind of were at a standstill for a while. And that was very unsettling. Too much time to think.

Ashley Tibollo 02:59

What were your thoughts on the economy in general, during the pandemic?

Lauren Pease 03:04

My thoughts on the economy? I don't think I started thinking about it until like, broadly until later. But just supply and demand was a little concerning. "Do we have enough toilet paper?"

Ashley Tibollo 03:22

That was a very real concern.

Lauren Pease 03:25

But I think we were fine. But yeah, I don't think we really like, once I knew that his job was secure, we started getting a little more comfortable. So we knew that like, our foster daughter was going to stay, and we will be able to afford our mortgage payments. And he was able to stay on full time, which not everyone in his office was able to do, which was a relief for me. And I stayed home. And I was thinking I might have to go back to work, but I didn't have to, just to make ends meet. But we were fine. And so I stayed home and focused on Robin's education and taking care of the little one.

Ashley Tibollo 04:13

So other than toilet paper and employment, [laughter] what, what issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Lauren Pease 04:23

I tend to worry about unserved people, especially our foster daughter's family and her community. I'm trying to think of specifics. I feel like we're so- well, we're not quite out of the woods, but-

Ashley Tibollo 04:39

No.

Lauren Pease 04:41

It feels like we are sometimes. [drilling noise] What was the question again?

Ashley Tibollo 04:45

What were your other- did you have other major concerns during the pandemic?

Lauren Pease 04:51

Um, socialization for the kiddos, especially my daughter being school aged and not being in school. We were lucky enough to have good friends that had the same perspective as us as far as being safe and masking. So that was to our advantage, we were able to get her socialized that way. But that was the main concern, I think; we were pretty fortunate and privileged in our position.

Ashley Tibollo 05:20

Did you know anyone who contracted COVID?

Lauren Pease 05:27

Yes, but not like in our immediate circle. I think we're also very privileged in the fact that we're in a suburb, and we had the space and the resources to stay safe. You know, we weren't on top of each other in our housing, we weren't sharing our housing with people that we didn't need to. But like just our

neighbor across the street, passed away from it and then her neighbor behind us passed away from it. And our friend's mother who was living in Florida at the time passed away from it as well.

Ashley Tibollo 06:08

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. You're in a bit of a unique situation, having a foster child at home during the pandemic. Was your day to day routine, with her affected by the pandemic at all?

Lauren Pease 06:30

It sure was. So like we- she has scheduled visits to [unintelligible] where she's picked up by a agency worker or a caseworker. And so during the height of the pandemic, we- not really the height in New York City, but when things were very unknown, they switched and had video calls with her parents. And so her mother was very good about it. But her dad was not interested, only wanted to see her in person. That was a big change for us. We had to like, you know, instead of just passing her off to be picked up, I had to facilitate hour long video calls, which was fine. We were happy to do it, I'm able to. But also it just like upped our awareness of risk factors in the community that we had to expose ourselves to once things started opening up again towards the end of the summer.

Ashley Tibollo 07:36

And outside of that, how, how did you manage your day to day activities at home?

Lauren Pease 07:44

Day to day?

Ashley Tibollo 07:46

Sorry, there's- we had another interruption from the kiddos. Let me say that- what- what did you do on a day to day during quarantine?

Lauren Pease 07:57

During quarantine at the initial quarantine, I don't think we were wearing masks at that point. Are you talking about the beginning or are you just talking about in general?

Ashley Tibollo 08:07

Like once you were sheltering in place, like staying home.

Lauren Pease 08:11

Oh sheltering in place, we had just a lot of quality family time. It was like early spring. So you know, Evansburg was kind of quiet. And Robin wasn't doing much schoolwork at the time. So it was a lot of scrolling and seeing what other people were doing and making sure other people were okay, probably watching too much news. But then also, we had a lot of family meals together. And kind of just reflecting and spending family time.

Ashley Tibollo 08:45

That sounds nice.

Lauren Pease 08:46

Yeah, it was actually really nice.

Ashley Tibollo 08:49

So you mentioned that Robin did not have a lot of work to do. What was your experience with online learning, or presumably online learning, during the pandemic?

Lauren Pease 09:03

Um, so the way that- that she was in kindergarten, she, she was in kindergarten. No, when it first started, she was in kindergarten.

Ashley Tibollo 09:13

Yeah.

Lauren Pease 09:13

Isn't that crazy? So I don't know it- I mean, because she was in kindergarten, I did not place a lot of emphasis on like, making sure that she got her work done. Like, I wanted to make sure that she was like socially and emotionally okay. And I knew that she'd be able to catch up otherwise. But it was a lot of just like, assignments. And then when they started getting their act together, because everyone was in this like COVID haze of like, "Oh my God, what's going on?" Then they would meet for an hour a week and just kind of have social circle time for kindergarten, and then during her first grade she had she stayed home for all of the school year.

Ashley Tibollo 10:03

So did Robin like that socialization online? Or...

Lauren Pease 10:08

She did. I think she was kind of indifferent to it because they were at the very end of the school year anyway. So it was like they were just kind of doing what they could. And like I said, we had some close friends that had the same outlook. So that made things easier. But I think it was nice. She got to see her teacher. And then they did a parade, which was really nice. I think they did that twice, where all the teachers would come around to the neighborhood to see the kids in their cars, and that it like, unexpectedly made me cry. I was like getting teary and emotional.

Ashley Tibollo 10:43

Yeah, they did that in our neighborhood as well. It was sweet. And you said she did the whole- this whole last year, first grade, online as well.

Lauren Pease 10:55

She did.

Ashley Tibollo 10:56

How- was that any different?

Lauren Pease 10:59

Yes. So the expectation like, I think the teachers kind of had their act together and had more time to prepare. So you could- I don't even remember how they did it for Williamsville. You could choose- I think everyone started at home. And then you could choose to go back [unintelligible]

Ashley Tibollo 11:19

Was there a hybrid schedule, and you could go-

Lauren Pease 11:24

Yes.

Ashley Tibollo 11:25

-hybrid, or you could stay full remote?

Lauren Pease 11:27

Yes. So anyway, we chose to, because I'm home, we chose to stay home with her. And her teacher did a really good job. So she had all remote students. And she did a really good job of scheduling the day, I think they had about two and a half to three hours of face to face learning with the teacher and the teacher's assistant. And they broke out into small groups. And I was very impressed with the level of instruction that she was able to receive; they used a program called Seesaw. And then they used Zoom to- to facilitate the learning. And she had a great year, lot of growth.

Ashley Tibollo 12:09

Oh, that's great to hear. Some- because people have had a mixed bag of experiences, I think.

Lauren Pease 12:15

Yeah, that's true. We definitely had a good one.

Ashley Tibollo 12:19

What were your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Lauren Pease 12:24

NPR is on in my house pretty much all the time. So radio is where I get most of my news. And then also just from news sources online. And then every once in a while, I would turn on the local news just to see what's going on locally. But primarily NPR

Ashley Tibollo 12:48

And do you think they did a good job with covering the pandemic? Did you feel like there was anything they weren't covering?

Lauren Pease 12:56

No, I feel like they did a really good job; for a long time they were covering the Cuomo conferences, he would have like a COVID conference like every day like, noon or 11. And then they would feature the health person, I don't remember who it was. But yeah, they would break into those news conferences for a long time until things started kind of being a lot of the same every day. But I feel like they did a good job.

Ashley Tibollo 13:26

I also used NPR and- and agree with you there. Since you mentioned New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, how did you feel about how he handled things or how things were handled at a local or federal level?

Lauren Pease 13:46

I feel like he was extra cautious, but I agree with generally how he conducted things. I think just the flow of information was very reassuring because there was so much uncertainty that just having that consistent voice of reason, and he always kind of comes off as a very calm, reassuring tone like I, I appreciated that. And then also anything coming from Fauci was fantastic, I felt. That's the question? Yeah.

Ashley Tibollo 14:23

Yeah.

Lauren Pease 14:24

I appreciated the news. And then they also had like, they developed that New York COVID website where you could check on the daily cases and that was also a source of information that I found very helpful, tracking like local spread. Our school also came out with their own- they pushed their own information-

Ashley Tibollo 14:50

Yeah.

Lauren Pease 14:51

-as far as the numbers, which was helpful.

Ashley Tibollo 14:54

And how did you feel about how the people around you, family, friends, community, handled the pandemic? Was there anything that surprised you?

Lauren Pease 15:04

Um, generally, my small circle was pretty like-minded and the fact that we were all being [unintelligible] along with like, we'll catch up next year or get together outside with space and masks. I think the part that surprised us was when we were invited to like a more extended family get together for, it's either Thanksgiving or Christmas, but it was just definitely like, before vaccines, and I was like, "We are not participating. Like, this is not our comfort level." And the fact that they were organizing, it told me that they were not like-minded, so I was just "Nope, we're gonna stay safe." And, you know, the nice thing is, we can always use our kids and the fact that we have a foster daughter, and like she has a lot of community exposure at that time. Like, we don't want to risk it for other people, we can always use that as a fallback for why we're not particularly interested in getting together.

Ashley Tibollo 16:14

Did that surprise you that there were people who didn't take it as seriously?

Lauren Pease 16:20

Very much so. I probably shouldn't be surprised. But it does surprise me. I don't know. I guess I could have, you know, you kind of form your own echo chamber. And then when you hear something from outside that echo chamber, then it kind of- it does kind of startle you.

Ashley Tibollo 16:41

How did you feel about sort of protests and political climate during this time?

Lauren Pease 16:50

How do I feel about that?

Ashley Tibollo 16:51

Yeah.

Lauren Pease 16:52

I was very supportive. It's hard because it was going on during this like terrible time. And people were trying to, you know, express how they felt and everything that was wrong was going on. And I definitely supported that. And it was nice seeing people doing what they could with masks on. Gosh, it feels like so long ago, but it's still so relevant and still going on. But yeah.

Ashley Tibollo 17:27

How- let me, let me start over, has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends and community?

Lauren Pease 17:43

Yeah, it makes me definitely reflect on our exposure level just so like for everything I was like, we've been so lucky, like through all this, to not have anyone in our immediate circle get sick. But also we haven't had the flu or the cold really, very much either. So it's definitely like, I hope that masks stick around, especially during the cold and flu season. And I'm better at saying no to certain things that make us uncomfortable. And we definitely slowed our kind of easing back in to activities. The kids are still unvaccinated. We are completely vaccinated. I'm curious to know how this school year is gonna go

Ashley Tibollo 18:32

Yeah, for sure. And how was your vaccine experience?

Lauren Pease 18:38

I'm a baby when it comes to shots. And I was really, it went really well. We ended up going to a community center in Buffalo. And I qualified early because of my weight BMI, was that?

Ashley Tibollo 18:53

Yeah.

Lauren Pease 18:54

What is that called?

Ashley Tibollo 18:55

Yeah, your BMI. Your body mass index.

Lauren Pease 18:59

So we qualified that way. And so we got it a little bit before it was available to others. It was really well organized. There was some AmeriCorps volunteers helping out at the community center. And yeah, I was impressed. And it was easy. And I had no reactions to either shots.

Ashley Tibollo 19:19

Oh, that's great.

Lauren Pease 19:20

Yes.

Ashley Tibollo 19:21

My final question for you is knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Lauren Pease 19:36

I think that it's really important to have a central way to just give the information out because I think the most frustrating part through all of this has been the misinformation and like the anti-vaccine movement, and where all those people are getting their information, and it's very frustrating to see people not thinking for themselves and being a good advocate. And not really- what am I trying to say? Not critiquing their, their media sources. You know what I mean? I don't know how to-

Ashley Tibollo 20:23

No, that makes sense.

Lauren Pease 20:24

-describe that. Yeah.

Ashley Tibollo 20:25

Yeah.

Lauren Pease 20:26

Like, where is this coming from? Who is the original source? Is it accurate? But I think that moving forward, I think that if we have good information from a top down and [unintelligible] clearly and shows evidence, I'd like to think that people will learn from that and hopefully think of the community rather than just ourselves. I think there was a lot of selfishness throughout the pandemic, and like people not thinking about what's good for the community and for others. [unintelligible]

Ashley Tibollo 21:05

Yes, I hope so, too. Was there anything that we haven't discussed that you wanted to be included?

Lauren Pease 21:11

I don't think so. It was an interesting, positive and negative experience overall. Just like, I'm glad that I had a family during all of it, because I can see it being very lonely for some people. And I think that we're fortunate to have young kids, and I don't think it's going to affect them negatively. And like I said, hopefully it will- there will be positive change that comes out of this for the greater good, moving forward.

Ashley Tibollo 21:44

I hope so too. Well, thank you so much for your time and your contribution to the archive. It's greatly appreciated.

Lauren Pease 21:53

You're so welcome. Thank you, Ashley.