

## Transcript of Interview with Kris McDaniel by Clinton P. Roberts

**Interviewee:** Kris McDaniel

**Interviewer:** Clinton P. Roberts

**Date:** 05/27/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** Blanchard, OK

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**Abstract:** [from item description] Interview of recent high graduate Kris McDaniel of Blanchard, Oklahoma by Clinton P. Roberts on 05/27/2020. Kris speaks about changes to his senior year of high school and the unique ways his rural town created a drive-through graduation ceremony due to COVID-19. Kris also speaks generally on what it was like to be a young person in high school, missing key moments due to the pandemic, and what he wants future people to know about this experience in this rural community. Submitted for the #ruralvoices collection. Contributed by Clinton P. Roberts, curatorial intern for Arizona State University, HST 580. #HST580 #ASU

CR: Okay, Kris, as a member of the class of 2020, can you describe your senior year? When did things start to change?

KM: When things started to change was around two weeks before spring break at a my school. And that was when a lot of the students were talking about it. I know personal, my personal friend group, we talked about it a lot at lunch mainly. And then as progressed on to the next week, one week before spring break, that's when teachers started talking about it. That's when staff, that's when most instances from parents, were emailing teachers. And at that point in time, we thought that maybe we're just getting extended spring break, we thought a week, two weeks, like with some schools did. And that was mostly about two- about one to two weeks before this all happened.

CR: And so what did you think going into spring break? Did you think things were going to change?

KM: I thought that we were going to have an extension, for certain, I thought maybe another week, I was hopeful for another week. Now a lot of my friends will even friends from different, different grades were hoping for another week, maybe two.

CR: So when did you- How are- how did you hear that, that school wasn't coming back even after a couple of weeks?

KM: Um, mostly parents talking to their kids. And you know, they spread that around on, on group chats and stuff on different apps, different social media, also listening to the news. Because the, the Oklahoma school board or whatever met with the CDC to announce it, to talk about it. And then that's when they announced that schools are going to be a distance, we're gonna be switching distance learning.

CR: Yeah. Well, at that time, did you think that you were going to go back to school before the end of the year? Or did you think it was going to last as long as it did?

KM: I was hopeful that we will maybe going to be out for three weeks, maybe a month on most and then spend the last couple of days rushing to get everything done. Gets senior bios, quotes, all that, for those who haven't. Tried to get our grades up for those who didn't have them high enough. And then when the Blanchard school- when the Oklahoma school border met with the CDC, that's when I learned more coming back.

CR: So what are some of the things that, that changed for you at that point? Like what things did you have planned in your school that you now realized you were not going to get to do as a senior?

KM: Um definitely a formal prom, like a school-funded prom. Senior trip. That's a big one we were all talking about and wondering what we're going to do. And then graduation. And we're very worried about graduation after we had a prom and senior trip were canceled. We thought we were basically just going to get diplomas in the mail and a thank you card, that was it.

CR: What about like the- say the prom itself, have you heard any news since then that maybe you're going to get an opportunity to do that?

KM: Yes, the city I live in, Blanchard, Blanchard, Oklahoma we as, the city itself not the school, has organized a prom on Main Street. I believe it's June 5, at like 7:00 PM to midnight or whatever. And so that's got a lot of my class really excited because now- since now all of us can have a formal goodbye and this would feel a bit more impactful emotionally to us, at least to me.

CR: Not to cut you off there, but like the the graduation itself. You guys experienced a really unique version of graduation like one that the local news stations were there. Describe that process for me.

KM: When we first heard about it- we heard about it basically when we picked up our gowns. The school kind of had to drive through where you put your name on your windshield, you drive up and most teachers recognized who you was and handed you a gown and then there was instructions for a a drive-through graduation and when we first had this, my senior class we were all angry I was pretty upset about as well. Since for so many years I attended my older brother's graduation you know, observe it seen others. So we all wanted this normal one and when we heard about this drive-through one, we weren't too happy.

CR: Well and then now that you've actually had that graduation, how do you feel now having done that? Describe that process of doing the graduation and how you feel now.

KM: It was the day of the graduation. Um, I was getting ready and that's why I kind of just thought to myself, um, you know, this you know, we're not going to get anything else. This is kind of it. We, in the past, we try to postpone it, we try to reschedule, we try to maybe do something else, and it just won't work. And so I just kind of made up my mind that like okay, I know I'm probably not gonna like this, but I'm at least going to do it for my family, for my class, for my town, and you know, move on and like at least I have a good story to tell.

CR: Did it feel like when you were doing it that it was something historic? I mean, when did it hit home how big of a deal it was?

KM: It was after the graduation that the local the new stations were broadcasting. They were just talking about unique graduations and it was kind of funny because the town I live in was almost never on the news on this it's like weather or something so seeing our, our, I guess, tiny little

town for some places, up on the news for having a very unique graduation. Even the other example they gave of another school their's wasn't even like ours.

CR: Yeah. And the graduation itself, how long did that take and what what do you what do you remember about it? Take us through that process of being at the graduation.

KM: So um, the way how there's a back way to get into the school that because we have basically one big long parking lot. And it's almost kind of a "C" - it kind of wraps around the entire school. So if you go through the back way you can just loop around and get to the front of the school. So they had all the students enter through the back way and of course, of course the cars roll down windows, they check to see the graduates in there or backup the drive and you have to get into a line. Well we have 132 students and if say each student wasn't you know double back into whatever's because I heard some students stayed there too, if they were in one car because their siblings and all that. That's roughly about 130-132 cars and some people brought limousines, some people have party buses. And this is a- we have a pretty decent-sized parking lot but since was stuck in this line. It was just like it felt claustrophobic and of course I'm sitting there on my gown, I'm wearing nice clothes, got my hair done. I'm just like- we're having to just be almost crammed like can of sardines. Like we're stuck.

CR: Yeah.

KM: And has I- As the, finally, the graduation starts I'm sitting there and I was 30th in line and I kind of heard something turns out for the past like 15 minutes our president, our valedictorian, our principle were all talking and I couldn't hear it. And maybe the first 10 could hear it. And I guarantee you anything past me couldn't hear it.

CR: Well and when you finally get up to the part where it was your turn to go through the front, walk us through that part. Like what you saw and what you thought. Or I should say drive you through,

KM: Yeah. [both laugh]

CR: - instead of walk you through that part.

KM: So the vehicles and we drove up and we- there's kind of like a circle drive kind of near the front of the school, so we stopped there. I got out and so my vehicles staying, like, they are stopped or someone's put their foot on the brake or they're in park or whatever. I get up. I grab my diploma holder and there's no diploma in it. And I'm, in the back of my head I'm going, okay there's no diploma, maybe I'm gonna get it later. Take- I take one set of pictures next to- we have, we have something that says Blanchard, Oklahoma the main- Blanchard, Oklahoma high school, the main donator, and all that. And we have like a lion statue because our mascot's a lion. So I take that and then I walk over and I stand around six feet away from our principal. They have this nice little small stage set up with nice backing. And you know-

CR: So you guys did like a social distancing-

KM: Yes.

CR: - in like the photograph also?

KM: Yes. Because I know that was a big thing. You know, you shake your principal's hand at a graduation. Well, we can't do that. But at least we have a picture with him.

CR: Yeah.

KM: So after that's done, the principal walks over to another stage, higher rise, has a nice background, flowers, you know, the whole thing. And we take a picture. It's just us. And it kind of looks like almost a formal setting. And so when you get done, you just walk off, you wait, and then your vehicle can finally start moving again to pick you up. And then you, you complete the circle drive and you go around to the other side, and then you receive your diploma. They have all, they have all of them in envelopes. You receive a diploma, then you drive down even further to the other side of the school from where most people already at. And you tell them where you want to send you a final transcript, and then you leave by going the other way through the back of the school.

CR: So that same process happened to all 132 students. So how long did that graduation take? Did it take longer than a normal graduation? Or did you hear?

KM: I really don't know how long it was compared to other graduations. But I was maybe 30th in place. And we were there for around 45 minutes to an hour. Yeah, so the guy whose way far in the back, I feel very bad for them.

CR: And now that your senior year is over, and you're kind of looking back, like what kind of things do you want to tell people who basically will never live through this or have no idea kind of what things were like during this time? What was it like, specifically being a senior during this?

KM: It was full of uncertainty.

CR: Yeah.

KM: We didn't know what was going to get canceled what was going to get moved. Because I mean, like I said earlier, my class believed there was no prom. Like city isn't doing one. School definitely isn't doing it. That's it, we don't get a final prom. Well, we all thought that and now, our city throwing one. So, you know, we're all excited for that one. And then for the graduation, we all made the best of it that we could. I mean, even though we complained at first, we eventually just like- we eventually just kind of came to conclusion that's like, this is it.

CR: Yeah.

KM: You know, we have to do it now. Because if not, we're just going to look like a fool to our whole family and, you know, to the town.

CR: Well, and you had mentioned that there were some people who couldn't wait until there was a graduation later.

KM: Yeah, when we were before the graduation, we talked about postponing it. I have a friend, he's going into the army. And we're all talking about postponing it to like June, June 30, or July even. Well, he wouldn't be able to attend to because he gets into basic June 23. So we have to make the choice. Do you want a drive to graduation with most of my class will be in attendance or are we're going to have a formal one with a good chunk of my classes isn't going to be there? And that could be for military or personal reasons.

CR: Yeah. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about? Specifically things that you remember about the pandemic? Just as a young person? Your perspective is really different? Because I'm sure you see different things online than older people.

KM: Yeah.

CR: And a lot of your social stuff is through social media. What kind of things do you remember on social media about the pandemic?

KM: I remember on social media, me and my close group of friends we talked about. We almost made a bet on how long this will last. And we all said, eh, maybe June? And we don't know if that's actually going to happen or not. Because in our state, in Oklahoma, we've had- It's gone down, it's gone up, it's gone down, it's gone up. So maybe that can happen. But we're betting this probably not.

CR: Yeah, Oklahoma is specifically has kind of eased back on their restriction. So things are kind of going back to normal. What were some of the first things that you notice that we're normalizing?

KM: Oh normalizing, um, mainly the amount of people on the road.

CR: Yeah.

KM: That's, um- Where I live, personally, I live next to a highway. So I'm used to hearing cars going up and down in between here and another city. And even with the pandemic, there's no people going back and forth, you know, the essential workers, some live in Blanchard. And they have to go and drive to Chickasha, or wherever. So then, when I had to drive to my friend's house, I drove through town, and there was no one. I mean, Blanchard isn't known for having massive traffic, but there was nobody there's no one parked in front of the Subway. There's no one parked like at the bank anything other than employees and it was just quiet. It was so quiet. But then, I would drive back to my house and I'd get home and there's people going up and down the highway.

CR: Yeah.

KM: And it kind of was the big difference- The big difference was that my town went silent, yet the other places is still quite loud when it comes to traffic.

CR: Yeah. be next to highway I'm sure a lot of big trucks and stuff-

KM: Yeah.

CR: -kind of never stopped. But when you went into town did- What did you notice about the businesses? Which businesses were open and some of them were closed?

KM: I mean, most food places were open. A couple, up until, the law basically said they couldn't, were having indoor dining. Excuse me. But most other businesses like couple of the minor ones, gyms, clothing shops, and all that, those places closed and I see them open occasionally. But ever since the pandemic happened, they were just silent.

CR: What kind of things do you notice, as far as like when you do go through town? What things look different? Like I've kind of mentioned in some of my stuff, that there are signs everywhere kind of telling you things and- Have you noticed things like that in public spaces?

KM: Um, I noticed, um, I took a dif- I took the same route as I always do to my friend's house and by that I need to pass the park, the local park in my town. And I saw a sign up next to someone's house and it's though "we can get through this." And I don't know what happened because when I came back my- the next week to go see my friend that sign was gone.

CR: Oh yeah. Well the- Did you see like a lot of hopeful signs? Like, I know that people talk about people were doing chalk messages in their driveways and stuff like that. Did you see a lot of things like that?

KM: Um, since I don't live in a neighborhood, I live just outside of town. I don't have a lot of communication with my neighbors. They don't have a lot of communication with us. But the few times I would have to drive through so one of the one of the neighborhoods in this town, I would see occasional chalk things but it wasn't like a message is usually just like some kid you know. It was a nice day. Kid had chalk, there you go. But I had seen the teddy bears in the windows, you know, like the paper ones. Yeah, I've seen that in a couple of neighborhoods. I see that even some small houses that are just scattered throughout.

CR: Yeah, that was one of the things that I talked about one of my submissions is the the teddy bear hunt and the sidewalk chalk art. And it was something that I noticed that kind of occurred at the same time as a lot of people getting out to walk. Have you noticed a lot of people outdoors, randomly, kind of like exercise-walking and stuff like that?

KM: I've seen my- I seen a good chunk of people walking, taking a jog, or something on the nicer days here, especially around the neighborhoods certainly.

CR: It kind of seemed like to me that people were maybe getting claustrophobic kind of in the house or they were getting cabin fever-

KM: Yeah.

CR: -whatever you want to say.

KM: And I understand that. I mean, even I know that like the first week, I didn't even hardly go outside my house for awhile and I was losing my mind.

CR: Yeah.

KM: So now I'm even- I'm spending a lot more time outside. I'll go and just sit outside and just relax, sit in the sun, or sit in the shade. Just be on my phone or just read a book or whatever.

CR: And one last question. If you were going to write this message or you were going to record this message to your future self and you wanted something to tell your children or grandchildren or something about this time that you lived in what's something really unique that you want them to take away from this interview?

KM: That's pretty hard question. Value your time with, not even just people, just with normal things like going out to eat, to going to the movies. Maybe if this happened during the school year, maybe go into like a sports event that your school is throwing and just kind of value time

with that because- You know, I know certainly I did, I took it all for granted. And then when this pandemic happened and a lot of it was taken away, it hurt quite a bit and hurt knowing that- it hurt having that feeling that, am I going to have a normal prom? Am I going to have graduation? What's going to happen? What's going to happen when I enroll into college?

CR: So you feel like you appreciate those things a little bit more now?

KM: Yeah, I appreciate it. Just not only because it's my senior year, I appreciate my friends greatly because we've been trying to keep things as normal between us as possible because some of us just want to get out of the house for a little while. Or some of us just, some of us just really enjoy each other's time.

CR: Yeah, that's, that's, that's really a good one because I feel like a lot of people are going to look back and see things like that about their their lives, especially younger people. All right. Thank you, Kris.

KM: Yeah, no problem.

CR: I appreciate you doing this interview for me. This is Clinton Roberts. I'm a graduate student at Arizona State University. This is for HST 580. Thank you.