

## Transcript of Interview with Joseph Dopkin by Ashley Tibollo

**Interviewee:** Joseph Dopkin

**Interviewer:** Ashley Tibollo

**Date:** 04/24/2021

**Location (Interviewee):** Buffalo, New York

**Location (Interviewer):** Williamsville, New York

**Abstract:** Ashley Tibollo sits down with Joseph John Dopkin to discuss how his life has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this interview he discusses how his life at school as a University student has changed. He also discusses how the dynamics in his dorm room and life at home with his family were impacted. At the end of this interview Dopkin touches on political topics, his views on how the pandemic was handled by local and state governments. He also discusses his views on both anti-mask and BLM protests.

**Joseph Dopkin 00:00**

Can you state your name for the record.

**Ashley Tibollo 00:02**

We are recording.

**Joseph Dopkin 00:04**

Great.

**Ashley Tibollo 00:04**

My name is Ashley Tibollo. It is July 24, 2021. It is 8:23pm. We are at my home in Williamsville, New York. I am with Joseph Dopki, who I refer to as Dopkin. Dopkin, please remember that any answers you give will be included in a public- publicly accessible database. Do I have your consent to record this interview and include it in that archive?

**Joseph Dopkin 00:44**

Yes, you do.

**Ashley Tibollo 00:45**

Thank you. Okay, could you first please state your full name and tell us what the primary things you do on a day to day basis are like, your job or school or extra cur- curricular activities?

**Joseph Dopkin 01:02**

Sure. My name is Joseph John Dopkin. I'm a student at Paul Smith's College in the Adirondack's. I'm majoring in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences with a Botany minor. Currently, I'm in Buffalo, working landscaping and working at Urban Roots Cooperative Garden Market, been trying to earn some money for my upcoming semester. I guess my most often, frequented pastimes are working and sleeping right now, as I try to prepare for the upcoming semester. I'm also taking some summer courses. So that has been high on the agenda. Yeah.

**Ashley Tibollo 01:39**

And what is it like at Paul Smith and in the Adirondack's where your are?

**Joseph Dopkin** 01:44

It's great. I love it because we have, I believe, 14,000 acres of land that is attached to our campus in the Visitor Interpretor Center, we call it the VIC. And it has a bunch of trails and opportunities to explore the area and study both fisheries and wildlife, as well as different ecology courses. And it also provides a great outlet for like sports and cross country skiing and all sorts of winter activities, which is most of the climate at Paul Smith's; it starts to snow around October and we get blanketed in snow and winds. And it's excellent. I love the winter. As for academics, I'd say it's science oriented, but we also have a large portion of our curriculum that is dedicated to culinary, hospitality, and business. And then we also have a few D3 sports teams.

**Ashley Tibollo** 02:46

Awesome. Sounds like a great place.

**Joseph Dopkin** 02:48

Yeah.

**Ashley Tibollo** 02:51

So when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

**Joseph Dopkin** 02:59

Well, I first learned about COVID-19 when all of my friends and I were sitting in our dorm's kitchen, kind of just chatting and eating. And someone said, you know, there's this viral outbreak in, I believe, Manhattan. And we have a couple students from the city. And we were like joking around like, "Oh, like don't get sick and bring it back," when we- you know, heard there were two or three cases. And then I think a day or so later, was our spring break. So we were all like, you know, "safe travels." We went home for spring break. And they extended the break for another week. And then we all got the message that Coronavirus, you know, had been at large essentially, and we were not permitted to come back to school. So I didn't really hear about it from news, but moreso my institution. And then honestly, it was kind of a shock. It was not a great experience having to finish all of my classes online because so many classes and so much of what we do is all hands on because of the space that the college provides to us. I had a lab that I was doing mist netting in which is where you set up these folds of thin netting to catch birds in and then you band them for research purposes. And we couldn't do any of that. I couldn't do my salamander research. So it was all very like, disheartening to hear that we couldn't go back and finish what we we started.

**Ashley Tibollo** 04:27

Yeah, that'd be incredibly disappointing.

**Joseph Dopkin** 04:29

Yeah, it was, it was definitely a shot. And then after the semester ended, I was working at Urban Roots Cooperative Garden Market during COVID, which was- it was very interesting because usually we have a good amount of customer base that comes through the yard and it's not very staff oriented, whereas we'll just walk around and be like "Hi, do you need anything?" But now we switched to everything being online order. So we had to package all of the orders, and I was in charge of making sure that cars run a line and running orders out to people in rain, snow, sun, every- every weather. So it was a lot harder to adjust. But once we got adjusted, I think,

you know, I appreciated the time where I had to work really hard to do basic tasks because it definitely filled the time at the beginning of COVID where my other friends were getting stressed or anxious or having other mental afflictions due to COVID.

**Ashley Tibollo 05:25**

And what issues have most concerned you about the COVID 19 pandemic?

**Joseph Dopkin 05:32**

In regard to like, other people or myself?

**Ashley Tibollo 05:37**

Either one; both.

**Joseph Dopkin 05:38**

Okay. I think in regard to others, I've noticed how selfish people can be and how self interested people can be. There's a- I mean a very obvious tie with some people not wanting to wear masks because they believe it's their right to do what they want to do, which I don't agree with. I think that you have the right to do whatever you want but with repercussions of yourself and others. So if you don't wear a mask or you don't get vaccinated, you're putting yourself and others at risk, which is selfish. But more so it created almost thus double standard, where people were like, "Oh, I don't want to wear a mask because you're infringing on my body and my rights." But then they don't stand up for, you know, women's choice. So it wasn't necessarily the masks or the not wearing of the mask that I had an issue with. It's the double standard that people support one general idea to back their lack of mask wearing, but they don't support the idea when it's someone else choosing what they want to do with their body.

**Ashley Tibollo 06:15**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

**Ashley Tibollo 06:54**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

**Joseph Dopkin 06:56**

So essentially, it's not like the- not the mask wearing that bothers me but the the double standards that kind of started to come up. And I started to see where people would defend their own point illogically just to do whatever they wanted to do. So that's what kind of irks me about how it affected other people. And for myself, and for a lot of other people, I think it became, because of that fast switch and having to adapt to the new normal, I think a lot of people had issues with anxiety and depression and trying to figure out what they were doing and where they fit into this new normal. I think COVID made me like, a little angrier at the world, because it's like, "Why can't we fix this? What- what do we need to do? What's not happening, what is happening?" And I became almost ravenous for information, trying to figure out what could be done and how I could get back to where I wanted to be and where I was. And at some point, I realized that we couldn't right away, and we're back, moving to where it was now. But, you know, with the new strains, and with people still not wearing masks in certain places, or even athletes, saying that they don't want to be vaccinated because they're- they don't trust Dr. Fauci, or they're afraid

of, you know, microbots, just how people go to the furthest lengths to do whatever they want to do. It's still there that upsetment's still there. But I think we're moving in a good direction.

**Ashley Tibollo 08:35**

And you said, you know, you have this thirst for information. So where is that information coming from? Like, what have you been your primary sources of news and information during the pandemic?

**Joseph Dopkin 08:49**

I think a lot of it because of, frankly, how busy I've been and how just awful I feel after I watched, like, the six o'clock news with my parents, a lot of it has come from discussion with a lot of different people who have a lot of different opinions, whether that be, you know, liberal, you know, right wing, or even religious, like where everyone kind of fits in the picture. I think that I've learned a lot from discussion. And still a little bit, I try to spread out my different news sources that I consume from, like, I'll watch some right wing and left wing media, and then some more centrist media, just because I think that every single side is important to know, to try to hic at all the perspective so that you can form your own. I will say that both sides, right and left, and some of the things that I don't agree with or would call it dumb that certain people do on both of those sides have pushed me towards centrism in this time just because you know, I can't agree with either one right now, because there's certain individuals acting out that it's just like, well, I don't agree with either of those, so I feel like I have to be moderate. And, you know, not necessarily in a political sense, but also just like living like, I can't go out and go crazy and party, but I also can't work all the time because, you know, I need to preserve my mental health. So I feel like I'm living in a very moderate, moderate form right now. And it's, it's upsetting, because if you, you know, if stand for nothing, you fall for everything. So...

**Ashley Tibollo 10:34**

And how did you feel about or how did you handle the, the need for quarantine or isolation?

**Joseph Dopkin 10:44**

My parents are at risk, so I felt like I really needed to for them. I definitely had, you know, the point where I was like, "Man, I just, I wish this is all over, I could go out with my friends." And there were points where people invited me to go do things, and I had to decline, and it felt awful. And I had major FOMO. But at the end of the day, it was worth it because neither one of my parents contracted the virus, and I didn't attract the virus. And everyone who I knew generally within my circle was safe, which was a blessing.

**Ashley Tibollo 11:20**

So where are you quarantined with your parents then?

**Joseph Dopkin 11:23**

I was. Well, we were living in the same house. I was going to- my mom and I were going to work. My dad is retired, so he would stay home, we were going to the stores since we already had contact with people. But I was pretty much staying at home or taking walks, but I wasn't really seeing many people. And we had like a family gathering with my mom, my dad, my uncle and his girlfriend, and we were all six feet apart and outside with masks on and then as mandates slowly started to lift, we were able to slowly begin to bring our gatherings closer and lose the mask. But we were- I think- I don't think we've had an indoor gathering since COVID started, not at least one that I've been a part of with more than my mom, my dad, myself and my girlfriend like, of a large

quantity. And then like smaller groups, four or less. I don't know, it's just- I feel- even when people walk up to me on the street; I went for ice cream earlier today and this gentleman came like right up next to me and instinctually, I moved away; I kept my my distance; I feel like I will always, or at least for a long time, keep some sort of distance away from people. And I don't know if that's just reactionary from COVID or if now I have this like, cognizance of personal space and how close I am to someone and how close someone is to me. But yeah, I think that my gatherings have gotten a lot smaller, both of my family and with my friends because of COVID. I don't- I don't go out with like 15 people anymore.

**Ashley Tibollo 13:08**

Yeah. And you mentioned your girlfriend, as well. Did you have to be separated from her during that quarantine time?

**Joseph Dopkin 13:19**

We were- so our school's policy is that we were allowed guests from the school. So other students in the dorm with us but we had to be wearing masks, whereas roommates could sign a contract and either decline and say that neither one of the roommates had to wear masks or both of them had to wear masks. But there were- there were agreements set up through that- through Residence Life and Housing. We had to wear masks because we were in different dorms. But hopefully- I believe the mandate for our school this year is if you're vaccinated, you are allowed to be maskless unless you would obviously like to wear one of your own, you know, own ability. But yeah, it's- it's a little concerning, because most of our school is we're, you know, apredominantly white institution. And there are a lot of people from red areas which tends to be, I find, the people who are more against wearing masks, and it's a little scary because we only have, I would say, less than half of our campus vaccinated, which you know, I'm going to have to quarantine before I come back home to keep everyone safe, even though I'm vaccinated. I don't you know, a 7, 10 day quarantine isn't gonna do anything, I can work on my classes, I can do something but... You know, I feel comfortable around other vaccinated people but there's still that, that fear, especially because of the new variants coming out. I don't know what these people do in their free time. I don't know if they're gonna ragers. I don't know if they're gonna see their whole family and God knows where, so you know, I think it's better to err on the side of caution until we're we can be 100%

**Ashley Tibollo 14:56**

What did you and your family and your girlfriend or, or friends do for recreation during COVID-19 since you've been so isolated?

**Joseph Dopkin 15:06**

For the first couple, few months, I didn't, I didn't really see anyone. I would go on like, walks or meet up with one person. And we would stay socially distance across like, on the... like on opposite sides of the trail on like a park and stay masked up. And then as you know, mandates slowly loosened, we would take the masks off. And then most of- most of everything I did was outside. Like I said, I haven't had a big in home family gathering. I've been to other friends and other people's houses. But yeah, I- there wasn't really a ton of recreation, it was more so I felt like I had to take a hit and just be a little antisocial so that I can keep everyone safe, especially my parents. But it's slowly starting to pick back up now where, you know, I feel comfortable seeing 5, 6, 7 people in a home. And once again, it feels super cognizant of how close I am to someone. So I'll go on like, sit in a chair or I'll scooch over on the couch. I don't still want to be right next to someone. I don't know if that's a little bit of trauma from the COVID, oor if that's just a cognizance like I said, but not much recreation.

**Ashley Tibollo 16:26**

You know, you- you've touched on sort of mental health, a little bit. So in what ways do you think that COVID-19 is affecting people's mental health and or physical health?

**Joseph Dopkin 16:39**

Well, I think in regard to physical health, a lot of good things have been done with, you know, different people and pop culture and social media and even just, you know, influential people who know a lot of people in their circles have been good about putting out fitness content, like, "Oh, you can work out at home, you can do this, you can do that." Which kind of affected my mental health because I was like, "Oh, man, I didn't really get fit in quarantine. What am I doing? Did I waste all this time, all this all this given... essentially, like potential that I had to do something great with my body that I wanted to do?" And I just didn't it's like, "Oh," almost keyed me in like, "Oh, is that- is that laziness? Could I have done better?" Which kind of helped me find motivation to do other things towards excellence? In regards to mental health, I think, I think uncertainty definitely brings fear, which can cloud judgment. I think my judgment was definitely clouded in COVID because I didn't know- I was in my house the whole day, I was pretty much in my bed when I got home from work. And it was like, "Well, am I doing the right thing? Should I be doing this? Should I be doing that?" I'm very happy that, that hard part is over. It's definitely a lot easier now that I can go out and touch grass and see my friends. And I think that humans being social creatures, definitely need some sort of stimulating physical contact or conversation or something. And I think that that took a big hit to a lot of people's mental health as not being able to interact with other human beings.

**Ashley Tibollo 18:18**

Yeah, for sure. I know, I felt that really hard. Did you or anyone you know, contract COVID-19?

**Joseph Dopkin 18:32**

We had some positives at school. But no, they weren't allowed to release names for, I'm sure, extra legal reasons. I've- not anyone that I knew personally, I've heard stories of like friends of friends' family contracting the virus. I'm trying to think if I, if I'm forgetting anyone, but I mean, if me trying to remember tells you anything, it's that either I didn't know them very well, or I don't have a very good memory, but no one I can think of off the top of my head which is once again a blessing.

**Ashley Tibollo 19:07**

Yeah, for sure. Has your experience throughout this pandemic transformed at all, how you think about your family or friends or community? And if so, in what ways?

**Joseph Dopkin 19:22**

I definitely think about my family a little differently because some extended family took on the nonbeliever. Like it doesn't exist, it's the government, it's this, it's that, and it's like, you know, people who I thought were generally intelligent, nice, nice, fine folk who are related to me via blood. You know, I was surprised for sure. So I definitely, I don't want to say everything they say, I take with a grain of salt, but I definitely think more carefully about how I process what they're saying because I don't know, that seems like a big leap in logic to be like, "Oh, there's a virus, government, for sure." So definitely think more about what people who I trusted an am close to say and just state as fact. And I might accept automatically, I kind of put it in a second thought now. Most of my

friends were pretty good about it. And I was like, I wasn't surprised. But I was impressed that everyone was so diligent, and everyone took the right steps. It was, it was sad when we couldn't do things or disappointing when someone said, you know, "I can't, I can't do this, I can't do that. Or we can't do this. We shouldn't be doing that." But I was impressed and happy that everyone ended up doing the right thing collectively in my friend group. And then as of the community. I don't really do much community outreach. So I'm not- I guess I'm not really at liberty to say because I didn't have much experience with that.

**Ashley Tibollo 21:21**

Oh, no problem. Do you have any thoughts about how local state and or federal leaders responded or are responding to the crisis?

**Joseph Dopkin 21:39**

Like I said, I tried to try to not watch the news, because it makes me very upset. However, I think that I was very happy to be in New York State. I know that Cuomo is not a perfect man, he doesn't do everything. Right. But the way that he handled the COVID crisis, I think, was pretty exemplary. And I was happy with everything in regard to COVID that he did.

**Ashley Tibollo 22:16**

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

**Joseph Dopkin 22:27**

I think that there needs to be a better plan in place. I think this was fortunately a wake up call and not, you know, wiping out a third of the world's population. I think that this- if we don't learn from this as a species, we failed, because, you know, we, we just need to be ready. And I think more research going into this, and the fact that we were able to create a vaccine so quickly, is excellent. But we need to continue on and keep pushing forward with, with all the research into this area and have a sophisticated, detailed plan that is accessible to most people so that they know what to do for themselves as well. And it's not like people are looking at the TV waiting for the government telling you you need to wear a mask and people like "Oh, I should wear a mask. I should quarantine. I should do this. I should not buy all the toilet paper up. I should maybe get a little bit of canned food."

**Joseph Dopkin 22:27**

Definitely don't buy the toilet paper

**Joseph Dopkin 22:32**

Just basic things. Yeah, I think just, just a detailed and sophisticated plan that everyone has access to in basic crisis information.

**Ashley Tibollo 23:39**

I think that sounds like pretty sound advice. I have two more questions for you that are a bit more pointed. Just because of, you know, we are friends, so I know of your individual sort of circumstances. My first one has to do with the illness that you experienced during the pandemic. It was not COVID. But I'm wondering, it was fairly serious and prolonged. And I'm wondering if you felt that the health care that you received during that time was affected at all by COVID-19?

**Joseph Dopkin 24:18**

Okay, lots to unpack there. So I contracted mono on the 11th of April. And I was si-

**Ashley Tibollo 24:29**

Of 2021.

**Joseph Dopkin 24:30**

Of 2021, And I was sick for about three and a half weeks with a fever ranging from 101 to 106.3 at some different parts. It was pretty crazy ride. I don't think that the health care that I received was affected by COVID more so I wish my school had a better way of taking care of ill students. So I don't think it was like a American health care issue but more so my college dropping the ball and not doing everything that they could. I think that their concern for me was heightened because of COVID. I was put in quarantine almost immediately by myself like, I offered to go into quarantine. I called the health services. But they were really great about, you know, bringing me enough water, keeping me warm, changing the temperature and stuff. So they were great in that regard. But I just wish I would have gotten more like, tests and, and- because I didn't know that I had mono, I didn't get a mono tests until almost the 20, like mid 20s in the month. And they thought it was you know, everything else I went to the hospital twice because my fever was so high. And no one thought to give me a mono test because I'd already had it before, which is, you know, a rare occurrence, you're gonna get it twice or have it flare up again. So I don't think it was like a health care issue necessarily, but moreso my college.

**Ashley Tibollo 26:00**

Got it. And my second question is, since your education is so focused on sort of nature and the environment, do you have any opinions or things to say about how COVID-19 may or may not have impacted the environment?

**Joseph Dopkin 26:27**

I know it's been said that they're like, the environment made a little bit of a resurgence, like Mother Nature was kind of coming back almost during this time where people were not, you know, driving as much or using as much gas etc. I think that- I don't know if that was just like a boom and bust or if it had any correlation or causation. If it was causative, excuse me, but I would like to think that we could kind of write it and hopefully push some more ecological reform, to hopefully like, you know, make the earth a better place. But I don't know if there's enough there to convince the people in power who need to make those decisions to actually push out ecological reform?

**Ashley Tibollo 27:22**

Do you think that ecological reform or environmental awareness could prevent another sort of zoonotic epidemic, like COVID-19?

**Joseph Dopkin 27:36**

I think that studying the natural world is definitely a way to get more information about things that, you know, afflict humans like, viruses and different illnesses and illnesses that may affect other creatures. So I don't think it would hurt to put more study and push more in that area. But you know, if the COVID doesn't take us out, our planet is only going to last so long. I think that both are very important, both in, in the human, you know, keeping humans alive. I mean, it definitely wouldn't hurt to learn more about our planet and try to save it. But I don't know if it's necessarily related, in my mind, to what happened with COVID. But that's just my experience.



**Ashley Tibollo 28:27**

Awesome. Was there anything that you wanted to discuss that we did not get to touch upon?

**Joseph Dopkin 28:37**

Um, I think that some of the protests that happen during the pandemic kind of shifted my view, a lot. And with some conversations with friends that I've had shifted my view a lot about how I think about other people and how other people might think about me.

**Ashley Tibollo 29:00**

Are you talking about protests in general, or more specific ones, like Black Lives Matter or anti-mask protests, or which?

**Ashley Tibollo 29:08**

Oh that is so upsetting.

**Joseph Dopkin 29:08**

I think that anti-mask protests definitely affected me in the sense that I just, I was so amazed that I, like not amazed in a good way either. It was just- I honestly have no words; I kind of almost disregarded it because I knew that if I got into it, I would just get riled up and upset and that wasn't worth my time. Because what I say is not going to change their mind if hundreds and thousands of other people are telling them, and they're, you know, yelling in their faces about it. In regard to BLM, I think I definitely learned a lot of information, not necessarily revolving BLM, but just the way that people feel and how they're treated. I don't like talking about BLM with people. I think that black lives do matter, but the- the people don't like the organization for racial reasons or otherwise. So I would much prefer to talk to people about how people are treated versus saying, "BLM this, BLM that." I think that the Black Lives Matter movement is necessary. Because they have not been shown that their lives matter, or at least matter as much. I have a friend who feels like he can't marry or have kids with someone of his race, and he is a minority, because he doesn't want his kid to go through what he's been. He's like "I have to marry and have a child with like a white woman because that is the only way that my kid is going to have a chance." And that is-

**Joseph Dopkin 29:50**

-Awful. It's so, so sad. So that kind of that- I was talking to him at the beginning of the pandemic, and that kind of jump started my exploration and knowledge of BLM and other movements that support you know...

**Ashley Tibollo 31:13**

And for the record, what race do you identify with personally?

**Joseph Dopkin 31:17**

White.

**Ashley Tibollo 31:17**

Okay.

**Joseph Dopkin** 31:19

And I think that as a white man, I think it's very important to not just be an ally, but an advocate, and go out and do stuff and go to the protests. And I was able to go to one protests, I had to stay in the back and stay in mass because like I said, I had to keep my family safe, number one priority, but I think it's important to be there and show people that you care whether they're, you know, white, black, Hispanic, Asian, etc. You just show people that you care about them, and they have a place in the world that you're living in. I think that's the most important thing.

**Ashley Tibollo** 31:54

Right, well, thank you so much for sharing and answering my questions and giving this contribution to the archive. It's greatly appreciate it.

**Joseph Dopkin** 32:02

Sure. Thanks for having me.

**Ashley Tibollo** 32:03

Thank you.