

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Anasitasia Viatele

Interviewer: Brett Reinert

Interviewee: Anasitasia Viatele

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Abstract: Anasitasia Viatele is from Kent, Washington. She recounts her life during the pandemic and the struggles she has faced during that time. She discusses her family in American Samoa and touches on their struggles as well.

Brett Reinert 00:01

Could you state the date, time and location of the interview for you?

Anasitasia Viatele 00:07

Today is May 10th, and it is 1:57. I'm here in Kent, Washington, and we're having to interview via Zoom.

Brett Reinert 00:17

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

Anasitasia Viatele 00:23

My name is Anasitasia Vaitele. And what I do for day to day basis, I mostly go to work. I work at a small business called Sozial Gifts. I am a lead packer for the company. And my job is to pack gifts for, you know, corporate business, and customizing glasses and reports. When I'm not at work, I'm mostly at home with my family. So for me, it's mostly going to work and coming home to help around the house and working on school related tasks.

Brett Reinert 01:08

Cool, and where do you live? And what's it like to live there?

Anasitasia Viatele 01:15

I live in Kent, Washington. The weather is super bipolar here. But it's it's always nice and cool. Sometimes I love it. Sometimes I don't depending on, you know, the mood and the weather. Even if the weather is nice, I hardly go outside I'm I'm more of an indoor type of person.

Brett Reinert 01:37

And when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it? And how have your thoughts changed since then?

Anasitasia Viatele 01:45

Yeah. I first learned about COVID when I was in St. George, Utah. I attended Dixie State University for my Bachelor's during the time, I honestly did not have any idea about the virus because I'm not the kind to watch the news. But my professors, they were always talking about it. But I have I have no idea what it was. They're saying that things are going to change and all of our classes are going to move online. Knowing me I did not pay any attention to it thinking is just, you know, another joke it's just another hoax played by my professors. It wasn't until like borders began to close, that I began to take it more seriously. When in American Samoa where I'm originally from they began to close their borders. That's when I was like, Oh, something is going on. And I began to watch the news. And that's when I started to learn more about the COVID. So by March 2019, all of our classes were moved online. I think March 2019, or 2020. I'm not sure. It's been a very long time, COVID. And I can't even remember if it's the right time. So classes were moved online, the university was closed down, a lot of nearby restaurants were closed down. And we were stuck in our apartment. It was everything was so sudden, it was very different. I've never seen anything like it. My first thought was that, oh, America, you know, the great nation is humbled by this virus. And when I say that, I mean America, the once busy nation is suddenly silenced and closed down by this virus. It was it was scary, and no doubt it was scary because a lot of things were became uncertain at the time. Me and my friends were planning a trip to go back home to American Samoa for the summer. But suddenly, we couldn't. And that made it very sad. I think for right now I have learned to adapt, and to keep up with the virus. I am comfortable knowing that I know what to do now. It became a norm. It wasn't a norm before. But now it's a norm for me to always remember my mask when I go out. It's like if I don't have my mask, I feel naked and unsecured sort of way. So the virus brought new habits and certain ways to be safe and secured. So yeah.

Brett Reinert 04:44

And so like how has COVID-19, the outbreak, how has that affected the way you associate and communicate with your friends and family?

Anasitasia Viatele 04:54

Yeah. When I moved here to the States for school, I communicate mostly with my family and friends on FaceTime and video chat. So when the pandemic hit, I was still communicating with them the same way it was, nothing has changed. But the only thing that changed was not being able to go back home. So I worked at McDonald's as a part timer during that time to save up enough money to pay for my fare to go back home. And a round trip to back home is like \$15 to \$16 hundred dollars depending on how soon you go home, so I saved up enough money. I was looking forward to go back home, to travel back home, but I couldn't, the borders were closed. So that was the only downside of things but communicating with them through FaceTime and video chat, it did not change for me. And I was blessed and grateful that I still had the opportunity to to connect with my family and friends back home, even with the pandemic.

Brett Reinert 06:05

Yeah, and so I guess not being able to go back to American Samoa was probably your biggest challenge. But were there any other big challenges that you faced during the COVID 19 outbreak?

Anasitasia Viatele 06:18

Oh, yeah. Yes, one of the biggest challenge was not going to back home. And other challenges that I faced, and me and my roommates faced was maintaining our weight, [both Brett and Anasitasia laugh] and our sleeping schedule. With the pandemic, we were stuck at home, we had nothing to do, we have all the time to ourselves. And our roommates and I began to take up the habit of baking and cooking. We baked certain recipes that we've always wanted to bake, because we did not have the time before. And now that with all the time in the world at our hands, we were able to bake and cook whatever we want, and we were just eating and catching up on shows that we didn't get to watch because of school, because of our normal schedules and routines of going to classes, going to work, and coming back home. And also, our sleeping schedule was so messed up. We went from sleeping at 10pm at night to sleeping at four or five in the morning. Because we were up, like, you know, bonding, watching shows, baking, having a good laugh. It was it was all about you know, bonding time, it was a lot of bonding time. I think we grew tired of it at one point because you know, we after doing all the things that we want to do wanted to do. We ended up with nothing else to do but to except for watching more shows, and, and doing all the things, all the things that we wanted to do. And it got boring and tired. We were just, I don't know, it got to that point where we wanted to go outside and just have some just walk around and do the things that we wanted to do that we did before like going to having enough exercise by walking to school and walking back home. But we couldn't do that. So not only were we we were over eating and but our sleeping schedule was way off. It was just insane.

Brett Reinert 08:48

And, you know, you talk a little bit about your roommates and the people around you. How did people around you kind of respond to the COVID 19 pandemic?

Anasitasia Viatele 08:59

I think with my roommates, my friends, and I, I think we were calm about the situation it was although we were surprised and shocked at a new reality of America. It was just we were calm about it. We we did not overreact or anyway. But our phones were blowing up because of our families back home. They were always checking up to see if we have enough food, if we were okay, and if we were staying inside the house and not going outside. I think our families were more worried about us than we were worried about us. And and I understand that because we were far away from each other. They, they do not want us to get sick or or something happened to us while we were away from home. So we had to assure them countless times that we were staying in and not going outside. So they were calm about it, but our families were not.

Brett Reinert 10:10

Yeah, I'm curious how was the pandemic kind of in American Samoa talking to your family? How was how was that?

Anasitasia Viatele 10:19

When I think American Samoa, they were quick to react to the situation they were, they closed down their borders, they even they weren't, they did not allow any type of traveling in and out of the island. So they were COVID free for a very long time until the beginning of this year, when they started to opening up the borders and opening up the, for inflight flights coming into the island. That's when they started to experience a surge in cases. But during the pandemic during the time, like around 2019, 2020, American Samoa was COVID free at the time. So my families were pretty, they were doing normal things. They were just they were not locked down for a while. I mean, they were at some point, but not for a long time. Because they didn't have they didn't have any cases at the time. So they were still operating normally, because they did not have any cases. But the only thing that changed was they did not allow any flights to come into the island. When they open up the borders, and they started to have flights coming into the island, that's when they have cases. So now they're American Samoa is having a difficult time right now because they they're just experiencing what we, America, went to went through when they first experienced COVID. But yeah

Brett Reinert 12:07

So, do your family do they have access to like masks in the vaccine and things like that?

Anasitasia Viatele 12:13

Yeah, at one point they did but, you know, it's a small island. Supplies goes go out very easily. So we me and my siblings here, we tend to send care packages back home. And we send them like masks, vitamins and, you know, the things that we used here for, even gloves. So we were I think that was our main task when we, me and my siblings did when we first heard that there are c- cases back home. We started to send my families back home all the things that we they need, you know, for the virus, just to keep them safe.

Brett Reinert 13:07

Well, that's good. Kind of circling back to you in the United States. Is there a specific pandemic related memory that stands out to you?

Anasitasia Viatele 13:17

Yes, a specific memory that really stands out to me is would be finding toilet paper. It may seem insane, but I have never experienced in my life something like this of calling different stores if they have toilet paper in stock. My friends even had to search it up on Amazon. And we were shocked to see the prices of the ones \$5.99 bundle, toilet paper became \$12.99 or even \$15.99. We always go to Walmart to buy our groceries before the pandemic, and that is like one of our favorite things to do with my roommates.

But by the time we went to Walmart during the pandemics, shelves were so empty. People were over buying a lot of stuff that they do not need, especially the toilet papers. We e- we even have to ask the workers, you know, the best time to come to the store to buy toilet paper. And they said that opening time is the best time. So me and my friends ended up making a plan. So you all have different stores, like the opening time to buy toilet paper, you know because it was limited to a one person, there's like a specific amount of toilet paper you hand to buy. And one of us would go to Walmart, the other go to Walgreens, and the other to another store. So by the time we get back home, we have toilet papers. We would not have to go out to buy for buy more. So it was a funny situation. And one of my favorite memories, it was the mission to find toilet paper. So yeah.

Brett Reinert 15:18

That's crazy.

Anasitasia Viatele 15:20

It was crazy.

Brett Reinert 15:21

So has so have, have supplies kind of gotten better, like you're able to find toilet paper now and things are is still kind of a struggle sometimes?

Anasitasia Viatele 15:33

Things are a lot better than when we first started having the pandemic. But yea, its crazy, it was crazy. I mean, I'm never in my- it was mind blowing, to think that people were overstocking and taking a lot [inaudible] people. But yeah.

Brett Reinert 15:55

So kind of looking to the future, knowing what you know now, what do you think individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future in regards to COVID?

Anasitasia Viatele 16:07

With what I know now, with everything that we know now, it would be easier said than done to say that this won't happen again. But you know, we never know what the future will bring. And there's a saying that history tends to repeat itself. You know, this is not the first time that America experienced something like this. But if something like this were to happen, again, things were would be much better if the government reacted to the situation sooner. I think if the government acted sooner to the virus, the situation would not be as worse. I mean, America was late to the game of, you know, combating the virus. I mean, it is never wrong to be cautious. I think we should all learn from that, especially the government. So now that we know what to do, we should be, you know, we should prepare for the future. whatever comes our way. So, yeah.

Brett Reinert 17:22

Sure. And are you kind of optimistic about things kind of getting back to normal? Or are you a bit more pessimistic like some people?

Anasitasia Viatele 17:33

I'm very optimistic that things will be okay. And things will be back to normal. I mean, it wouldn't be back to how, how it was before, like the normal that we know. I mean, things will be opening up. And a lot of things will be opening up, a lot of things will be going back to, you know, operating the same the same way. But the way that people are right now, you know, is the situation with the masks, it's like people are even with me, it became a habit for me to, to go out, to have my mask to always have my mask on my head. I mean, it became really weird for me to see that people are now walking around with no masks, but, you know, we all we're all different. So people tend to react to the situation differently. But for me, and to some other people, it became a norm for us to always have our mask on, even with regulations saying that we don't need our masks. I am more secured, and I feel weird without my mask. So now, I mean, things are things have changed for me and how I react to the pandemic and how my normal life has been for now. But I think I'm optimistic that things will be better. And, you know, I'm just saying that America should react more sooner to the situation to combat so that we don't have to go through the same thing again.

Brett Reinert 19:28

Perfect. Thank you.