

## Transcript of Oral History Monologue by Erika Claspille

**Interviewee:** Erika Claspille

**Interviewer:** Self

**Date:** 09/06/2021

**Location:** Texas, United States of America

**Abstract:** In this monologue, Erika Claspille shares her personal experience of having a family member dying of COVID-19.

**Erika Claspille** 0:01

So I thought that I had adjusted to pandemic life pretty well. I'm a naturally pretty introverted person. So I was excited at the prospect of not going to work and staying home and not being around people. So that that was great for me. But it was probably until the summer of 2020, when the impact of the pandemic kind of hit me. Of course, I was doing all the things like social distancing, wearing the masks, not touching my face, disinfecting, groceries, all those crazy things. But in the summer of 2020, I was taking a genealogy class through Arizona State University, which I really enjoyed. I had done my father's side of genealogy previously. So I was ready to do my mother's side, which was a pretty fresh and new immigrants that had come over in the 1930s. And I got to my uncle, his name was Alex DeSanga. And I was researching his name to kind of fill in some information. Yeah, he's my uncle but we hadn't spoke for quite a while. he had some severe mental illness, paranoid schizophrenic. And he had done some things to my mother, my family that kind of cut off the lines of communication, and he really didn't want to talk to us as well, but so had been a couple of years since we'd heard from him. So as I was doing research on newspapers.com, I came across his name in a death notice. And I thought, well, maybe that's his father, because his father had the same name. He was a junior. But it was dated for April 15, 2020. And we were now in July of 2020. And I'm reading my uncle's name on a death notice on newspapers.com. And I thought, okay, that's strange. Let me look more into that. So I contacted the funeral home that was listed next to his name. And the funeral director returned my call. And sure enough, he confirmed the full name, birthdate, location of death, all that sort of stuff. So I thought, okay, that's pretty crazy. They directed me to like a state agency that said they had his ashes from his cremation. So I contacted that state agency and the lady on the phone, I asked her, what was the cause of death, you know, what happened? And she read COVID. And she added, you know, it could have been anything that he died from, but COVID is kind of like the catch all thing of right now. And I thought that was interesting, because he, he kind of had a lot of risk factors. He had some underlying conditions, you know, diabetes, high blood pressure. He lived in Detroit, Michigan at the time, which was a pretty big hotspot. And he was in a nursing home, like an adult kind of assisted living due to his mental illness. So he kind of had that- the deck stacked against him, but when I realized that he had died from COVID, it you know, it was close to me now, now that I knew somebody who had died from COVID. It had impacted my family, it impacted my life for the first time, and I wasn't just enjoying this quarantine, this lockdown has, you know, me and my family, my kids, it had actually taken a family member. So I feel bad that he died of COVID. But I feel worse, that we didn't know until several months later, and if I had not taken that genealogy class, who knows when we would have found out. So I gave information to my mother who was in Michigan at the time, I live in Texas, and she went to that state agency and retrieved his ashes and set him up for burial. So it's kind of hard to tell my mom over FaceTime that, you know, I think your brother's dead, like you

need to go figure this out. But thanks to that, we now know that unfortunately, we lost my Uncle Alex to COVID.