

Transcript of Oral History of Annie Riestenberg  
Interviewee: Annie Riestenberg  
Interviewer: Nick Goettke  
Date: October 12, 2020  
Location: Cincinnati, Ohio, United States of America

Abstract: Annie Riestenberg describes how her life has changed, or not changed, during the COVID-19 pandemic. She still travels and see's her friends. She discusses her opinions on news and the U.S. Presidents work at handling the pandemic.

Nick Goettke 0:02

All right, we're recording. My name is Nick Goettke. I'm here with Annie Riestenberg. Today's date is October 13th 2020. The time is roughly 6:30pm. We're at Annie's house on the west side of Cincinnati. Annie, I want to briefly inform you the consent and data gift that you signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with the Journal of the plague year COVID-19 archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recording demographic information and verbatim transcripts will be deposited into the journal the plague year, a COVID-19 archive and the Indiana University public library system for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer so far?

Annie Riestenberg 1:21

No

Nick Goettke 1:23

Taking part in this study is voluntarily you may choose not to take part or you may choose to leave the study at any time leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in the study will not affect your current or future relations with the Indiana University, IUPUI or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute, or the University of Cincinnati, through which we are running this project. Participation in this project will mean your interview will be recorded and digital, video and or audio format and may be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcript of my interview have copies of any supplementary documents, or additional photos that you wish to share. And the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the plague year COVID-19 archive and the Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions about that?

Annie Riestenberg 2:20

Nope.

Nick Goettke 2:23

In addition to your signed document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Annie Riestenberg 2:29  
I understand.

Nick Goettke 2:32  
Okay. I'm also asking that you verbally confirm you have agreed to the interview and your interview will be made available under the following license. The first one is a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial ShareAlike 4.0 International and the second one is the COVID-19 oral history project the Journal of plague year a COVID-19 archive and the trustees of Indiana University acting through its agents employees representatives and his limited right to reproduce us exhibit display perform broadcast create derivative works from and distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media now existing or hereafter developed in perpetuity threw out the world. I agree the oral history materials may be used by the Voices from the Waterways and IU including its assigns and transferees for any purpose including but not limited to marketing, advertising, publicity or other promotional purposes. I agree that IU will have final editorial authority over the use of the oral history materials and I waive any right to inspect or approve any future use of this oral history material. Moreover, I agree that the public has the right to use the materials under the terms of the fair use us copyright law section 107 of the US Copyright Act. Finally, I want to ask you for a verbal confirmation that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

Annie Riestenberg 4:04  
I agree.

Nick Goettke 4:05  
Okay. Now that all the legal stuff is out of the way, lets get into some questions about the pandemic. Again, today is October 13th 2020 and it is 6:30pm. So if we could just start off what is your name? And what are the primary things that you do on a daily basis.

Annie Riestenberg 4:31  
Okay, my name is Annie Riestenberg and I'm semi retired. And I do still work four days a week with two Alzheimer's folks and just giving their families a break. Little caregiving there. And I also am very active with our personal friends about 12 of them in our group. So, you know, we take trips, we do play cards, we, you know, get together for different, different things, but we stay very active with them. And then I walk every day. So I do get my outside exercise and and I enjoyed that quite a lot.

Nick Goettke 5:19  
What part of town do you live in?

Annie Riestenberg 5:21  
I'm in Monfort Heights on the west side.

Nick Goettke 5:24

On the west side? And what's it like to live there?

Annie Riestenberg 5:27

Oh, I love it. It's just a good, wholesome family community. I love it. Because it's near the expressway. So it's easy and easy out if I need to, you know, cross... cross through the city. So I've enjoyed it for five years so far.

Nick Goettke 5:46

Okay, good. All right, we're gonna get us some questions about the actual pandemic. Now. When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your initial thoughts?

Annie Riestenberg 5:57

Well, you know, based on what the media said, it definitely was a frightening announcement, you knew it came from a foreign country? Or that's exactly what that was indicated. And there were a lot of unknowns. And I think it was just something that you you hit, it may just step back and, and pay attention to.

Nick Goettke 6:26

Okay, how have your thoughts changed about it since initially learning?

Annie Riestenberg 6:32

Well, you know, again, I understand, truly, that the professionals even in the health field, don't know a lot about this. And different things have emerged, since it broke kind of broke into the country here. But I, I, I have never really been fearful of it I never really looked at myself is as even being a victim of it. And I, I consider myself pretty healthy along, you know, in general. So I just I just listened in and to all the precautions that, you know, were suggested.

Nick Goettke 7:18

Okay, thanks. And you said you didn't feel like a victim. And you also said you're semi- semi retired? Has the pandemic has COVID-19 affected your job in any way? Since your since you said you were semi retired?

Annie Riestenberg 7:36

Yes, it has actually, the, the folks that I helped, we actually backed off from, from I actually backed off from seeing them and, you know, as everybody kind of went into some isolation and isolation period. So for five months, I did not have that work in in my, you know, yeah, basically on papers. So, it was, you know, it was I missed it a lot. I really did.

Nick Goettke 8:11

So you were without work for five months, five months? What, um, what broader concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19? On I guess, your employment or the economy as a, as a whole?

Annie Riestenberg 8:24

Well, I know it has affected I mean, there's, there's just examples presented every day of different entities, you know, you've got Oh, gosh, restaurants for one is a big thing bars, restaurants, a lot

of private businesses, small businesses, especially just, you know, had to close, you know, there's just there was no real easy way to open up for business. The airline industry, my goodness is not a small business, but that is any place that he has close proximity of people was highly affected by that. So I I am concerned about about that, that entity and

Nick Goettke 9:13

How about other people that you know? Did you know anyone that was personally affected, or their employment was affected? Specifically by the pandemic?

Annie Riestenberg 9:24

Just know, you know, being at the retirement age, I think I'm probably one of the few of my, my age group that is, is probably still working. And I do volunteer as well, but, but a lot of things were kind of eliminated. A bit. No, no, nobody that I know personally was was really in a hardship situation.

Nick Goettke 9:49

Okay, good. How about, Hhas Covid 19 affected you or your family's day to day activities?

Annie Riestenberg 10:00

No

Nick Goettke 10:01

Nothing has changed throughout the pandemic?

Annie Riestenberg 10:03

I would say no, you know, for, I would say three months, we really kind of hunkered down and we just decided to change. I mean, I still got out and looked. We took rides in the car, we really stayed away from going into stores, in general, grocery shopping was probably the only thing although in my view grocery shopping as a great breeder of this disease, so I really did very little of it, or kept it in a minimal, for sure.

Nick Goettke 10:37

Okay, how about the day to day activities in your household? Did anything change within your home?

Annie Riestenberg 10:43

Nothing changed.

Nick Goettke 10:45

Nothing changed. Okay. Has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate or communicate with your family and friends?

Annie Riestenberg 10:54

Not any longer. Again, we were very, very, for probably three months or so. Just, Just being so very cautious. We did not really do partying, or celebrate birthdays, of course, our churches were

closed, our schools were closed. That was disappointing to me. I just think shutting down too much, almost.

Nick Goettke 11:27

I guess it's kind of into the next question here, the biggest challenge that you faced during the, during the pandemic, what was what was the biggest challenge that you had?

Annie Riestenberg 11:35

Oh, not seeing not seeing my family. You know, we did a lot of talking on the phone, but seeing family and close friends, you know, person to person was a was definitely kept at a minimum if not done at all. I have two of my three children are out of town. So that was relatively easy not to travel from state to state. And, but otherwise, yeah, that was probably the hardest thing is is just staying away from folks. And not until, you know, things kind of eased open. Did I? Did I even go face to face with anybody?

Nick Goettke 12:24

Got it. Okay. How about your recreation? Did your recreation activities change during the pandemic or what did you do for recreation? Such as, you know, reading books or said before you were exercising?

Annie Riestenberg 12:40

Yes. Well, rec rec recreation was, you know, we, I did walk every day, and I and I walked probably more than I ever did before, because I enjoy being outside. And, you know, our card group didn't get together, that changed, we were just very respectful to, to just, you know, listening to the, I guess the, the call not to be close to each other. We did, we did, we did kind of just try and kind of take our little space that we had, and I did a couple of household projects. And, and, and got some projects done at home. And we decided to throw ourselves into just watching some movies every night. And that I really enjoyed that a lot. And then once, once the critical closure kind of stopped. I had a couple friends over on my patio and we would play cards on a non-windy day. And sitting in the sun. I thought that was a healthy, healthy thing to do. So we gradually came back into more recreational things then.

Nick Goettke 14:01

Okay, good. All right, moving along. How do you think the COVID-19 outbreak has affected your community such as schools, churches? [Dog starts barking] Pretty much any or all of these communities just as a as a whole or specific. How do you think?

Annie Riestenberg 14:27

Well, I could say probably my church being closed, you know, places of worship were the biggest things. Because you know, you've got you've got, you know, folks that, you know, especially for the church, there was just the lack of giving and support financially for keeping the church vital and open and I think the church and the schools, the children, I think Really, you know, suffered that in that area quite a bit. I was a big supporter of the schools not closing. But now we find out that the, the younger children really aren't affected by this COVID-19 not much, but I kind of respect that they did close because, again, we were all going through a learning phase with this.

Nick Goettke 15:32

Okay. Did you see a change in the people around you? And how they responded to COVID?

Annie Riestenberg 15:38

Yes, some, most of our friends were, we're not frightened, just like, we were not frightened of it. But, you know, it was wearing the masks, we kind of did the protocol on that. And, but there are, actually there are two sets of our friends that still to this date, don't communicate with. I mean, they we talk on the phone, that's as far as it goes, they haven't come into the crowd anymore, or traveled with us, we've taken several trips, since things have kind of opened up a little bit, we even took, you know, a trip to Colorado on a plane. And, you know, nothing, nothing came negative from that.

Nick Goettke 16:25

So you still have one group that not coming back, I guess out of their house.

Annie Riestenberg 16:30

Well just yeah, it's in it's a matter of their relationship with their parents. And they're very, very young, very infant grandchildren. So they were they were kind of respectful and in the extreme of those two, age the ends of the age, you know, there's two spectrums of age.

Nick Goettke 16:51

But other than them, everybody else that you, I guess hang around with, kind of shares your same opinion, as far as their, how they feel about the day to day activities.

Annie Riestenberg 17:03

Now, everybody's- I right now, on this date, October 13, you know, I've, I've taken four or five, five trips, five trips since the month of August and I've got both of my both of my families back on board with me two of the three I should say. And then I've got you know, we've taken trips, we've been in groups, when we eat out, we do try and get outdoor places instead of being inside. So just little practical things like that. And I I really find myself resisting going in stores. So gross grocery store, if I can't find it in a grocery store, I'm pretty much not doing that.

Nick Goettke 17:57

Which kind of leads me to the next question. Self-isolation and flattening the curve have been two key ideas or phrases that have been used. Do you feel that you or your family have responded to the request to self-isolate or to flatten the curve or what are your feelings on those on those phrases?

Annie Riestenberg 18:18

Well, you know what I I know both of those I know that this are very familiar phrases and yes I think those that initial out of the gate news of here's what we have to do to keep numbers down and and I respected that and I you know, went along with it and not until they said well you know, we can if we can kind of slowly open things up I was all for it. You know getting back to normal is really important. And I and I still say that every day that you know I don't I don't even like that term new normal because I want the real normal back and so I I just do it I just get out

and do things and I don't jump in front of somebody without a mask guy if I don't have a mask on it's when I'm all alone. And not a maybe walking all by myself or but in any store or in around any people my mask is on still to this day.

Nick Goettke 19:29

Good. So with that in mind, have you or do you know anybody that's come down sick during the pandemic and what has been your or their response to being sick?

Annie Riestenberg 19:46

Okay, I know two people that have tested positive and they basically just stepped back for, you know, did a 14 day quarantine. And nothing serious came of that at all. But they were tested that way. And I, you know, our area here in Cincinnati is heavily tested.

Nick Goettke 20:12

Did they have major illnesses? Were they hospitalized?

Annie Riestenberg 20:17

No, neither one was hospitalized. No.

Nick Goettke 20:22

Okay. How about in which ways do you think the COVID-19 has affected people's mental health?

Annie Riestenberg 20:29

Oh, well, personally, let's see, I know people in retirement homes, so they're not ill, and I have 101 year old uncle who it has changed him a little bit because they were isolated, couldn't come out of their room, they had their meals delivered to their rooms, half of the time, cold, it was just almost staggering to a huge level. And everybody, everybody's affected by that differently, especially if they don't have any family that communicates with them. So during that time, that's really, really a difficult area of folks that I think, I think it was hard, you know, very hard pressed to find a solution to that, during the isolation.

Nick Goettke 21:32

Were there any outbreaks at that nursing home? That you know?

Annie Riestenberg 21:35

Not that I know of? No, not where our uncle is, but I do know another one in the area that did have some outbreaks.

Nick Goettke 21:46

Okay, we're gonna switch gears here, and I'm going to what? What has been your primary source of news during the pandemic?

Annie Riestenberg 21:56

Oh, probably just start local news.

Nick Goettke 21:58  
Local on TV?

Annie Riestenberg 22:00  
Uh huh.

Nick Goettke 22:02  
Okay, yeah, TV? Has anything, has your source of news changed at all?

Annie Riestenberg 22:08  
Sometimes I tune into YouTube. I don't get cable at home. So it's either the, you know, the local three channels that we have. But sometimes I jump into YouTube just to see on a national broader spectrum, what news is going on other places?

Nick Goettke 22:30  
Okay, so you have access to the internet?

Annie Riestenberg 22:32  
Absolutely.

Nick Goettke 22:36  
What do you think the important issues are? The biggest issue is that the media may not be covering about the pandemic?

Annie Riestenberg 22:43  
Well, gosh, may not be covering?

Nick Goettke 22:51  
Yeah. Maybe just from watching the nightly news, or-

Annie Riestenberg 22:53  
I don't know, just in my little world where I live, it's hard for me to even call it a pandemic. It's just I'm not, I don't know enough people, I'm sure people have died, I it's hard for me to understand that number that they that keeps rising over and over again. And but I you know, when you're isolated, and you're not able to really do, you know, get out and do much. You just don't hear you don't hear of anybody else, unless it's free, put in, you know, whatever the news says you think you should believe?

Nick Goettke 23:31  
But do you feel that the government, local or state or even federal, do you think they've been misleading you? Or do you think they've, I guess, done a good job in reporting or passing on the true information that they know.

Annie Riestenberg 23:50  
Well, you know, again, I'm not a health care. I'm not a health person. I'm not a educated person in the health industry, put it that way. So you have to take basically what they say is some kind

of Bible to this, and, and, you know, factual, you know, information. And but I, I do think it just seems like the numbers are escalated way too high. And I have heard at least in in a couple of our communities, that there were deaths, you know, across the across the board in hospitals and retirement homes, and possibly marked down as COVID cases when they actually weren't, and that's disturbing to me. So how much of that has happened to increase the numbers is a concern to me?

Nick Goettke 24:52

Definitely. So do you feel like they've responded to the outbreak? You think it was a I think respond,

Annie Riestenberg 25:00

I think I definitely think they probably overdid it, if anything, but I think they I think, actually our president did a fantastic job of this from the get go when it was disclosed, and and all the all the different steps of action that were taken to do what he could to supply hospitals to give them every material that they need. And, and, of course, all the research companies, the pharmaceuticals that are that went right away to the testing table to try and find a good vaccine for this is wasn't as imperative. And I think everything kind of went smooth. Right on, right on the mark. From everything I can tell without being a medical person.

Nick Goettke 25:59

Okay. What about your, I guess your thoughts on has this experience? This pandemic? Has it transformed about how you think about your family, your friends, or your community? Is it? [Dog starts barking again.] Has it changed anything about how you feel about certain people or where your community?

Annie Riestenberg 26:22

Somebodies come to the door. Yeah, I would say, I changed my opinion. [Doorbell rings and dog continues to bark and whine.]

Nick Goettke 26:28

Change your opinion at all?

Annie Riestenberg 26:31

Now, I not too much. I don't think I don't think so.

Nick Goettke 26:39

Okay. How about how does a pandemic compared to other big events that have happened in your lifetime? Is it this compared to anything that you've experienced in your life?

Annie Riestenberg 26:54

No, not I wouldn't say I mean, there's been so many different, what they call pandemics and, you know, health episodes that have happened. Not I don't even remember anything that ever shut down schools and churches before. So I think this was probably a little bit overdone.

Because I think there were, there were just as many deaths in the past for for different episodes similar to this. This is just something that came from a foreign country, and we knew nothing

about it. And it was it was frightening in that respect. So nothing stands out to me. It's just I think the economy you have the effect on the economy is kind of tragic, definitely tragic.

Nick Goettke 27:50

So where do you envision yourself in a year? How do you think your life will look like a year from now? Or what do you hope your life will look like a year from now?

Annie Riestenberg 27:59

I don't really expect too much different. I mean, I'm still the healthy person I was in the beginning of the pandemic, if you want to call it that, and I, I'm hoping to be that same feeling that same health level in a year from now

Nick Goettke 28:14

You don't think this pandemic would weigh as much of a change on

Annie Riestenberg 28:19

My personal life?

Nick Goettke 28:21

Your life now?

Annie Riestenberg 28:22

No.

Nick Goettke 28:23

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

Annie Riestenberg 28:33

Well, I keep your eyes and ears open. And, you know, again, this was such an unknown when this broke, you know, who knows what the next one will be? I just think, you know, alert, alert a country alert the authorities as soon as something seems to be, you know, heading our way, from wherever, whatever source in other country and other state, you know, and, and, you know, just act on it, and take precautions as early as you can, because the sooner Yeah, you know, act on it, the safer everybody's gonna be.

Nick Goettke 29:21

Alright Annie, I appreciate your time. That's really all the questions I have. Is there anything else? This interview is gonna be archived in a in a plague? The pandemic archive? Is there anything you'd like to add before we wrap up?

Annie Riestenberg 29:35

Oh, I don't think so.

Nick Goettke 29:38

Okay, I appreciate your time. I'm gonna stop the recording now.

