

Merrimack College COVID-19 Oral History Project

Interview Subject: Marissa Broome

Interviewer: Grace Russo

Date: 11/29/2021

Location: North Andover, MA

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GR: I am Grace Russo at Merrimack College in North Andover, Massachusetts. I am interviewing Marissa Broome who is located at Merrimack College as well. I just want to remind you of your rights here. You can refuse any questions, you can ask me to pause the recording, you can decide to withdraw from the process at any point. And I want to remind you that this interview is being recorded and collected as part of a Merrimack College public history project and will be made available to the public. Are you willing to participate?

MB: Yes.

GR: Alrighty, let's begin. So, the first question is kind of, like, if you were going to talk about the pandemic and your life prior to it. Like I said, you can refuse any questions if you want to—

MB: Okay.

GR: So the first question is: what was going on in your life prior to the pandemic?

MB: Prior to the pandemic, I was working two part-time jobs at Dunkin Donuts and Lululemon. I was going out seeing friends and just kind of keeping busy at school.

GR: How long were you working at Lulu and Dunkin Donuts before the pandemic had started?

MB: I was working at Dunkin Donuts for less than half of a year—I started in the summer and then it went to January. And Lulu was only maybe a month and a half.

GR: Do you remember the first time you heard about COVID? Could you describe it to me? What did you think was going to happen like right when you started to hear about it?

MB: Yeah I was on spring break in March and me and my friends were in Florida. It had just started to get bad so like our parents started to get scared that we were not going to be able to fly home, but this was before we wore masks and stuff so on the way there my grandmother gave me a bunch of masks and gloves to give everyone. But we kind of thought it was like—I don't know—like a joke, like not really serious so we didn't—and then right when we got back from Florida was Saint Patrick's Day weekend and the Boston parade got cancelled that we were all supposed to go to and that's really when quarantine came and started.

GR: We started quarantine—I think it was around the end of March to April? Was there a time for you when you started thinking like, “Wow, this is like a real thing—this is becoming serious”? Could you describe it? Like when you realized this is going to be a long lasting thing?

MB: Yeah, so it was when after spring break we got an email from school saying that our break was extended only for a week and that was obviously right when quarantine was happening and then that week went by and I stayed in my house and it ended up obviously being extended longer and it was like they were just going to kind of communicate to us when we could come back. But both of my parents were healthcare workers so for me and my siblings, while like everyone else was still going out, I was actually stuck in the house day after day for months. And that's kind of when—once my parents said that we couldn't go out any more—like me as an adult being 21, like having them tell me we couldn't go out was a big thing.

GR: So you talked about your parents working in healthcare—what was that like for your family, if you don't mind sharing?

MB: So in two aspects it was kind of good because we knew what was going on but then also it was kind of annoying especially towards me and my sister in a way just because it came to a point where they would go to work everyday and we couldn't. That sounds really stupid but at the time we would take even going to work and getting out of the house that way as the biggest thing. They were working consistently and everyday we normally knew what was going on kind of ahead of time because they were working in hospitals which was good, but then it was also like we just felt like they were out of the house so much more—obviously not on good terms—but that was something that we wish we could have done.

GR: Because it was their way of being able to leave the house and you were staying in.

MB: Yeah.

GR: So, lockdown started in March and April—we said that. Do you remember what lockdown was like for you—like what were the hardest parts? Were there any positives for you?

MB: The hardest parts of lockdown was how strict my parents were being and then seeing some of my other close friends just being able to go out and just be with each other and see other people. Like the only time I got out was literally to go to the grocery store with my parents—that was, like, very rarely, but—the good parts of quarantine for me is I actually got into a really good

and healthy kind of routine. Like working on eating and everything and I was kind of very structured and self-disciplined more than I was outside of that.

GR: Yeah that's great because during the pandemic, I feel like a lot of people fell off of their habits and everything, but that's great that you stayed positive with it and you found something good out of it like staying in routine. I think that was probably the hardest part for a lot of people..

Do you remember the first time you wore a mask? Like when it was or where were you? I know you were saying when you were in Florida, you had them but you weren't wearing them, but do you remember when you had to start wearing it?

MB: It was mostly when I would—anytime we would leave the house during quarantine with my parents so honestly, mostly only to go to the grocery store or if we went on hikes and stuff—I don't remember the exact first time, but it was mostly when I started going out of the house with them.

GR: And since your parents worked in healthcare was there ever a time at your house where you all had to wear masks if they were home? Or were you comfortable enough not to wear them when in the house?

MB: We were all pretty comfortable enough not to wear one, but my parents—especially at the beginning—so like, in healthcare they changed the system. My parents are pretty high up and they could wear kind of whatever they wanted to work or whatever but then at one point they both started wearing scrubs again and they would keep their clothes—they would take them off in the garage and throw something else on that they had down there and throw those clothes immediately in the wash. The only time that we had to wear masks in the house was later on towards the end of the pandemic when there was risk—people got exposed and stuff and we'd wear masks, but that's kind of it.

GR: And then—obviously, this question's directed toward anyone but having family in healthcare it's probably more high risk—but were you or anyone in your family or close to you affected by the virus during the pandemic?

MB: Well, one of my parents worked directly in the pandemic unit at the hospital so that was scary but during quarantine I guess we weren't affected. It was more after, when we started going out and I had ended up catching COVID almost a year later. Still during the pandemic but after quarantine. I ended up catching COVID and that was a big thing.

GR: Do you remember when you got it?

MB: It was the Friday of Easter weekend last year [2021].

GR: That's late in the pandemic.

MB: Yeah, it was super late. I went awhile without actually getting it but yeah it was the weekend—the Friday of Easter weekend. I'd come back up to school because we had just started going back to school that year and I had come back to school to visit friends and had gotten it.

GR: And then prior we talked about your work prior to the pandemic, but is there anything you really miss pre-pandemic, like before everything had happened?

MB: I guess in some sense, like everything but also nothing really because I don't really mind. I think the pandemic made me realize how, I guess, gross and unsanitary stuff was before so I don't really mind that aspect of it. I feel like it's just the generality of getting used to masks and stuff like that. That is something that I miss because we had never even thought and used those, unless obviously you were a hospital worker or whatever—so I guess it's just getting accustomed to the new things. I don't really miss much.

GR: Yeah, like nothing drastic—you feel like almost the same. I know we talked about you got into a routine—like just doing better health-wise but besides that was there anything like during the pandemic that became routine for you that you felt was strange, like “this wouldn't have happened before the pandemic”? If that question makes sense—I can reword it.

MB: Um, no, I know what you mean—I'm trying to think. That felt strange—I guess it was just like having to form habits that sound kind of basic but you didn't really focus on, like before. Like simple things—like reading a book. Obviously that's simple—so many people have done that—but I picked up that habit up more. And then I feel like—I don't know—

GR: Did you, your family and you guys start doing more walks or hiking? Was that something you weren't doing prior to the pandemic? Did that become more of a routine?

MB: Yeah we definitely started doing more outdoorsy stuff—we did take walks pretty often as a family. But even me and my siblings started doing bike rides around our neighborhood especially in the warmer months when we could go outside, being outside, and almost like doing stuff together was different because we all kind of did our own thing before but then started doing stuff more together.

GR: I know that during the pandemic for a lot of people exercise—not exercise, but being outside became more routine for some people, like that was never a thing for them because they were too busy or had too much going on.

MB: Yeah, and it sounds super basic and almost like an instinct, like being outside.

GR: A lot of people didn't have time, obviously, to go outside as much, and I feel like now—even still—people are making it a point to take more walks, walk their dogs. That's all people really had to do during COVID.

So, just move on to—do you have a memory of the pandemic that stands out to you as memorable that you could share? It could even be something negative or positive. Something you like almost really enjoyed during the pandemic. Or something you hated.

MB: One thing I guess, really—well I guess I have two things. My younger sister started staying with me halfway through the pandemic which was a good thing because I just had my younger brothers so everyday when my parents went to work I was watching them. Before my sister got there it was kind of just they did their own thing and I did mine. I guess another somewhat bad memory is like again with my parents they would do these things with the other hockey parents—they'd all go sit outside and have talks and hang out or whatever—they'd make them happen every so often. But if that was the case for me to ask to do that they'd be like, "No, you guys can't be trusted to keep your distance" and stuff. [unclear cross-talk] That really annoyed me, I guess, at the time.

GR: I feel like that's a logical thing to be upset about.

This might be too personal—you can skip over if you'd like to. Since your sister moved in during quarantine did you guys become closer or were you already close enough?

MB: We definitely became closer, I mean we were close enough but living on and off living with each other—so having a stable, like seeing her everyday was different, so yeah it definitely made us become closer. And now she still lives with me.

GR: That's a great thing that came out of the pandemic—a good memory.

Do you feel like you've changed or learned anything? Any lessons? Any advice you'd give—like what you'd want future generations to know about the pandemic?

MB: I definitely learned a lot about myself, and kind of being alone without my friends and doing my own thing. I picked up a lot of habits during the pandemic that I previously probably wouldn't have picked up, which are good. I guess it's just realizing that I have more control of creating a routine in my life than I actually think. Like once I set my mind to it, I can do it—I've done it before. I've fallen out of it a little bit recently, but that's also not a bad thing because kind of life is getting back to normal so it's a little more hectic, but I guess it's just kind [inaudible]—you learn a lot more when you're, I guess in a sense, alone.

GR: I definitely think that not being with your friends—well, being with friends is very important—when you get that taken away from you it's definitely hard to adjust especially if you're someone who doesn't like being alone all the time. I know for a lot of people it was definitely hard adjusting to—obviously you're with your family every day but friends are a big aspect of a lot of people's lives—so taking that away could honestly affect you in a negative—but it seemed like it affected you in a positive way almost.

MB: I mean because I was a person that spent almost everyday out with friends and stuff like that so it was a very big change and adjustment. I feel like that's also something that made me realize more about myself is that I didn't—as much as I want and love that, being out with my friends everyday—I didn't need it as much as I thought I did.

GR: So we talked about personal life and the pandemic, so we're going to move on to the job section of the interview. We talked about your pre-pandemic jobs so you don't have to go over that, because it was Dunkin Donuts and Lululemon. So, how did work change for you during the initial outbreak in lockdown in the spring? So, like you working at Dunkin Donuts and Lululemon.

MB: So, I had obviously not returned for a few months when my parents were actually keeping us inside. For Lulu the part time job aspect was actually kind of over but I had the chance to go back but because they were kind of limited on who they were asking to return—stuff like that—that was kind of out of the question for a few years. With Dunkin Donuts I had gotten asked to come back but at the time I also needed to watch my brothers and sisters while my parents were at work so I kind of couldn't go back even if I wanted to. So, I didn't go back for a while, but once we started school again I got a job on campus so I now work a few hours every week with students and I also work again at Lululemon part time as of right now.

GR: Did Lululemon shut down, do you remember, during the pandemic?

MB: Yeah, because it's part of Derby—all of Derby Street got shut down.

GR: Can you tell me a little bit more about your on-campus job that you had during the fall of 2020?

MB: Right before we left for the quarantine, like pandemic and stuff, from school our sophomore year I had been taking—so for the job on campus I had to take a one semester class for it. So I had been taking that my sophomore year right before we left for the pandemic and then when we returned junior year is when I started it. Starting it junior year—basically I work with students—I kind of help them organize like class, give them any advice, basically just being an extra support system as a student and not as an adult that they can feel comfortable coming to and talking to about whatever the case is. So I'd meet with students weekly/bi-weekly. It kind of depends. People can drop into my hours. Basically I have a certain set of hours a week that are advertised for what we call the "Promise Space." When I first started that my hours were all online, so I was meeting with students via Zoom and everything—I held what they called drop in hours. My Zoom link was sent out to everyone in Promise not just my caseload of specific students and if they needed anything they could come in. I also had an hour workshop a week that went over a specific topic that first-year students were supposed to come to and that was completely online. Junior year as well I could go into the Promise Space, but that was also when we still had to wear masks and we had to be six feet apart from students, so for the most part I would be in the Promise Space working, but I would be meeting with students and holding my hours over Zoom. Now, that's a little different—I can meet with students in person and hold my workshop in person, but yeah that's kind of how it started.

GR: So you were working on campus remotely, but you were in the Promise Room but the students weren't coming to you in person. They were mostly meeting with you on Zoom, right?

MB: Yeah and I didn't have to go to the Promise Room—I could be in my room—it didn't really matter, but for the most part I was sitting in the space and, yeah, students were just over Zoom.

GR: That is interesting. I feel like mostly it was—you had that choice to do it in your room or in the Promise Room, but I feel like most of the time like as far as online classes and meetings went, it was most of the time like—no one's really on campus so that's interesting. I hadn't heard—that's like a different dynamic, I feel.

Did you find it difficult to adjust to the remote working environment? I know we had done Zoom classes in the spring and you were familiar with it, but did you find it hard to adjust with your students on Zoom like the communication aspect?

MB: Well it was very obviously weird starting a job and doing it all on Zoom. I found it—I don't know, it kind of went two ways. I found it difficult at first because more students are prone to not meet with you because it's online—they have a tendency to forget or whatever—so it's kind of harder in that aspect, but also, I guess, sometimes too it's also not as awkward when you meet with them—but then sometimes it is. So it's kind of like—I don't know, it's very wishy washy. I didn't mind meeting with them over Zoom. They were very quick and brief interactions, I feel like, so they weren't as—not like intimate, but like—

GR: Personal, almost? [inaudible]

MB: Yeah, so it was very basic compared to now—I meet with a lot more students now than I did before.

GR: Do you feel it was easy to adjust—like say you had started this job before the pandemic started and it was in person and then you moved remote, do you think it was easier for you because you had started remote off the bat or do you think like either way it would've been fine?

MB: I feel like it definitely would have been easier knowing the aspects of it before the pandemic started and then going remote. But honestly, it was fine because again it's a student job. They expect enough of you but they know obviously in trying times like that that it's going to be difficult and my boss is very helpful and not bad about anything so—

GR: What were some things you enjoyed about your job during the pandemic and what were some things you didn't? One thing negative and one thing positive.

MB: I mean, I definitely liked—especially when we had our weekly work trainings—those are on Zoom so I just sat in my room and didn't have to go to the Promise Space. It was just kind of I don't know—I guess it's a lot easier when you can just sit in your bed and do a work meeting. But for a negative, I guess I would say it was kind of—I feel like it was hard at first. I had to learn how

to work Zoom through the facilitator aspects, not just a student watching. When I did my workshops I had to actually present the slideshow and also talk to the students and take questions and stuff like that, so I think that was kind of the hardest and the downside of that because I'm so used to being a student, not the facilitator.

GR: So that was a big adjustment?

MB: Yeah.

GR: Were there any—I know it's almost like a repetitive question but it's a little bit more specific—were there any pandemic-related challenges in terms of dealing with your students—I know you talked about—they were short interactions, but was it difficult for them to keep track of the meetings? Or anything else you want to add about that?

MB: Yeah it was definitely a lot harder to kind of get students to interact with you slash kind of even answer you in the first place because a lot of students at the time who were first years and stuff coming into college straight into a pandemic—they just didn't even bother to respond to emails about meetings and stuff like that. They just kind of thought “Oh, it's another thing—I don't need to meet with them—whatever,” and that's true—they don't need to—it's just for their benefit, but it was definitely a lot harder to get I guess answers from people than it is in person and now whereas if you see them you can actually say something to them.

GR: Right. Did you learn anything new from working on campus slash remotely during the pandemic?

MB: I guess I learned just different ways to interact with people, like there's just so many different ways you can go about situations and scenarios that I feel like Zoom and online kind of really taught us instead of just simple in-person interactions, so I feel like that's just something beneficial.

GR: And we're just gonna—a few more questions. Now, are you still working the same job—are you continuing as the—

MB: Yeah

GR: So, do you like it better in person? Did you like it remote? Is it a little bit of both?

MB: I think I liked it better remote at first, but honestly right now I like it in person. I enjoy meeting with students. It kind of allows me to actually connect with them and for them to see that I'm just a student here, too, so they don't feel kind of as intimidated by me because I really am just like an extra support system to them —like I'm just there to help them, so I don't want them to feel any bad ways about it. I do like meeting in person, especially with students who I meet with now when I see them around campus, like it's a lot easier to say like, “Hey, how are

you?" Just kind of catch up in passing instead of—I feel like I don't know my students who were on Zoom.

GR: That was probably like a difficult thing, maybe seeing them and [inaudible] recognize them. Do you feel like you've made more of a connection with your students that you meet? Would you say that you get to know them more in an in-person meeting, even it's more—not intimate like you said—but more personal. [inaudible crosstalk] rather than talking to a computer screen.

MB: Yeah I definitely know them a lot more and I feel like it's helpful with being in person—like, I'm there majority for academic-wise to help them that way but if there also is like any other problems—like socially or whatever the case is—they can tell me that and I find that a lot more of my students are willing to open up about other stuff besides academic when I make the connection we are in person, because they know it's confidential and stuff like that, and yeah—

GR: Overall, I feel like the Zoom aspect—from what you're telling me—was great, like maybe you learned a little bit more how to communicate with your students but as far as personal details go I feel like in-person is better just because you get to know them on a different like—you have a connection with them, you see them outside more—they're more comfortable with you. So it benefits both you and your students.

MB: Yeah.

GR: We'll just wrap back up to—did you continue working at Lulu or Dunkin Donuts, did you say? I don't remember if we talked about that kind of thing.

MB: I did not continue at Dunkin Donuts, but it took me a few years but I'm back at Lulu now.

GR: And are there still COVID restrictions in place while you're there? Masks or social distancing—stuff like that.

MB: Yeah, we're supposed to wear a mask and we have to fill out a health declaration every—every time you go in for a shift basically just saying you're not sick and you can work the shift and, yeah, that's kind of all for that.

GR: Is it difficult—like we talked about working on campus with customers and clients—is it difficult still during—even though it's like—we're not during quarantine or pandemic—it's almost post-pandemic, but is it still difficult—are some customers and clients reluctant to wear masks or like difficult when they come to the store?

MB: Yeah, it's definitely a change now with a bunch of places having what they call curbside pickup. That's a new aspect that I've had to learn, and yeah there definitely are people that will come into the store without masks and you kind of just have to politely tell them to put one on. If they don't, there's kind of not much you can do about it, but yeah we do wear our masks, keep everything sanitary and stuff. It is difficult working with people who won't cooperate, but also I

guess that's kind of in a way not our problem. Once we say it once, there's only so much we can do.

GR: Right. I feel like that's a big challenge with working in any retail, restaurant industry—there's going to be people out there who are refusing to wear a mask for many reasons, but it's not a mandated thing. Now it's not like you can or you can't—a lot stores are requiring it just because of like, all the new—I mean, as of now—like maybe if I interviewed you like three weeks ago, the new strain of COVID hadn't come out yet so we don't know what life's going to be like in a few weeks from now. Might be interesting to see like the restrictions that come back up.

So that was my last question I had for you.