

Merrimack College COVID-19 Oral History Project

Interview Subject: Kyle Templeton

Interviewer: Thomas Wilson

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TW: Alright, I'm Thomas Wilson here present with Kyle Templeton here at Merrimack College. If any questions during this interview are too tough for you or hard to answer you don't have to. So we're going to start off with some general questions just going over pretty much the start of the pandemic and life during. So what was going on in your life prior to the pandemic?

KT: Well, Thomas, prior to the pandemic, I was attending school at Merrimack College living with you. You were my direct roommate at the time. Normal life we had, you know, we were there first semester with no issues, and then we went home for Christmas. And we basically came back for a month and then we were done. But yeah it was just normal normal college life.

TW: Yeah. Do you remember the first time that you heard about COVID and could you describe it?

KT: Yeah I do, I remember um well you know being at school, you don't really get like the news as much, and you know, like, we're not talking about like politics as much as like or like the news as much as like you do at home, so we really like I really didn't know about it until like I was in class and my one accounting teacher was like, "Oh, like there's this disease over in China, like they're shutting things down," and he was like, "You guys like don't have to worry about it, like it's not going to come over here like we're probably fine." And that was like the first time I ever heard about it, and then I remember hearing about it in another class in my environmental history class and the teacher was like, "Oh, like you guys might want to bring stuff home when you leave for spring break, like extra stuff because who knows if we're going to come back?" And that's what ends up happening, but yeah that was like the first time I heard about it, was like in class.

TW: And what did you personally think was going to happen?

KT: Yeah I mean I really hadn't heard anything about it or knew anything about it at the time. So I had no idea—I mean I remember being home for spring break and watching the news and it was like right around when Trump shut the borders down, and I was like, oh, like, oh that doesn't look good—we're probably not going back to school. And then I remember, they—we had spring break week and then they extended it a week for corona. And then obviously we never came back, but—what was the question?

TW: It was pretty much what did you think was going to happen?

KT: Yeah, I mean I didn't really know what was gonna happen. I just—I was just kind of going with the flow, but once I saw that, like the borders are being shut down and stuff, and that it's over here, I was like we're probably not going back.

TW: So you might have already kind of answered it in the previous question there, but was there a particular moment when the pandemic became real for you? And could you describe that?

KT: It probably wasn't real until like I went to the grocery store for the first time and everybody had their masks on, but like even then I couldn't really understand it until like six months in and like I had been living through it for so long. And yeah I would probably say the moment I think the one moment that I knew like—I don't want to say—yeah, like once I went into the grocery store and like saw everybody wear a mask, I knew like that, like it had officially begun.

TW: Right that's a good one. So it was in March that the first lockdown started happening in Massachusetts so what was lock down like for you and what were the hardest parts?

KT: Lockdown for me was just being you know, like everybody, at home with my family. The hardest parts was like it was tough to go see friends, because we would want to like [inaudible]—we have to hang out outside and stuff. And not all families was cool with us hanging out and like seeing each other and stuff and like just stuff like that, like not being able to see people I would say.

TW: And would you say there were any positives for you during this period of time?

KT: Yeah, like I don't know. I obviously was like—I was in school, but it was online, so it wasn't really school. So I wasn't doing like that much work and then I lost my job, so I didn't have a job during the summer so I've been—like I had a lot of time to just relax and just hanging out and like with family and friends and I didn't have any responsibilities, really. And like I've been, like I've had a summer job since I was 14 so I've never like not done something during the summer in a while, so it was good to just hang out and kind of I mean you kind of said, like wait it out. But yeah that part, like being being alone, and like not having responsibilities was probably the highlight of it.

TW: Do you remember the first time that you wore a mask?

KT: I don't remember the first time I wore a mask at—it was probably like I went to Costco with my mom and that was probably the first time I had to wear a mask.

Kyle Templeton: Yeah.

TW: So in the summer of 2020 the state's reopening plan began to go into effect. Was there something that you were really excited about opening back up?

KT: I think. Right, I think, like some were restaurants opening back up, so I was excited to go out to eat again because, like I just like going out to eat. Yeah I remember because me and my girlfriend went out to eat, and we were both excited because we hadn't gone out to dinner together in like a while and that's something we always do. So yeah.

TW: Yeah that's a good one, a lot of people looked forward to that.

KT: Yeah exactly.

TW: Was there a point where you felt there was a new normal and could you describe it?

KT: Yeah I mean it felt like a new normal through the whole thing through each phase of it.

I feel like we just adapted so quickly to them that, but like wearing the masks felt normal and like you know staying away from people felt like it was going to be the new normal for a while, especially once it was like eight months in and everything and like, you know, restaurants were opening up, but we were still wearing masks, we're still like doing the stuff we're supposed to do. Yeah it's weird because I feel like we adapted so quickly that—just like the new normal stays with you right through it yeah.

TW: What did you miss from pre-pandemic?

KT: Compared to now?

TW: Yeah, compared to now, yeah.

KT: I guess there's not that many differences. I miss how Sparky's used to be. Original Sparky's—

TW: Ha.

KT: —got totally changed by COVID. But like there's not many areas of my life that I think, oh, this is permanently different due to COVID. Yeah I would say Sparky's.

TW: Yeah, um, how did you stay connected with people?

KT: Yeah I tried, like I said, me and my friends would try to hang out like beginning of COVID like outside like in someone's driveway, just like have a fire or something, you know what I mean? Or just like hanging outside just to see each other. I think it's important to see people, especially in a time like that, when you're not seeing anybody you can get depressed and stuff and—like hanging out with your family and stuff—what was the question again?

TW: How did you stay connected with people?

KT: Yeah, social media, too. I mean I well we talked to each other on Snapchat and stuff and you know Facetime and like yeah just going to see people, I mean if both, if you like, people were comfortable with it and it worked out.

TW: Was there anything that had been a routine for you, but became strange?

KT: There anything that was a routine for me, but became strange?

TW: Yeah that had become a routine for you, but became strange.

KT: Yeah like the masks coming off, they became so routine. Everywhere you went you had one, and then you didn't have to wear one. And then, like, I know, like even now, when I go up to like Umass Amherst, like they're in a mask mandate, and you have to wear a mask and like restaurants and grocery stores like anywhere you go. And that feels strange to me, especially because at Merrimack I, you know, I only have to put one on for class, but I don't have to wear one around North Andover. And same at home, I don't have to wear one so like going there and just having to wear a mask it just it feels very strange.

TW: So were you or anyone close to you affected by the virus?

KT: Yeah I had COVID. I mean once. Yeah, because our roommate got it when, well you obviously weren't here last semester, but you were there the semester previously, so once Eli was positive, then we had to quarantine and I quarantined with two of my other roommates for 17 days. And we all got COVID and we were all I mean, I was the sickest I've ever been for about like 30 hours. Couldn't get out of bed, had a fever, aches, coughing, and it was terrible. it's the sickest I've ever been in my life and the worst part was just like having to quarantine for that long. It was tough. And then, I know a bunch of people who have gotten COVID. Obviously, a lot of people that were my roommates got it and, yeah, it directly affected me a lot. It's not something that's fun to get and, especially, having to deal with the quarantine that comes with it, it's a tough process. Did you? Did you get COVID?

TW: No, I don't think I ever had it.

KT: Anybody in your family?

TW: Nothing I can think of, no.

KT: Amanda never had it?

TW: No, don't think so. Was there a particular moment where you felt there was a light at the end of the tunnel?

KT: Yeah, once we were back in restaurants I was like, I was like we're getting somewhere and like at least I can do this now—my life is a little bit more normal and then the big thing was probably like people being back in sports arenas like when we went to the Red Sox games and like having everybody in Fenway, I was like, we're finally back to normal, at least we can do this, you know what I mean? Like at least we can all be together in a great stage like this and, like, even earlier than that was like the NHL was on and they started letting fans back and, like the Boston Garden was at full capacity, and that was pretty cool to see because it had been empty arenas for so long. Yeah it was awesome to see fans back, and I was like this is a moment now we're finally getting back to normal.

TW: Right like that feeling of coming togetherness again yeah.

KT: Yeah exactly, just seeing people, I mean seeing 15,000 people together as something that seemed itself and to just have stadiums back that was pretty big. And like concerts and like music festivals and stuff like that, where you just get large large gatherings right.

TW: So what is a memory that you have of the pandemic that stands out to you as memorable that you could share? Like a memorable experience from the pandemic that you'd like to share?

KT: Um—let's come back to it. I'll think of it more.

TW: All right, um how have you changed, and what have you learned?

KT: I mean, I take more—I mean—like going from lockdowns and not be able to do anything, I have more appreciation for like the everyday life that we can live here, because I know like even in like Australia and stuff like this, they still have lockdowns and like the rest of the world isn't like the United States is right now and some countries are struggling worse. So I probably learned to like take more pride in the life that I'm able to live. Like being able to go out and do what I want like whenever I want because we weren't allowed to do that. And I probably learned to spend more time with family. Being in my house with them for so long, just made me appreciate it and know that like spending time with them is important and—

TW: Yeah, yeah, that's a good one. Do you have any lessons or any advice that you would want people to know?

KT: Like if people were going to go into a pandemic?

TW: Yeah, exactly.

KT: I don't know, you just kind of gotta wait it out and be patient. You know things don't change, like change doesn't come as quickly as you might think it would. And you just have to take baby steps into it. You know, we just—you just have to wait it out.

TW: Do you or can you describe the mid-semester transition in March 2020?

KT: The mid semester transition, what do you mean?

TW: In March 2020 so this would be our sophomore year, the transition from sophomore into our junior year. How we didn't go back and then we came back in March.

Kyle Templeton: Yeah, um. Yeah so we finished school on Zoom and then we were done we basically had like six months of summer almost. We finished up on Zoom and then we came back, and I was, I was really excited to come back. I didn't think we were gonna like be in person. And then we got I remember, we got our housing information, and I remember, I was with obviously you and Jack and Eli and then we were with six other guys and I was like, wow, like we're going to be living with 10 people like this is like something i've never done before. So I was excited for that and then being going to school, for the first time I was like, thank God like we're back to normal somewhat, like it was the best living with 10 guys in a room. We never wore masks in the room, and we lived normally. And that first semester obviously nothing happened—none of us had COVID or anything, and it was fine and it worked out great and I was super happy to be back on campus, especially not knowing if we were going to be and not wanting to be at home for another semester.

TW: Yeah so I forgot to tell you, these are more questions for on campus students now, which as you were an on campus student, so the following questions are going to be more oriented for on-campus students—

KT: The last one as well?

TW: So what factored into your decision to be on campus in the fall of 2020?

Kyle Templeton: Yeah, I mean I felt no reason not to be. I mean I knew Merrimack had put \$3 million into making the campus a safe place for students to live. I was excited to go back, I mean we're young. Like I knew, even if I got COVID I knew like I was just going to get sick and I was going to end up okay. I would have gotten better. I wasn't afraid of COVID and yeah I definitely didn't want to live at home. I was so excited to go and live with my friends and actually have a normal college life like you're supposed to. And that's ultimately why went back.

TW: So, how did it initially feel being on campus and was there a point where things started to feel normal?

KT: Yeah I mean it felt pretty normal as soon as we were back, I mean. We had to wear masks everywhere, and that was strange, but like we still were good like we still had people over and like had fun and did the normal things we're supposed to do. It probably didn't feel normal until like this year when we didn't have to wear masks everywhere, and we can have parties and go to like sporting events and have intramural sports and do all the things that we like weren't allowed to do during COVID, I would say, took a whole nother year until it felt normal, which would be this year.

TW: Yeah I agree this is definitely the year that makes it feel like it was almost pre-pandemic school.

KT: And I would be surprised to see what next year would be like. Obviously I don't have plans to be here, but I'm sure it's just going to be totally back to normal.

TW: Can you describe some specific differences between school pre-pandemic and school during it?

KT: Yeah pre-pandemic, we had more than one entrance into campus. Personally, that is just something I don't like. It just rubs me the wrong way. And Sparky's was better, the whole cafeteria was better. Intramurals were better. Like, I don't know, a lot of things are better. But

those two are probably the most. It's honestly just annoying having one entrance on the school. And having to leave usually from just one entrance creates more traffic, I understand why they do it, but that's one thing that I don't like and I don't like Sparky's anymore either. I liked the food before the pandemic.

TW: What was it like day to day in the dorms? In the classroom? around campus? Testing processes?

KT: Day to day—fine, you know felt pretty normal, except that obviously last year we had to wear the masks. Camping—sorry the testing facilities were fine, dorm life was normal except you couldn't have parties or like have many people over like you can now. Classrooms were basically the same, classrooms are the same as they were back then. Not much of a difference in those areas.

TW: So what did you maintain or how did you maintain a school life balance?

KT: During the pandemic?

TW: Correct.

KT: Once well, once we were in school, in spring of or instead of fall of 2020, it was basically, you know, back to normal, back to just being at school, doing the normal stuff so there wasn't much of a difference, then the only the only time it was hard was like being home on Zoom at school, like I didn't feel connected to school at all I didn't feel like I was in school. So it was hard to keep a connection there, but once I was back in school, it was easy, just as easy as it previously was.

TW: How were classes during the pandemic like remote classes, or in person classes?

KT: Yes, remote class was, I mean, terrible it's hard to learn. It's really hard to learn so yeah I didn't like my classes. And I'm glad we don't have them anymore.

TW: Were you affected by any of the outbreaks and did you ever have to quarantine? What was that like? Oh yeah we touched upon that. On campus students are required to have a go bag. Your plan ready in case of a positive test result Do you remember what was in your bag?

KT: Um no because I didn't have a go bag. But if I did have one I'm sure I mean there, there would be no—that's I mean there would be no way to have a go bag. I would need to have double of everything and, obviously, when I did get COVID we just all packed up and left and it wasn't an issue at all.

TW: So this is now going to move to questions for student athletes. You do club ultimate frisbee on campus. How is the season different the following year?

KT You know ultimate frisbee is an outdoor sport, so you know we never had to wear masks or anything. When we scrimmaged Stone Hill the previous year, we had to wear a mask and this year we haven't had to wear masks at any tournaments, so that would be the only difference.

TW: How did practice and training change during the pandemic?

KT: Practice was pretty normal, again we were outside and we were getting tested weekly, so we didn't have masks on and practice remained and it was normal.

TW: How would you say that competition changed at all?

KT: Probably only because I'm sure some kids didn't play due to COVID either were remote took a semester off or were home so, yeah if anything they like—competition had less players.

TW: And then, just one last one here, was it difficult to stay in shape or form with everything shut down?

KT: No, well with everything shut down, yeah, but I wasn't going to the gym as much back then, so wasn't a huge thing and during the pandemic I would run anyways or bike so going to the gym didn't affect me as much. But now, obviously the gyms are open, everything, so it's fine.

Thomas Wilson: Yeah.

Thomas Wilson: So this will conclude our pandemic interview, I'd like to thank Kyle Templeton for joining me here today.

Kyle Templeton: Thanks for having me, Tom.

Thomas Wilson: And signing off at Merrimack College!