**Transcript of Interview with Marian Munos by Shane Carlson**

**Interviewee:** Marian Munos

**Interviewer:** Shane Carlson

**Date:** 05/14/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Location (Interviewer):** Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Transcriber:** Lawson Miller

**Abstract:**

Marian Munos is a junior studying journalism and women’s, gender and sexuality studies at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. Marian participates in track and field and is originally from Illinois. She is working for the university while in Wisconsin. Marian’s mother is a principal and said that she didn’t want her to come home to avoid spreading Covid-19. Marian misses her teammates and family but is thankful that she can FaceTime her grandmother. Marian details that strangers have been kind during the pandemic and that she thinks we will come out of it closer than ever before Marian got very sick sometime in March with her roommate, but was unable to get tested because only those who had traveled abroad or come into contact with someone who had could get tested at the time.

**SC:** Alright. It is May 14, and roughly three o'clock in the afternoon. My name is Shane Carlson. I'm a UW EC [University of Wisconsin Eau Claire] graduate student participating in the COVID oral history project, and I'm here with Marin Munos. Who is, well, let's, let's have you tell us a little bit about yourself. And clearly, you're a UW student. So if you want to talk about maybe your major or what activities you're involved in?

**MM:** Okay, I'm married. I'm a journalism major and a WGSS [Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies] major. I'm in involved in track and field here at Eau Claire. I do a little radio Sunday, too. Yeah, that's just a little bit about me.

**SC:** What year in school, are you?

**MM:** I'm a junior.

**SC:** Okay. And so you've have you competed multiple years for the track team?

**MM:** Yeah, I've competed every year at Eau Claire, so three years.

**SC:** Okay. I have a couple of questions about how this year might be different with NCAA's [National Collegiate Athletic Association] shutting down so abruptly, but first, could you tell us a little bit about where - where you're from?

**MM:** I'm from Aurora, Illinois, which is 45 minutes east of Chicago. Yeah [laughs]. I don't do anything else from that.

**SC:** Maybe what what brought you to Eau Claire?

**MM:** A check actually [laughs]. I really wanted to run track in college but I was not like good enough to run on a D1 [Division I] or a D2 [Division II] school. So my mom and I came up and I visited Eau Claire and I visited Hamlin, and the minute I got here, and I met Jeff, he's our head coach. I just I was like, I need to go to this school. So I didn't even look at the journalism program. I just decided I wanted to run track here [laughs].

**SC:** On from what I've heard it sounds like they have an excellent journalism program too.

**MM:** They do, which I found out so that's good [laughs].

**SC:** Nice. Alright. Do you remember where you were when you first heard about COVID?

**MM:** Yeah, I was at work. So I think, well, I gue - I guess there are two times that I remember because the first time I heard about it was actually in the summer when it had started in China. And I, just because I prefer our journalism professors like make us like take in a lot of news. I think that's why I heard about it. But the first time I really heard about it being more of an issue that was of direct concern to myself was when I was at work. And they were talking about the potential like lockdown of the country basically. And that I think that was like, March, like really early March, maybe late February.

**SC:** Are you still in Eau Claire?

**MM:** Yes, I am.

**SC:** Oh okay. So are you still working then?

**MM:** Yeah. So I work at printing services. And we're considered essential because the Chancellor needs things printed. So we've still been working just it's been very restricted. We're down to - normally we have about eight full time employees and we're down to two full time employees and two that are they work every two weeks, so they're on furlough right now. And everyone else has been furloughed for a month. And then we there are two stern [sic] student workers, and normally, there's a About 10 to 13. So we've really taken a lot of the workload like normally had during the semester, I'd work nine hours and now I'm working 25. So there's definitely then that shift and who's doing what and the needs that need to be met.

**SC:** Are there any differences in the workplace that you've noticed? Other than, you know, clearly less people?

**MM:** Yeah. Well, we've completely had to redo because only we're a walk up counter and people will just come and order things. So now we do curbside pickup, which is different, like all of our doors are locked, which is weird. Like I can't even get into Schofield [Administrative Office at University of Wisconsin Eau Claire] without a key or having someone come in and get me and normally you can just like walk in and out so easily. That's just something that always throws me off. We have to wear masks and we have to wear gloves. when working. And we cleaned down everything before, like locking down for the day. And then if we get a package in the mail, we just kind of let it sit in this bin for two weeks in like a separate room. And then we'll open it unless it's like something really urgent, and then we just wipe it down and we'll take care of it. Those are the main differences. Our workload is definitely it kind of went, like a little like you so we started out with a lot of stuff and then we went about two weeks with nothing, like completely I just would do my homework for eight hours because there was nothing to do. And now we're kind of going back on the up climb and I it's been a lot of work lately. It's just people are still ordering huge orders, but there's only four of us and normally there will only be so during the day. There'll be one full time employee and then one student. So but we split the day in half. So there'll be a full time employee and a student in the morning, and then they'll switch with another full time employee a student in the afternoon. So at one time, there's only two of us working. So we're kind of like running around like crazy people [laughs]. But it's not bad. I'm really grateful to be working and have that. So that's nice at least.

**SC:** Yeah, you mentioned that some some of your co workers have been furloughed. How else has the pandemic impacted employment that you've seen?

**MM:** Well, as a student, I'm pretty broke normally. And I've seen a lot of my friends that have worked on campus and needed jobs on campus lose their jobs, and they've had to file for unemployment or even some of my friends that work in the food industry, they don't have jobs anymore. So they're now back home living with their parents doing work for their parents because they, they have no way to - no income to pay for their student loans and stuff. And then just personally, at printing, so our eight full time employees, four of them I haven't seen in about a month now. And they have until July 31 on furlough. I know but I know one of them is already on food stamps just because the unemployment isn't enoughbecause she still has a lot of student loans. So the impact that this has had on the workforce is just astronomical to me. My mom is a principal in the Chicago area and the transition to online for them. It's just it's been so hard. Like, it's just.. just such a difficult time that doesn't even those words don't even fit, but that's what I use to describe it.

**SC:** Yeah, well, I really feel for your mom because I teach part time. And yeah, you said it, it has been difficult.

**MM:** Yeah.

**SC:** So you brought up kind of to two memories of your experience with COVID, two of some of the earlier memories. Could you speak a little bit about how it's impacted track or your track and field season?

**MM:** I - so we found out basically that this, this was going to be really impactful on our season when our team was at nationals in North Carolina. Our team was on track to have a three, three time national champion winning streak. So we had the expectations. And the NCAA tweeted out that everything was canceled. And then one of my friends snapchatted me and she was on a plane home and it was kind of just at first a shock. Like, this isn't happening. This is not real life. And then they got back and the Chancellor wouldn't let us go like clap for them when they got off the bus like we weren't allowed to be there. So I think that was when it hit me. And we weren't allowed to go congratulate our team even though like nothing had happened, but they still had all made it to nationals and the expectation was there. It was kind of just absolute devastation. There was three weeks there I was honestly so depressed because this team is my family and not seeing them every day. Just it, it leaves you kind of empty feeling. So that's that was kind of my initial response to it. I think now, I'm more used to it. But it's still it's, it's so hard to work out without having their support or having a purpose because it feels like I'm not doing anything. I don't have a point for doing anything because our next competition season is like 10 months away if there is one. So it's really difficult.

**SC:** Here. Let me see. I had a question about what what access to facilities do you have as far as workouts go? Because I've seen a lot of creative solutions online.

**MM:** Yeah. Well, our track was closed for all of March pretty much so we had to break in Memorial High Schools track. I don't know if I'm condemning myself saying that. But, myself and another girl we just like jumped the fence and use it to run because we still had workouts to do and stuff. And we actually made friends with the cop that sits outside that high school [laughs]. And he was like, yeah, as long as you don't come with more than 10 people, it's fine and stuff. But now our track is open again and we have a little shed that we put some hurdles together and we made that into like a lifting rack. So that's kind of nice and it's nice to have our track again, the only thing most of us - our shoes are locked in the locker room. So we don't have like our sprint spikes. We don't have our shot puts or our javelins or anything. So we don't really have any equipment or anything that would be useful training with but we still have access to the track and really all you need is a pair of shoes but it would be nice to have those spikes.

**SC:** On your your multi so yeah many events.

**MM:** Yeah [laughs], it's weird not having all my shoes around me all the time and stuff.

**SC:** But do you have access to equipment then?

**MM:** We have access to hurdles. And we have some really old rusty chaplets but that's pretty much about it. Yeah, it's well we don't even... we high jumped on the back of our pole vault mat so it's definitely [laughs].

**SC:** For interviewers watching. I'm a pole vaulting coach [laughs]. That's alright. It's good that it's getting used.

**MM:** Yeah, it's our only option. We have high jump (\_\_\_\_\_???) just no high jump mat.

**SC:** Awesome. So [laughs], would, how would you say that your experience of COVID so far has differed than maybe some of your friends at Eau Claire that are also students?

**MM:** Like someone that isn't an athlete or someone or just another student?

**SC:** Maybe both. Okay, well, I can start with my roommate. So I room with another girl that's on the track team. And she's actually gone home she lives in Duluth [City]. I, my mom told me I couldn't come home. So I've been stuck in Eau Claire, which is completely fair, I, she doesn't want to give us anything because she still is in contact with some of her students, and she doesn't want us to give her anything. So I been here the whole time. And I think one thing that's really different from our experiences is my my roommate works in the mailroom. And the mailroom's pretty much all shut down right now. So she can't work there. But I'm still working at printing, which is pretty different because most students aren't working on campus at all.

**MM:** So I think that's the biggest difference, but then... we obviously both still are, like missing out on track. This is like the same amount like we both still miss our teammates so much, but it doesn't matter that she's in the loop because it's not like I can see them either. So I think there's that. And then if I were to compare my experience to just another student's experience, I think the devastation of losing track and school has just been, it's been a weight that I haven't ever thought I'd have to carry. I've been running track since I was five. So I don't really know what life is like without track. It's kind of been this constant in my life. And even if I'm not in season, I'm still training for it. But right now, everything feels so uncertain that I've just never been in this position before. So it's it's really confusing. To me,

**SC:** Mm hmm.

**MM:** And I just feel like another student might not experience that if they weren't an athlete. It's just a different kind of loss.

**SC:** Yeah, loss is a good word to describe what everybody is experiencing right now.

**MM:** Yeah, definitely.

**SC:** Yeah. And so you brought up that your your mom thought it was best that you don't come home? Could you could you speak a little bit about what it's like, you know, just being a family member during this time, especially when you're apart.

**MM:** Well there's a lot of FaceTime calls. My grandma, we taught her how to FaceTime so that's good. It's, it's just really hard. Just because, like normally I wouldn't see her that often, but at least I'd see my mom at track meets and stuff. But now I don't even have that because she can't come up for those obviously. So I just finding myself missing track even more because of that and missing her because of that, because that's something we bond over. Yeah, it's just been really tough and my brother and his girlfriend live in Bloomington, Indiana. And then my grandparents live up in the UP [Possibly Upper Peninsula of Michigan]. So we're all like very separate right now, which isn't something I'm used to. Because normally I'll be able to see, like at least one of my family members, like once a month, but I haven't seen any of them since Christmas. So it's just been really tough. And FaceTime obviously doesn't really do it. It's just not the same experience. So yeah, I'd say right now, just trying not to - trying to avoid the homesickness and just be there when they need me. I think that's the role I'm playing right now as a family member.

**SC:** Are you seeing a similar response with communities? Just as you described that everybody just seems very separate and living different lives feeling maybe isolated?

**MM:** You know, I don't think so. I like to go on walks. I've been going around to all these little like, free book library things. And one thing that I noticed on my walks are these cutout hearts that people have been putting out and one that I really like it's a bunch of like kid handprints mixed in with the heart. So it says, "we're all in this together." And I think that's like the movement that someone started somewhere. I don't know. I think it's really cool though. And then I always see people have been putting these teddy bears in windows for kids when they're going on walks to like spot. And I just think that's really cool. I think people are honestly more open at least in my community like where I live, more open to strangers than they ever have been and more caring. I I really, it's kind of ironic that something that pushes people away is bringing them together. It's just interesting. Yeah, I would definitely say that communities are - I feel like things will be closer after this instead of farther apart.

**SC:** That's a really interesting perspective. I can't say I've thought of it that way, but I definitely know what you're talking about.

**MM:** Yeah.

**SC:** Have you noticed any other changes in your community? Just think about like day to day life. Work, leisure activities in general.

**MM:** I've noticed a lot more people outside than ever and I... one thing that I notice is often when I'm walking home from work people will be grilling out but they're sitting six feet apart. So instead of like a tight circle it'll be like huge. I'm just trying to think of other things that have been different... I don't know I - Eau Claire feels emptier. I live in the third wo- ward. So I feel like a lot of students have gone home so I think that's a big part of the streets are just are open. It's kind of like a ghost town sometimes because Friday nights are not loud anymore [laughs]. So that's kind of weird. Yeah, I think those are the only things I can think of really, super different.

**SC:** Do you know anybody that has gotten sick so far, or has had like, a health scare?

**MM:** Um, well, I'm convinced that my roommate had it [laughs]. I don't, I don't know for sure. But she had all the symptoms, and then I got sick. And we were both sick for about two, two and a half weeks. And I've never been that sick before, but I don't think - I don't know what that was. But my mom actually did have a teacher that's da - died. Yeah, so that's a teacher that I knew someone I was like, cuz she teaches in the same school district that I went to school in. So that was, that was pretty tough. Yeah, that that one was really tough. That happened about a week ago. And he was he was 80 years old. So I mean, I think they knew that his odds weren't that great but it's so hard processing all the national news and then you see it right in front of your face. And I don't know, I guess it - you don't really - I feel like you tend to not care about something until it's personal sometimes. So it's easy to pretend like social distancing isn't important. But when you see something like that actually happen and it's not just on the TV. It gets really personal and really real.

**SC:** Mm hmm. I'm sorry to hear about that. Would would you feel comfortable explaining maybe why it sounds like you didn't get tested? (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_???) [laughs]

**MM:** We tried to get tested.

**SC:** Oh, okay.

**MM:** Yeah, no, we we tried. So this happened right in early March, right when everything was going down, so we didn't know if we were just scared or what but we were like, okay, we should get tested and all of our parents were like, yeah, you need to not, not get tested. So we, we went over to Mayo [Health Clininc in Eau Claire, Wisconsin]. Well, we called first and they were like, "oh, yeah, we have a drive up clinic," like a drive up test site. And then we got there. And I don't know why they didn't tell us over the phone. But they were only testing people that at that point that had traveled or had been in contact with someone who had traveled. And to our knowledge, we hadn't been in contact with anyone, so they didn't test us.

**SC:** Wow.

**MM:** Yeah. So.

**SC:** Do you remember what point in time this was? I know you said early March, but..

**MM:** I think it was so I think around March 5, March 5 or March 6, it was about a week and a half before everything kind of blew up nationally. So I - yeah.

**SC:** So that would have been that would be before nationals before your teammates went well of course you're not thinking like well having contact with them who would have been traveling but

**MM:** Yeah, no and this is before that happened, that was the only thing I was that the only people I would have been in contact with but yeah.

**SC:** Yeah. Wow. Oh and what clinic was that again? You said Mayo that is Mayo and?

**MM:** It's - I don't know which one it is.

**SC:** Do you remember what city?

**MM:** It's in Eau Claire.

**SC:** Oh okay.

**MM:** It's...

**SC:** The one right by campus?

**MM:** What?

**SC:** Is that the one right by campus?

**MM:** Yeah it's it's well not the one on upper the one on lower.

**SC:** Okay.

**MM:** Do you know what I'm talking about?

**SC:** Trying to picture it. I'm still pretty new to Eau Claire, is it close to downtown then?

**MM:** No, it's not. It's like kind of far back [laughs]. I can't think of what it's called. I think it's like the Lutheran campus or something.

**SC:** Mm hmm. Okay. Well that's still really important insight to have.

**MM:** Yeah. And we were pretty scared for a while. Yeah, that was a little nerve wracking for a while [laughs].

**SC:** Mm hmm. So, could you talk a little bit about how people are receiving information about COVID right now, and if this ties into a gov - a response to the government's response to COVID, then, you know, feel free to fuse them.

**MM:** Okay. I think I have a unique perspective as a journalism major. I think that really affects my opinion on this. So I would call it.. there's just so much misinformation. It's kind of like an infodemic [laughs]. People, I feel like people kind of latch on to what they want to hear. And then they just run with it. And if there's any changes in that information, they don't want to hear it. And they are people aren't really checking their sources, personally, even my mom, she gets a lot of information from Facebook sometimes, like, "mom [laughs] you can't listen to everything." And I do think this is a reflect - a reflection of our government right now. It's [laughs] can I just, I'm just going to be very candid. I - President Trump is saying a lot of things that are not okay. They're not backed by anything. And I feel like there's a lot of opinion in there and what he thinks is happening isn't actually what's happening. And this information is fed directly to the public because this is breaking news every day. So, and people do follow Trump and people do support Trump. So people are gonna listen to that. And I think that really plays into the infodemic and people getting this information and then they spread the misinformation. They're like, "oh, I got it from so and so." And then it just kind of like this snowball effect of just not stable sources and not just not good information. It's just it's so bad. It's so hard to watch as a journalist. Because... people, because of fake news, people like don't like journalists like they don't support us and then when something is - some information is wrong, we're instantly blamed. Which is so frustrating. And I've seen that happen multiple times as this whole thing has gone down, and it's just so frustrating, but what are you gonna do?

**SC:** M hmm. How how would you describe the differences in the state and federal responses to COVID?

**MM:** Personally, I think our state took a really good approach to COVID I think Wisconsinites have been really, really good about staying at home and following orders. But the stay at home order was just, like, released or like picked up or what is it called?

**SC:** Lifted.

**MM:** Lifted, lifted. Yeah, that's what I was looking for. And I think that was too early. I think that was too early of a decision. But I think because of the stay at home order and because people are doing what they're supposed to be doing, we really flattened the curve and I think that was really good but I don't think - I think it was lifted too soon. On a national level, I think the stay at home, the lockdown, everything was put in place way too late. We had knowledge of the Coronavirus way before and I think a lot of deaths could have been avoided if we had had that knowledge and if officials had actually listened. But I think that that kind of can be applied to a lot of countries. America is not an exception to that. But I definitely think the sake of the citizens in America if we had been put in lockdown sooner, it would have been for the best even if that caused a more harsh effect on the economy.

**SC:** Alright. Thank you. And there, I've only have a couple more questions for you. And earlier you had mentioned maybe a silver lining to this that, you know, strangers are closer probably than they've ever been. Are there any other ways that you've seen even your family or friends or broader communities transformed by this experience? Well, one thing that my mom is doing, she has an Etsy shop, and I know she's selling masks now that she's just making at home. So I think that's really cool. And I know a lot of people have been just making masks and sharing them. My friend actually, she's from San Diego, and she mailed me a mask that she made because she wanted us to have matching ones. So it was kind of funny. Me - I don't know, I just think I just noticed more. I think it's a Midwestern thing to say hi when you're walking, but people are more receptive to that. And I've actually had more conversations with people than just saying hi, just for the sake of being nice. People will be like, "oh, how are you doing?" And I don't even know who this person is. So I don't know. I think it's the fact that you see someone and you're like, "oh my gosh, there's another person." Because you've been stuck at home for so long or whatever. I just, I think we're all in this together. And it's such a hardship that we're all carrying. That has never happened before. Like, it doesn't matter your race. It doesn't matter your gender. We're all being affected by this. Yeah. So I just think, yeah, that's yeah, that's it. Yeah, um, I guess then the last question I have for you, is there anything that you wanted to ask me?

**MM:** How are you seeing people in the community like, do you think do you agree with my opinion on that?

**SC:** Absolutely. And I think we're getting a bit of both ends of the spectrum. It's, it's definitely transforming the way our our society operates. And I've been doing a lot of research. As part of this project, the graduate students involved have to do research on top of that and make parallels between the 1918 pandemic. And so I've struck up quite a few conversations with people trying to make comparisons. And it's really interesting that in the research I've come across, they describe this lack of memory about the pandemic. And there's a recent historian, or a historian that wrote a recent book called The American Pandemic. Her name's Nancy Bristow. And she argues that part of the memories of the pandemic were wrapped up in World War One. And I can verify this at least for Eau Claire, I was looking through some of the articles from 1918. And like and on November 11, which is normally regarded as the end of World War One. Even going through the newspaper, like there, the the city had already issued some orders back in October, and there were there were some businesses trying to contest them and saying, well, we need we want people to work out people need to work out right now. Why isn't the Y [Young Men's Christian Association] open?

**MM:** Yeah.

**SC:** There were church leaders saying that we need faith more than ever right now. God is the only thing that's going to save us from this. Yeah, and it's it's really interesting. But anyway, so these these memories seem to be wrapped up more in the end of World War One and the language they use to describe them is very similar. So it's not. Yeah, it's very militant. Like we need to fight the virus. There's so much of it that references fear. I was reading an article that began from then November 11. (\_\_\_\_\_???), there's so much on the end of the war, of course there is there's a small blip on like the eighth page of the it's like the last page of the newspaper. And it's it more or less says that people need - can go about their daily lives, and that they can't be afraid to do so. But and then like later on it lists well, "these are the precautions you should take."

**MM:** Oh (\_\_\_\_\_\_???) [laughs]

**SC:** Yeah [laughs]. I want to save that for like, you know, first but, and they give they list, you know, like, local ailments or they push different maybe silver bullet cures? [laughs]

**MM:** Yeah.

**SC:** Like, if you have a cold put put your feet in hot water. I don't know, I don't have that background. But you know, I don't see that anywhere in there in the suggestions as to what to do if you have COVID now, it's not a thing.

**MM:** [Laughs]

**SC:** But yeah, it's interesting that the memory gets wrapped up into the experiences of World War One and ends up getting loss over the preference of, you know, World War One where you can actually look at that and say, like, "okay, well, there's victory in that." Sure, there's loss, but that loss ends up being seen as honorable or Noble. And whereas the the experience of the pandemic is completely the opposite. It is, you know, you have a nation that is becoming more, more of a powerhouse and more of a player in the world. Yet they are there, they have no response to this. There's nothing that they do that ends up working other than the public guidelines. You know, and years after analysis is pretty conclusive that well, not even years after. In in 1919, Eau Claire was recognized for how seriously they took the pandemic. And [laughs] then the state. This data sent a letter to the Board of Health the State Board of Health sent a letter to the Eau Claire Board of Health saying, like "your neighbors Chippewa Falls didn't take this seriously. These are their statistics."

**MM:** Oh my gosh [laughs]

**SC:** In Eau Claire, and like, these are your statistics. We think it's because you took this very seriously you issued public warnings, you were very transparent about the data you were giving out and Chippewa Falls wasn't, in Chippewa Falls, you can find newspapers that mention while Eau Claire has the pandemics racing out of control, we can't stop it there. We don't know that to be true here. But it seems to be more an issue of transparency, because when the final statistics came out about deaths per month, it's very clear that Chippewa Falls suffered at a much greater rate than Eau Claire per capita. Oh, and and overall, I think there are twice as many deaths despite having half as much as the population.

**MM:** Yeah, geez.

**SC:** Yeah. Anyway, so yeah, I would say the, what has shocked me was in the past, the lack of the lack of memory and I guess how memory transforms the way we view the past. And I really wonder how that's gonna play out here. Because they're like you said the infodemic. I've only read I think there's a piece by The Guardian put out on that. And the World Health Organization defines infodemic too, but they do it with a less partisan spin. Like they don't they don't attribute any misinformation. It just seems like there's way too much information in their definition. Yeah, that is probably just trying to stay non partisan.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah.

**SC:** But yeah, I don't know. I look for the little things that get me through the day. I think I think everybody's kind of in that boat.

**MM:** Definitely.

**SC:** So much stress. And you can find good examples in the community and you can find scary things in the community. And...

**MM:** Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**SC:** Yeah. Sorry, that was a really long-winded answer.

**MM:** (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_???) I appreciated it.

**SC:** Well, I really appreciate you contributing to the oral history. And this will be.

**MM:** Oh yeah, thanks for letting me do this.

**SC:** Yeah. Yeah. And your your records will be stored in the Digital Archives for Eau Claire and with the archives at Indiana University, which is going to be a much broader national project. And I know they're getting global responses to that project as well. So that'll be really neat to see what happens there. Yeah, that's gonna be cool. Awesome. Alright. Well, I'll stop the recording.