

## Transcript Interview with Andrew May and Jacinta Parsons

**Interviewee:** Andrew May

**Interviewer:** Jacinta Parsons

**Date:** 2020/03/06

**Location (Interviewee):** Melbourne, Australia

**Location (Interviewer):** Melbourne, Australia

**Transcriber:** Michael Wohl

**Abstract:** Jacinta Parsons and Andrew May discuss the significance of living through a historic disease and introduce the Journal of the Plague Year. May encourages listeners to participate through submitting a wide range of topics and materials.

**Jacinta Parsons 00:00**

One day we will be the past that people will be looking back to and wondering how we got through this time of the Coronavirus. There's a really interesting project that is collecting some of these stories. And we're being encouraged actually to be part of what is be, called, called a Journal of the Plague Year: an Archive of COVID Nine, nine. Joining us right now is Andy Mae. He's a professor of Australian history at the University of Melbourne. Good afternoon, Andy.

**Andrew May 00:28**

Hi, Jacinta, good to be with you.

**Jacinta Parsons 00:30**

Well, it's really good to have you this is sort of what we've all been thinking about. This is this moment in history, you know, we've been the people reading those books and wondering what it was like to go through the Depression, or, you know, World War Two, or the experiences that we often read about, we are going to be that experience, aren't we?

**Andrew May 00:47**

We certainly are. And I think, you know, we've got a touchstone, for example, there's been a lot of interest in the 1919, Spanish flu, influenza that hit Australia. And we've got evidence from the newspapers and so on. But we really don't know a lot about what people felt how they experienced that in an everyday way. So this is our chance to send a message to the future, if you like so that future historians and others can actually understand the daily sense of what we're going through.

**Jacinta Parsons 01:21**

So what is the proposal? Are we to write it down? Take photos? How do we share our experiences of what day to day life, living in this very unique time in history is like,

**Andrew May 01:33**

Look, we're collaborating with some colleagues from Arizona, and we have a website that is now live. And look, it's pretty, pretty simple. We're basically encouraging everyone to document how the pandemic is affecting their lives. And you can share whatever you like, it can be a photograph, it can be a screen capture, you can write a little diary entry, a video clip, and you can upload that very easily to the website, and you can tag it to Melbourne on the map. And it will go live. It's a moderated site. So once it's approved, it'll go live. And, look, the beauty of it is it's in a way, it's a kind of a community History Project. And it's something that I think we can do individually to document how it's how this is sort of going down in Melbourne. But it also helps us connect globally, we can you know, there are entries already up on the website from North America, obviously, but from Brazil, from Italy, from the Netherlands, and experiencing real time how other people are dealing actually with pretty similar, you know, fears and anxieties, and also kind of regulations that that we are so we can kind of track it in real time, which is really exciting.

**Jacinta Parsons 02:48**

It is really exciting. What sort of things do you think are going to be interesting?

**Andrew May 02:53**

Look, I think at the moment, so early on, there's a lot of material, obviously, about social distancing. There's a lot of images of empty shops, shelves, shelves, and shortages, and so on. But I think the interesting stuff is really the kind of emotional dimension, you know, how we experienced this in an everyday way. And they're the sorts of things that often are not captured in other types of sources. So I'm really interested in kind of personal responses, this fantastic stuff up there already from Melbourne, an example is a photo of kids who've been talking messages on suburban pavements, saying things like, you know, have a nice day. So everyone who's out there kind of, you know, walking their dog that at the appropriate social distance can, can say these messages that kids are leaving in Melbourne street. So they're just a little sort of things that give us an insight into how we're experiencing it in an everyday way people are uploading their sort of family homeschooling schedule, with little commentaries about, you know, the challenges of dealing suddenly with, you know, all these high energy kids at home and the importance of having a daily schedule. So, so they're little records of everyday life. But I think they're also in the sort of virtual way, expressing the sort of community that we that we need, that that binds us together. That helps us to understand that we're not experiencing this alone. But in doing it, it's leaving a trail for the future.

**Jacinta Parsons 04:24**

I love it. This idea that we are, we are the thing, this great text here saying being part of a historical event isn't nearly as fun as I thought it would be, which is very true. Thank you so much for joining us this afternoon. If you want to be part of the journal and take part in it. You just need to get into your search engine, Melbourne history workshop, I think and there's a link that you can follow all the way to that journal. Thanks for joining us this afternoon, thanks to Andy May is the professor of Australian

history at the University of Melbourne, where we're able to chronicle this year as the plague year an archive of COVID Nine.