

Ashley Tibollo 00:00

We are recording. My name is Ashley Tibollo, it is July 24 2021. Is it is 7:20pm and I am here with Janine Brown. We are at Sweet and Jenny's ice cream shop in Williamsville. New York. So, if you could just get, well first I need to tell you that any answers that you give during this interview will be included in a publicly accessible database. Is that okay with you?

Janine Brown 00:35

Yeah

Ashley Tibollo 00:36

consent, okay. Okay, so first, can you state your full name? and say what are the primary things you do on a day to day basis are like your job, extracurricular activities, etc.

Janine Brown 00:50

My name is Janine Brown, and I am a full time graduate student with the University of Buffalo researching or not guess researching, but studying music education. And then I also part time, teach martial arts in Williamsville, with Master Catchings Martial Arts Academy.

Ashley Tibollo 01:11

And you had another job during the pandemic, correct?

Janine Brown 01:15

Yeah, I worked at Our Lady of BlackRock, in Buffalo, New York.

Ashley Tibollo 01:20

And what did you do there?

Janine Brown 01:23

I was the music and art teacher, but I also taught religion for eighth grade. I mean, the primary duties with the whole pandemic thing was we had to, like do temperature checks in the morning, and, like, give out hand sanitizer, we had to walk the students from their classrooms to lunch, and then back. And then we also like, instead of having a music and art room that students went to, I just went to each of the different classrooms whenever their class times.

Ashley Tibollo 01:58

So unlike a lot of people, you are in person, right? Most of the pandemic?

Janine Brown 02:03

Right, we had a couple of breaks, one, I believe in November, and then the other in February, where we had to all quarantine for a few weeks. But other than that we were in person for pretty much the whole time.

Ashley Tibollo 02:21

And during those breaks, were you off of school, or were you teaching remotely?

Janine Brown 02:25

I was teaching remotely for the whole time.

Ashley Tibollo 02:30

And what was that like for you?

Janine Brown 02:32

Oh, that was not fun. (laughing) I, I did not enjoy that. It's hard to do. art and music over zoom, mostly because I cannot get the supplies to the students. And because our students, our student body doesn't always have access to a bunch of different art supplies that we would normally use in school, I pretty much just had to have them do pencil and paper stuff. Because not everybody had markers. Not everybody had oil pastels, or paints, or anything that you would normally use. And also for the music side, not everybody has instruments or even like working headphones or working speakers to like play music on. So it was very much "how do i do my job?" And one don't like it was starting over pretty much like how, how do I teach this way when I was taught to teach all of these other ways.

Ashley Tibollo 03:37

And when you were in the classroom, what, what was it like during the day dealing with teaching and dealing with a pandemic at the same time.

Janine Brown 03:49

I mean, it was stressful. There's always the risk factor. When you're in person, there's always you go room to room. So if you're in one room, like say I'm in second grade, and somebody is mask comes off, or somebody is coughing, and then that same day, I have to then move my person to a different classroom with a different grade. It was stressful in that I didn't want to be like a transfer agent for a deadly disease. So that was always in the back of my mind. I wanted to make sure that I wasn't doing anything that would harm the students or the other teachers, the faculty. So it was just a lot of hand sanitizer, and hoping for the best. But yeah, teaching during the pandemic, even though in person was better than remote learning was still extremely stressful because a bunch of responsibilities were put on pretty much everybody that weren't there before and it just became overwhelming.

Ashley Tibollo 05:06

Let's back up a little bit. And just talk about the beginning of the pandemic. So when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

Janine Brown 05:21

Um, it started my senior year of college when I was doing my bachelor's in music performance. And it was at the tail end of the year, spring semester, all of a sudden, we hear about a virus that broke out. And at first, I didn't think much of it, because why would I really just like, Oh, you know, something's happening somewhere else. And then, all of a sudden, the state ordered all of the colleges to be shut down. And suddenly all of my classes, I think my teachers had like, a couple of weeks to figure out. I think they had spring break, actually, they had one week to figure out what what are we going to do for

finals for exams. For me, because I was a performance major, I had a recital, like the date booked the rehearsal set, I had everybody I needed, every everything I needed in Lyons, and then all of a sudden, we can't do recitals in the recital hall because nobody's allowed in there. So it, they weren't sure, like if I was allowed to graduate, because I wasn't doing the recital that everybody would normally have to do in order to graduate. They ended up making it so I had to just submit a video of myself playing alone, which was a little bit. I don't want to say depressing, because that's an extreme word, but it definitely was not the experience that I was hoping for.

Ashley Tibollo 06:51

So maybe disappointing?

Janine Brown 06:53

Yeah, absolutely disappointing. Because, again, I had no my recital dress, I had my feet like I had my family coming, I had the date the paperwork, accompanies everything. And I, I worked really hard. I worked really hard to make sure I was ready to perform. And then they're like, Oh, just submit a video. So I ended up having to just do it, like, in my basement, you know, and that's not ideal.

Ashley Tibollo 07:20

And in the interest of full disclosure, Janine and I are best friends, so I know how hard she worked for it. And I was very disappointed that I didn't get to see your recital. I was looking forward to that. And we even went shopping for the dress together.

Janine Brown 07:40

Yea, got it on discount \$7 (Woohoo) but it was beautiful. I still have it. Maybe someday I'll do it like an informal recital.

Ashley Tibollo 07:48

Yeah. And I'll wear the jumper that I was supposed to wear for martial arts banquet.

Janine Brown 07:54

Yeah. Yeah

Ashley Tibollo 07:55

That will be great.

Janine Brown 07:57

But I guess to finish the question, so that was going on, everything was canceled. And then I actually had during spring break, when everything started closing down, I was actually in Florida, visiting my sister. And we were very worried that the airport was shut down before we could get back. They didn't, which was good. But it was just another layer of I was getting these school emails telling us like, how things might work. Like while I was in a different state, and like, everything was shutting down. We're like, what, like, what's gonna happen? Like, are we gonna be stuck here for a while? How long is this gonna last? So yeah, that's pretty much what was going on.

Ashley Tibollo 08:35

And how have your thoughts changed since then? Now that sort of, hopefully the other side, although the Delta variant is coming.

Janine Brown 08:48

So my thoughts on what exactly?

Ashley Tibollo 08:52

How have your thoughts changed about the pandemic, since you first heard about it?

Janine Brown 08:56

Oh,

Ashley Tibollo 08:56

you know, having sort of lived through a year and a half of it?

Janine Brown 09:03

Well, it definitely opened my eyes a little bit to the state of the country and the world in a way. In a way, I'm a little bit more disappointed in humanity. But there's, there's been some good things, especially in my line of work, teachers were needed. And I was able to get work very quickly. When I was working at Buffalo string works, which was actually part of when I was remote teaching, I had to do some remote teaching. When the pandemic started for buffalo string works before I went to Our Lady of BlackRock. So I sort of like I knew the apps and stuff that we had to use, like I was familiar with how that would work. So it wasn't as terrible of a transition. But yeah, it definitely opened my eyes to the things that could happen. And I don't know, if it's all negative, I don't think it's all negative. But it definitely is not all positive. (laughing) I sort of see the light at the end of the tunnel like it's there. And I'm just waiting for it to get a little bit closer. Yeah, my grandmother ended up with COVID, twice in a nursing home. And she eventually passed away. For reasons not completely unrelated, but it definitely took a toll on her overall health, which let the other things you know, get to her more than they probably would have if she wasn't sick twice.

Ashley Tibollo 10:44

Right

Janine Brown 10:47

So it's been it's just it's been stressful. I'm still stressed. Even though I've had a couple of like in person classes that up. It's very much like we're not out of the woods yet. Things are getting more relaxed. And that's exciting. It's exciting to be vaccinated and to go to Wegmans for shopping every week without having the need to, oh, I need to sanitize after I touch anything. I need to have my mask on. Like, do I have this? Do I have that? Now it's just like, Oh, I can I can go to the store. And that's great. Like, I love that. I love Taekwondo. Even though I don't agree that the adults aren't mandated to wear masks, if they're vaccinated anymore, I still think that it's a step in the right direction. We're still doing like cleaning the floors, cleaning the myths, cleaning the chairs, but we're not as it's not so much as Oh, no

one person walks through, we have to clean everything now. It's more of Okay, after each class, we do some cleaning. And it's it's more relaxed.

Ashley Tibollo 11:53

I may be asking you to predict the future a little bit here. But do you think that's going to continue? Or do you have fears that that's going to change again with this delta variance.

Janine Brown 12:05

So what I've read so far, about the studies involving the Delta variant is that those with Pfizer or maternal vaccines are still at 8% protected against it. And I believe all of them are not immune, but they're not. They're not likely to be seriously ill, even if they do show symptoms. So that makes me a little bit more relaxed about it, even though it is still a very real concern. I would be worried if things shut down again, that there would be worse outcomes, which is crazy to say, How can there be a worse outcome than hundreds of thousands of people dying in a pandemic. But, surprise, surprise, humanity is a wonder in and of itself. So I would be worried if there were another lockdown, like, like how there was last year. So that's a concern is that we're going to find a need to shut things down and people aren't going to like it. The other concern, again, is people who choose not to vaccinate just because they don't want their freedoms infringed. upon which I understand that everybody has to make their own decisions. But when it involves other people, I think that needs to take a little bit more consideration into that. Because again, if they do get infected, then they are essentially a breeding ground for maybe a worse variance. Even though we're protected for the most part against the Delta Varian being fully vaccinated, who's to say there won't be a different variant that is much worse, and possibly even resistant to the things that we use, right now to combat it. So that's a concern. That's a big concern. And unfortunately, it relies on, I guess, evolution, hopefully, it just won't happen. That would be great.

Ashley Tibollo 14:12

Yea

Janine Brown 14:13

Because viruses can't choose to mutate. They just sort of it just sort of happens. And it also relies on other people, you know, being generally good, which I have more hope for the evolution thing. (laughter) I feel like it's just maybe, maybe the chances are it'll just sort of fizzle out. That would be great. I'd rather rely on that. But like you say it's a coin toss either way. So...

Ashley Tibollo 14:42

You mentioned that you're you know, you're getting some information through like research that you've been doing and other people's research. So what Where are you getting that from? Like what of your primary sources of that news and info One nation that in during the pandemic,

Janine Brown 15:02

pretty much just everything the CDC says a lot of their stuff like as they figure things out, they post articles, I read the articles, and then I make decisions for myself based on what that is. So when they said at first, like it would be helpful to wear a certain type of mask, as opposed to like a different type,

then I listened to it, because I think that they, they've studied, they've spent their lives dedicated to this exact thing. And I, I'd rather trust them. So help me make those decisions. So it's pretty much been the CDC. Honestly, I don't trust a lot of like blog posts or anything I don't, I don't just like, like, if I google something, I do my research and make sure that what I'm clicking on is not just somebody in their basement typing up what they feel that day. I like reputable sources. And if I can get them, that's great. And if they say that they don't know, fully what's going on, I also take that into consideration because not not everybody can know everything.

Ashley Tibollo 16:16

Do you consider mainstream media to be I'm talking sources, like the New York Times, or MSNBC or Fox News, or any of those sort of on TV sources are for broadly read newspaper sources to be reliable.

Janine Brown 16:37

I think they do a good job short handing the research, sometimes I I've ran into situations where it seems like they didn't quite capture the essence of the article that they're quoting. Or that they make mistakes in what they imply. I don't trust them. implicitly, I don't like if I if I were to read an article, or if I were to see like a news story on TV. I wouldn't take that as fact, because news articles, like like that, they're mainly to get views. And especially now when everything is so polarized, they want the most discussion about their particular form of media distribution, like they don't want. It's not just Here are the facts. Here's what we learned. It's always something sensational about something to draw people's attention and get them to click on the links and get them to tune into their channel. So I don't trust the ulterior motives for them. And I think they have a lot to gain by misrepresenting certain sources. So no, if I were to read something or see something from one of those sources, I would double check it with a place more reputable.

Ashley Tibollo 18:00

And do you have any thoughts about how local state and or federal leaders have been responding to the pandemic?

Janine Brown 18:12

Um, well, it started out. Okay. I mean, again, going back to my senior year of college, when the universities were like, sort of, like, well, we don't know if we're gonna shut down like nothing is nothing is certain yet. And then Governor Cuomo was like, No, we're shutting down now. So they were just like, oh, shutting down now. Which, you know, made people figure it out really quick. I think that it wasn't super effective in the beginning, because nothing was wide, like nothing had a widespread This is what we are going to do. There was no uniform solution, or uniform practice. It was mostly just county by county, pretty much all over the country. What do you feel like doing to try to help? And some places said nothing, we don't need to do anything. And some places said, let's start locking things down. But then like, they didn't actually enforce that. So nothing got solved and it just made the lockdowns be longer, which in turn fueled the fire of people not wanting the lockdowns anymore because they don't work when in reality, it's not the lockdowns that didn't work. It's the fact that they were not enforced properly. Because people are still going out there still gathering they're still doing all the things they did for under the guise of a lockdown when there was no lockdown. And I'll stand by that because I've seen too many parties too many people doing things to say that there was ever a real lockdown where we

are right now. So I think that it could have been handled more uniformly. I think it could have been handled more aggressively. Honestly in a way even if People would have been upset this, this is something that could have been over in a month, a month or two. And instead, it's a year and a half later. And we're still talking about the same things we were talking about a year and a half ago. So, yeah, I don't think it was handled great by anybody that may be New Zealand, because they did pretty good for a while. I think it could have been done better. I think people were too afraid of making other people mad, and making them upset when they ended up just making that worse in the long run. And they also lost the trust of pretty much everybody on either side by doing that. So yeah.

Ashley Tibollo 20:42

How did you handle the quarantine orders in self isolation?

Janine Brown 20:50

I followed them pretty strictly I was. So my mom's nurse, she does home care. And towards the beginning months of the pandemic, she was actually tasked with going into patients houses who were diagnosed with COVID. So she was going in there, like, you know, herself, and she had her her protective gear and everything. But I remember, she did not tell me that she was doing that until after it was done. And then there was always the concern of what what happens if you accidentally brought something cool. And now we are here. So we had the quarantine, then we quarantine for a little bit after coming back from Florida. It was just like wearing masks everywhere. I still have my hand sanitizer and in my bag that I carry with me everywhere I go. And if I touch doors, or tables or chairs, I use it. Even though I'm fully vaccinated, and I don't have to wear a mask or Taekwondo, I still do every class. The only time I take it off is if I'm in the office with nobody else in there. So I think I follow them pretty, pretty religiously, for lack of a better word. Was I perfect? No, I still went to stores because Surprise, surprise, I am a human that I need. And I can't I can't just get things delivered. At least I don't know how to do that. But so like, yeah, I took it fairly seriously. My whole family did a pretty good job, I think, especially towards the beginning of taking it very seriously. And just making sure that we did what we were supposed to do. So if anything happened, we knew at least we did the best that we could do. And if something happens, it happens. Sure. It could it could. But I I knew that I couldn't do anything more other than lock myself away for everything.

Janine Brown 22:59

So yeah.

Ashley Tibollo 23:01

And has COVID-19 in the quarantine and lockdown is, is any of that changed your relationship with family or friends or community? And if so, in what ways?

Janine Brown 23:14

Yeah. Yeah. Like I said, I learned a lot about people. I learned a lot more than I wanted to about people. My political views do not align with that with those of my parents. So there was a lot of clashing going on. And it was hard. It's very tense a lot of the time. Because, and again, like I said, my family did a pretty good job at self isolating and doing what what we're supposed to do. But that doesn't mean that they liked it. So every day I had to hear about how how stupid the masks are, how they wish they'd

have to wear them anymore, how they don't think the virus is that bad. And that will probably be fine because we're healthy. And it's like okay, but it's not about us. You know, so that was a really big divider. And of course, politics got dragged into it. We are on I don't think we're on opposite ends of the political spectrum. But we are pretty close.

Janine Brown 24:20

So I had to hear a lot about, you know, our former president of the United States and how he said that it's not that big of a deal. So we should relax. When I knew that to not be true, based on what I have seen. So yeah, it was tense. It was not my favorite.

Ashley Tibollo 24:49

Did your grandmother's multiple battles with COVID-19 affects your family's views on it at all or not so much?

Janine Brown 24:56

If anything, it made it worse. In part because our family was not allowed into the nursing home. It's a secret. We were not allowed to visit. I think we got weekly video calls with her, where sometimes she would just be sleeping. So they said, Oh, we can't do it. And that was really hard, because her health was declining. Like I said she had to COVID twice. And the nursing home staff are the people who gave it to her. Because they're the ones they brought it into the nursing home. So they said, we're not allowed to visit her, because we might bring in COVID. But they are already bringing in COVID. So it's like, why are you keeping us out when you are already doing the things that you don't want us to? And it made things worse in that regard? Because it's like, well,

Ashley Tibollo 25:52

why?

Janine Brown 25:53

Why can't we see our relatives? And I understand that pain very much because she was my relative to.

Ashley Tibollo 26:00

Yeah, that must have been difficult.

Janine Brown 26:02

Yeah, it was, it wasn't great. Like I said, stressful year. But I think everybody has their own version of that story. where, you know, somebody, pretty much everybody I know, know, somebody who caught it, who was okay, who caught it, and then was not okay. So it did make it a little bit worse in that regard, because it just was a bunch of pent up frustration over, we have to follow all these rules, we have to do so much, because you said so but then your own staff doesn't apparently have to do those things. And she wasn't being taken care of the best of her ability, there is going to be a lawsuit about it. I'm not going to get into that now. But the way that it was handled was not great. And it just exacerbated the issues that were there at the beginning. Because it started out with being

Janine Brown 27:00

Oh, it sounds so bad. We'll isolate we'll get masks will sanitize and everything will be okay. To now we cannot see our family who is dying? Because you are killing her. Like that. That's what happens in their support. Like they did not take care of her properly. And so I think it just I think everybody just snapped a little bit.

Ashley Tibollo 27:27

So to be clear, the the problems. I mean, there obviously are problems with your grandmother related to COVID-19. But as though the lawsuit isn't necessarily that she got into COVID-19, but how she was treated, leading up right or during that time,

Janine Brown 27:45

right. So the lawsuit itself isn't about COVID-19. Because again, things happen. It's a very slippery virus that you know, it's contagious. It gets around very quickly. So at least me personally, and I can't speak for anybody else in my family. But I can't blame one, one or multiple people in the nursing home who might have accidentally brought it in. Because I don't know what happened for that to happen. It could have just been they didn't. I don't want to say they didn't sanitize maybe I don't know. But somehow it got in. I don't know how it happened. So it just is what it is the lawsuits more about the time that she was there. She was neglected to the points that she required extensive hospitalization, because of health problems that arose because they were not taking care of her anymore. Like she had a bed sore on her back that went all the way serve her bone. Because they they didn't do anything. And she was in so much pain and they left her there. So it's not all about COVID-19. It's just like, honestly, a small piece of the puzzle of the they weren't doing everything they should have been doing.

Ashley Tibollo 29:07

I'm sure it exacerbated the whole situation.

Janine Brown 29:10

The pull Yeah, definitely would have made her health, not up to where it could have been. You know, if she wasn't fighting it off twice, then her immune system could have been doing something else instead of being occupied. Right. But yeah, that's, that's the big thing.

Ashley Tibollo 29:30

I'm sorry that you had that experience and lost your grandmother ultimately. My final question is for you is knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals communities or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Janine Brown 29:51

I think they just know that they're not going to please everybody. Like, no matter what decision they make, somebody is going to be upset about something Whether it's because they just don't like the person in charge, like dummies don't like them, they don't agree with them, or because there are legitimate reasons, no matter what calls are made, somebody is going to be upset. And they need to know that that's okay. It's okay, if people are upset for a little bit if it means that the whole is protected. Because I mean, politics is a popularity contest. And everybody's so concerned about their image that they're putting, you know, regular people's lives on the line. Like we talked a little bit about the former

president. And he made his stances on the whole thing very clear, but he was one of the first people to get the vaccine came out. So it's very much the case of no matter what you do, somebody is going to be upset. So you need to just make a call stick to it. If it's the wrong one. It's the wrong one, you know, and that's, that's a price that you pay. It's one of the risk factors of being in charge. But I think people just need to understand that it's not all about it's not all about you. It's about everybody else. Which is what I think they could learn to my family, I think they could learn that. Again, it's not all about you. Just because you would be fine if you were sick, or because I would be fine if I was sick doesn't mean that our neighbor who is elderly is going to be fine. If she gets like, it's, I think it just is so selfish. So many people are so selfish, and I didn't realize how selfish they weren't until this happened. And it's like, oh, I don't want to be around you anymore. So I think that that's something everybody can learn. Everybody can take away is. You just have to you have to be there for people you don't know. You have to be willing to, to inconvenience yourself. If it means literally saving somebody else from going through that even if they don't die, even if they just get sick. Why do you want that to go through that? Like there's there's no reason for it. If all I have to do is wear a mask. I trained for hours at a time in a mask, and I was fine. Is it harder to breathe? Absolutely. But I was fine doing it. And I'll do it for as long as I have to if it means that I don't get anybody else sick. So that's, I don't know. Like I said humanity's not at like its peak right now. It's like a little bit. A little bit torn up.

Ashley Tibollo 32:46

Well, I thought that was a fantastic answer. I wish everyone could hear that message. Hopefully they will through this archive. Thank you very much for your time and your contribution to the archive. It is greatly appreciated.

Janine Brown 33:09

No problem.