

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Erika Groudle

Interviewee: Erika Groudle

Interviewer: Jason Inskeep

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Abstract: Erika Groudle is a resident of Monroe, Washington. She lives in a tiny house with her partner on her mother's property. In this oral history interview Erika discusses working with kids during the pandemic and her opinion on how they handle mask wearing. Additionally, Erika discusses her "pandemic garden," caring for her grandfather, staying connected to friends and family during the pandemic, how she first realized the pandemic was close to home, and the realities of living in a state that not only had the first case and death of COVID-19 in the United States of America, but also highly publicized protests in Seattle.

Jason Inskeep 00:03

Hello, today is May 4th, 2022. My name is Jason Inskeep and today I will be interviewing Erika about her experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am located in Chandler, Arizona, and then in a few minutes, we'll get where Erika is located. So, Erika, can you give us your full name and any other demographic data you feel comfortable giving us?

Erika Groudle 00:30

Sure. My name is Erika Groudle, and I live in Monroe, Washington. I'm 24 years old, and currently I am in between jobs. But in the summer, I'm going to start working with a summer camp. Work with some kids, I'm excited about that. That's all I can think of that's not gonna maybe bleed into answers.

Jason Inskeep 01:02

Okay. What are the primary things that you do on a day-to-day basis? I mean, could be jobs extra...you know, hobbies, activities, sports.

Erika Groudle 01:11

Yeah. I love cooking. I...now that we're getting into spring, starting my my pandemic garden again. Started that two summers ago 2020. And been doing that, every summer learning more and more every year. That's been a lot of fun. I'm excited for for that. For the next couple of months. I aside from school, I take care of my grandfather. And hang out with him a couple days a week.

Jason Inskeep 02:01

Very cool. So, you mentioned your job working with kids this summer? Is that something you have done past summers? Or has that changed or become something since the pandemic?

Erika Groudle 02:12

Yeah, last summer, I was in the same position. Um, so I'm looking forward to being able to continue that again this summer. It'd be pretty cool if got to see some of the same kids. Because you know, working with kids is always always fun, especially in more of a education, kind of, you know, it's it's sure it's summer, but it's a like science camp. Each week is different, you know, get to see some of the kids multiple times throughout the summer, it's always fun to watch them be able to grow. We're really lucky that we've been able to continue through through COVID. The first summer, the company that I worked for, didn't have any transmission cases, because they're really good about keeping the class sizes low. Having kids and adults wear their masks. So, they were able to social distance eating outside, because it's a full day camp. So, we do lunch and snack times. And then last summer, I don't think we had any transmissions or any cases and so really hoping for for year three of being able to make it through and have everybody be safe and happy.

Jason Inskeep 03:40

Did you, just a side question, did you see any difference between the first year and then last summer's kids like how they accepted or how they felt about the co, the pandemic or mask wearing? Or social distancing? Was it similar or different? Or?

Erika Groudle 03:57

I actually I didn't work there that first summer in 2020. But I did finish my student teaching. So, I did have some experience with kids in a different setting the year prior in 2020. And so being able to, you know, see kids on Zoom and hear their voiced opinions. It was a little bit of a different age group. But getting to hear them kind of move from the general consensus of being confused and concerned and, you know, not really understanding some of them the purpose of masking, right but and then seeing the overall consensus in the summer because it had kind of been more of a normal thing for them. Everybody was fine with it. You know, there was a couple of kids that like needed a reminder here and there. They took a sip of water right like oh, I have to I have to put it back on. But it wasn't the same kids, but you know, the general consensus and social knowledge that they had. I feel like it's kind of applicable in that, that transition, so.

Jason Inskeep 05:13

Alright, that's good. That's an interesting point of view. Thank you for that. And currently you, you said you live in Monroe, what do you...are you working currently? And is that something you've done before?

Erika Groudle 05:25

Yeah, currently, I am not working, I finished my last kind of job that I had. Actually, yesterday, I was working for ASU [Arizona State University], I was doing some writing tutoring, which was a lot of fun being able to see other students, especially myself being an online student. Getting to even just kind of briefly talk with, with other students and other people and do something I enjoy, which is talking about writing. That was fun. So, I've got a month break right now until I started working my summer job. So...

Jason Inskeep 06:06

Do you feel like that technology of however you talk to students; well, first of all, what was it was Zoom or like that, but how do you feel like that translated well, and, and helping people write?

Erika Groudle 06:17

Yeah, we did everything through Zoom. And, you know, continuously as Zoom, was still pushing out updates to make the platform better. It wasn't a huge barrier. Sometimes there was if, you know, somebody hadn't updated Zoom, or if maybe they had just any general kind of tech issues, and there was that barrier. So, there was kind of an aspect of like, almost, tech support.

Jason Inskeep 06:51

Right.

Erika Groudle 06:52

But, you know, being able to use like the annotate tool in Zoom and kind of underline and where I'm talking about was, was really helpful. And for the most part, it was decently easy to be able to communicate with with students. So...

Jason Inskeep 07:13

Do you feel because of that, that even though the pandemic is officially, per Dr. [Anthony] Fauci, over in America, there still is transmission danger, I guess? Do you feel safer doing online tutoring then in person, like, kid's classes, like you're talking about at the Science Center? Or are you just how do you I mean; how do you feel about that now and comparing those two jobs? Safety wise?

Erika Groudle 07:39

Um, I mean, I don't think we're making any changes safety wise, I think everybody is still going to be in masks and distance for my my work this summer. Which, you know, I think is good, especially for like kiddos who aren't old enough to be able to get vaccinated. But considering we have pretty good track record, I feel, you know, still pretty, pretty good and safe and confident that this summer is going to going to be okay. As for working with, like, college age students and stuff, since I don't live in Arizona, doing Zoom and online tutoring has just kind of been, you know, physically what works out for me. And I enjoy it, you know, I enjoy being able to wear sweatpants for work.

Jason Inskip 08:41

Awesome. So, you said you live, kind of switching gears a little bit, you said you lived in Monroe, Washington, which is somewhat close what within a half an hour or an hour of Seattle. So, what is it like to live there? Maybe before and after? Or? Or during the pandemic? If you could describe that?

Erika Groudle 09:02

Yeah, so it depends on on traffic, right, how how close we are. Um, some days, its half hour, some days might as well as be two hours and not go over. But it was a lot scarier, I guess, is the word that I can think to use. At the beginning, just because I know that we had, like, the first COVID case in the US and I think the first death from COVID in the US, at least. We were hit a lot harder at the beginning. So, there was a lot of uncertainty and confusion for everybody right in the US, everybody in the world at the beginning of all of this mess. But I think especially here, there was in some parts of the state, right, a more kind of push for mask wearing and social distancing and following all of the guidelines and rules more to a tee. Since we are in a little bit more of a liberal area. However, I will say there are pretty big pockets of people who push against that. I don't want to make the overgeneralization and say that we're perfect state or anything like that, or, you know, in regards to following guidelines. It was, I think definitely at the beginning, a lot of uncertainty. And now everybody has kind of settled into their opinion one way or the other of whatever it is that they have opinions on about the pandemic and how it has been handled or lived through or dealt with. So...

Jason Inskip 11:15

You bring up a good point that everybody's just kind of set in their opinions. Now, entrenched, I guess. I..being, I know you don't live in Seattle, but being so close to Seattle. Is there anything that other than during the COVID pandemic, there was the Capitol Hill occupied protest, CHOP, or CHAZ [Capitol Hill], Autonomous Zone. Did that cause any disruptions or fear to you where you live outside of Seattle? Or if it did, how did it affect you?

Erika Groudle 11:48

Yeah, um, I wouldn't say that it disrupted life necessarily, since we are, you know, a decent chunk outside of Seattle, especially because Seattle is so big. However, there was a lot of thoughts and opinions that were very vocally expressed about the protests, from you know, people I know, people, I've seen it on, like, community groups on Facebook kind of thing. One way, or the other, support or not. For everything that was going on during that time. I have a lot of friends who went down and participated in some of the protests. From all over the state, not just those who kind of live in this area. And some friends who were driving upwards of two hours, three hours to come. Because they felt that strongly about it. And during that same time, I was working on my student teaching to complete my secondary ed degree for my, my bachelor's. You know, I feel like I'm going back to kids, right, but seeing their thoughts and opinions and questions was, was really cool. I feel like people don't, don't give kids enough credit for the amount that they do pay attention and understand and want to ask questions. Especially because the school that I was working with was was virtual. And in that area, so there were

some kids who had gone to the protests, had parents who did, had family members who did...who were involved. You know, it was a lot of trying to teach, but also respect, and listen and encourage social awareness. You know, just even if they don't fully understand, like, the nuances, right of what's going on. Just trying to have a base of being able to see the world around them.

Jason Inskeep 14:45

That's a really good point of view. I...It's, it is important that we understand how kids are learning and what from the whole basically the culture sociological and how this learning from the protesting and the pandemic will affect our decisions in the future. So that's, that's very interesting info. Thank you. Just to kind of switch back to your perspective, like you talked about how, like Seattle in general or living in the area in the metro area or an hour outside, kind of what's going on, but how have your thoughts been affected? Like, how have your thoughts changed since you first heard about COVID-19? Or what were your thoughts? Initially? You talked about the first cases and the fear, but how have you how has your thought on the pandemic changed? Or evolved? I guess?

Erika Groudle 15:36

Yeah. So, you know, definitely started with a lot of uncertainty, anxiety, fear. I feel like I've kind of moved to the other side of the bell curve of that emotion. And hit my by peak, and slowly coming down from that level of anxiety, for lack of a better word. You know, I'm still paying attention and aware that its transmission cases have lowered significantly, but there still are cases in our area, and I guess, kind of everywhere. It's evolved a lot in terms of, of that fear. Now, I remember. And kind of, I guess, just the not understanding and lack of knowledge at the beginning, not only for me, but for everybody, right. The first time that I heard about it was actually in Costco. My dad called me and was like, "Hey, you should probably be aware, I don't know if you heard heard about this yet. But like, people are going to start freaking out. You know, we don't know what's going to happen. Try not to let yourself be too anxious about it." But of course, I'm a worrier by nature. So, of course, I was immediately anxious because of the lack of knowledge, right? "Like people are going to start probably panic buying because they're going to freak out." And I was quite literally in the middle of Costco watching people panic buy in that exact moment. I was like, "That explains why there's so many people here." The town that I was living in at the time, I actually had to move kind of towards the beginning of the pandemic. But the town I was living in was pretty close to the Canadian border. And so, there was a lot of Canadian license plates in the parking lot that day. Because, you know, people were unsure what was going to happen not sure if the border was going to close, which it did. So, there was no toilet paper.

Jason Inskeep 18:19

Yeah, we all that's like one of the biggest memories for everybody I think was at least adults trying to find toilet paper or whatever. It's amazing how that memory has jogged us. So, you talked about your dad calling you and kind of caught you and updated you and talk to you about the pandemic, has the pandemic outbreak or I guess how it has evolved in the last two years has that changed? How you are

affected, how you associate and communicate with your family or friends? And if so, what kind of ways has it changed?

Erika Groudle 18:48

Um, yeah, I mean like at the beginning before vaccines were readily available and before we kind of understood fully right everything definitely at the beginning a lot of following what everybody else was doing, moving to Zoom, doing what we were more in in lockdown doing what is it Netflix party, that like online plugin thing. Being able to like watch and stream movies together and do like talks on Discord and no pretend there was some semblance of of normalcy. Trying to social distance and not be around people as much, wearing masks when we were. Kind of the same moves as a majority of people and I'm following what we were we were supposed to be doing to keep everybody safe. Once kind of vaccines rolled out, I was very excited to get vaccinated. [Redacted] I went down the first day that vaccines were available for my age group or I guess, not even age group, whatever the phase was called, got vaccinated that that first day was very, very excited about it. Very relieved. And so, once that happened, and more of our social group, you know, whoever that may be right, was, was vaccinated, we were able to kind of feel more comfortable. Not necessarily like, going out and doing stuff, that stuff was still, you know, half closed, right, but like, having barbecues in our yard kind of thing. So definitely the evolvement of what we were supposed to be doing so.

Jason Inskeep 21:05

And you said, you currently take care of your grandfather, one to a couple days a week? Has it always been that way? I mean, in the last two years, did that, did that change? Or? I guess, could you summarize that experience, during the trying to, you know, keep him healthy and be helpful and taking care of him during the pandemic?

Erika Groudle 21:28

Yeah, that I mean, there's definitely, like everything else, right, like been evolving things as new information as you know, new guidelines, right? Started out a lot. It's like, trying to limit my grandparent's exposure, my grandfather and grandmother lived together. And so, running errands for them, you know, picking up prescriptions, going grocery store, that kind of thing. Not necessarily doing a lot of like, kind of in home physical health, but more just social help. And, you know, did towards the beginning, that was that was that and as [redacted] and things have been been evolved, right, and being able to, you know, progressed, like being able to do stuff and wear masks around them, and, and now, you know, being able to do in home, help more and support my grandmother, with some of my, my grandfather's health stuff. So, now, it's, it's, I guess, evolved in that way.

Jason Inskeep 22:57

That's, I mean, in my opinion, it's cool that you have some more quality time, maybe now that you're helping out more than before? If that's the case, I mean, it's always good to have more quality time with grandparents.

Erika Groudle 23:07

Yeah.

Jason Inskeep 23:10

How did people around you, and you don't have to get too in depth if you're not comfortable, how did they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic? Meaning with activities, hobbies or any other ways? How did they respond? And that could be like I said, friends or family, or partner.

Erika Groudle 23:32

Yeah, um, let's say my mom and my grandmother and my grandfather all had a medical career in different aspects. You know, obviously, my grandmother's retired, so is my grandfather, but my mom still works in the healthcare field. That's as specific I'll get about that. Um, so they were a little bit more I don't know in in tune in that way. So definitely listening to them on on the little bit more ahead of the curve on distancing and mask wearing and in that aspect. I know the mask mandate has kind of been lifted in our area, but in order to continue to still help and be safe around my grandparents, still wear masks, in public, big, crowded areas kind of thing. And pretty much that has been the general consensus with other people in my life. So.

Jason Inskeep 24:45

That's good that you have a consensus, because some people have family or friends that are on totally different sides of the news or opinion of PPE or whatever during during the pandemic. So, what are...what were the biggest challenges that you faced during the pandemic?

Erika Groudle 25:08

Yeah, the first kind of challenge was having to move right at the beginning of it. Kind of had to leave where, where we were living. And went from living with one of my, one of my best friends to moving to a small space. My partner and I live in a tiny house on a shared property with my mom. She doesn't live in the tiny house, she lives in her house, on the shared property. Just to be clear, it's not not everybody in in the tiny house. So, we share my my partner and I 300 square feet, which is quite small. She works from home, my mom works from home, so they go and work in, er my partner goes to work in my mom's house during the day. So, it's not as smushed in here all the time. That was kind of the biggest challenge was having both of our stuff and lives. But in a small space, we've made it work, we've over the last two years found new ways to store things and keep everything tidy, in such a small space.

Jason Inskeep 26:33

That's interesting, because I complained about the pandemic having 1200 square feet. And now I have no right to complain. I've always been interested in tiny houses so we'll talk about that in a different day. Because it's interesting to live in that and watch TV shows on and everything so. So, the challenge was just basically being in tight spaces with someone you love. And I'm sure it's hard not to get on each other's nerves in certain ways. So, that's kind of a question, I felt listening to this, is there anything

specific to you, whether it be personality, cultural, anything about you that you feel that the pandemic really affected? I mean, you mentioned anxiety earlier, you know, you don't have to talk about that if you don't want to, but anything like that, that really engaged you in a positive or negative way.

Erika Groudle 27:21

Good question, um, because of who I am, as worrier, you know, trying to, I definitely fell victim to the, I have to pay attention to the 24/7 media cycle. I've gotten a lot better about that. I spend a lot less time trying to watch and absorb every single detail of every single thing. Because it was driving me nuts. That was kind of a big shift. I've always tried to be aware of what was going on in the world around me, I feel that it's important to be a involved, engaged person in society. But it definitely ramped up. And now I'm trying to not do that. So...

Jason Inskeep 28:28

So...so, for the last question, is there anything that you want to talk about that we didn't talk about? Or is there anything that you want to just put out there that you think that individuals or communities or governments need to mind in the future?

Erika Groudle 28:45

I love the future idea there. I would just love it if we could, as a whole, learn from this experience, and try to remember the good and bad parts of the steps that were taken. Kind of in the greater sphere, right? There's only so much that you and I could do right, but people in power. Hopefully they will remember and reflect on the things that have happened. So that, you know, God forbid, something like this ever happens again, really hope it doesn't. Not even a pandemic, which is kind of a global issue, right. Like, let's try to learn from this. Will we? Who knows?

Jason Inskeep 29:42

Is there anything that you feel like you didn't get a chance to talk about that you want to air out or do you feel like we discussed everything you wanted to know?

Erika Groudle 29:51

No, I feel content. Thank you.

Jason Inskeep 29:52

Good. Okay. Well, thank you Erika, for your time. I appreciate it. And I will discuss this with you later when it's all the transcripts all done, but I appreciate your time today thank you very much.

Erika Groudle 30:05

Thank you, Jason.

Jason Inskip 30:07
All right thanks.