

**Interviewee:** Anna Buss

**Interviewer:** Haley King

**Date:** December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Format:** Video recording, Zoom

**Location of interview:** Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Transcriber:** Haley King

**Additional Transcription Equipment used:** Otter.ai

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**Abstract:**

In this interview, Anna Buss, who is a student at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, discusses her experiences being a student with a chronic illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anna transferred to Eau Claire in her third year of college and shares her experience adjusting to the new school. She also talks about how the pandemic made her change her major, which was originally nursing, to graphic design.

**Haley King 00:03**

Okay, my name is Haley King, and I'm conducting an oral history interview as part of an effort to archive the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, on individuals and communities in the Midwest, both for the Western Wisconsin COVID-19 archive and the Journal of the Plague Year COVID-19 archive. Today is Tuesday, December 14, 2021, at 10:40am. Currently, there are 49 million cases of COVID-19 and 773,000 deaths from COVID-19 in the United States. And in Wisconsin, there have been 958,000 cases and 9000 deaths. Nearly 60% of Wisconsinites are fully vaccinated. And today I will be interviewing Anna Buss who is a student at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. Anna, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to share your experiences with us. We really appreciate it.

**Anna Buss 00:58**

Yes, of course.

**HK 01:00**

Yes. Okay. So if you could just start off, um, do you mind sharing some demographic information um for the study? So your race, ethnicity, age, gender?

**AB 01:10**

Okay. Okay, so I'm white, I'm 21. I'm a female.

**HK 01:19**

Perfect. That's all I needed. And what are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis? For example, your job, your extracurricular activities, etc, schoolwork? You know,

**AB 01:30**

I'm a student, so I go to class, and that's about it at the moment.

**HK 01:37**

Perfect. Um, so if you're comfortable sharing the information, where do you live and what is it like to live there?

**AB 01:44**

I live in Aspenson [Student Housing in Eau Claire]. And it is great living here. It's very a nice place, and it's really close to campus.

**HK 01:53**

Perfect. Um, so when you first learned about COVID-19? What were your initial thoughts about it? And how have your thoughts changed since then?

**AB 02:02**

Um, when I first learned about it, I was like, afraid of it. And just concerned about like, catching it, like, and all that. And I would say that my thoughts haven't really changed. I'm still afraid of getting it. So.

**HK 02:20**

Yeah. I get that. So, um, what issues have most concerned you about the COVID 19 pandemic?

**AB 02:30**

Um, I would say, the like, how some people are afraid to get vaccinated and all of that, and how, like, at the start of it, people weren't really taking the quarantine seriously. And people were throwing a fit about the masks. So that was kind of annoying.

**HK 02:51**

Yeah. [Laughs] I get that. Um, so when thinking about this project, I felt like you were a unique perspective on the impacts of the pandemic for two reasons. The first being you are a transfer student this year, and also you were diagnosed with a chronic illness. So to start things off, could you tell us a bit about the school you were previously at and your decision to transfer to Eau Claire?

**AB 03:11**

Okay, so, um, I was at Carroll University. It's down in Waukesha [Wisconsin], it's a private school, it's really small. Um, and I guess throughout my whole freshman year, I was kind of like, oh, I don't really like it here. Like, it's not good. And then we got sent home in March. And I was like, wow, I really hate being at school, when I got sent home because I was much happier at home. And then I was also a nursing major at that point. So I, the next year, I was like, Oh, I'll switch majors. See if I just hated it, because I was a nursing major, and I didn't like that. So then I did. And I still hated it there. Um, and then I just kind of transferred during the fall semester, not fall semester, after the fall semester there. So

**HK 04:09**

Alright, interesting! Um, so you mentioned you were a nursing major, do you think the pandemic had any impact on changing your major from nursing to well, what are you currently now?

**AB 04:20**

Graphic Design.

**HK 04:21**

Graphic Design? Okay. Yeah. So what do you think the pandemic had any impact on that, like seeing how the pandemic was affecting healthcare workers? Do you think it had any effect on changing your major at all? Or do you think you were just unhappy in it?

**AB 04:35**

It definitely played some effect, just because, um, I had like a friend who was a year ahead of me in nursing school, so she was doing clinicals and all of that. So she was going to get placed on like a COVID unit for clinicals. And I was like, no, I don't want to do that because I was afraid of, like getting COVID so that was definitely part of it. And then also with like, how supplies were running low in all of the hospitals and stuff. It just seemed like too, too much stress that I didn't want to do that.

**HK 05:14**

Yeah, I understand. I think that's a totally reasonable thing. Do you think you would have transferred schools if COVID never happened? Why or why not?

**AB 05:24**

Um, I actually don't think I would have. And I don't think I would have changed majors if COVID didn't happen. I think getting sent home at that one point, that's like, the week before, I was like, so unhappy at school that I was relieved that we were getting sent home. And that's kind of when I was like, oh, like, I need to transfer. So yeah, I think COVID definitely played a part in me transferring.

**HK 05:54**

Yeah. And would you say you like it better at Eau Claire than you did at your previous college, Carroll?

**AB 06:00**

Yes.

**HK 06:01**

Okay, perfect. I'm glad, I'm happy for that, I have you are feeling better. Um, so for many college students, I know that social life is a big aspect of the college experience. So being a transfer student in the middle of pandemic, how has that affected your social life? How have you like,

found ways to make friends during it, because I know there's not as many social, like, get together. Like when I was a freshman, obviously, we had things every single night. And I know they offer some things for transfer students, but if you're just kind of want to go into that, how you were able to make friends and how all that went down.

**AB 06:37**

it's definitely harder to make friends. But I think, because I'm in art classes, like you have to collaborate a lot more and like talk to the people around you. So I think just like being in those types of classes, I was able to make some friends and then also living with some people I already know, I'm able to meet their friends and just all of that. So that's what I've been doing.

**HK 07:02**

Yeah, good. So when coming to Eau Claire, it was obviously a bigger school than you were previously at. Did that concern you at all for like health concerns or anything? Just because you would be surrounded by more people.

**AB 07:15**

Um, no, it didn't just because I knew that like my class sizes were still going to be about the same as they were at Carroll. And I was actually looking for a bigger school because how small Carroll was drove me insane.

**HK 07:29**

Yeah. Good. Okay. So kind of switching gears here. Now, into the other aspect of why I felt you'd be really interesting person to interview. I know that in the beginning of this school year, you were diagn- diagnosed with a chronic illness. Um, could you just tell us a bit more about your illness, and just what it is how it affects your day-to-day life?

**AB 07:53**

Okay, so I have Crohn's disease, so it's when my immune system is like, overactive. And it like attacks um, the lining of my digestive system. So like, in my stomach, my large intestine, and colon. So that leads to like, a lot of discomfort and like pain, and I have to go to the bathroom a lot. So yeah [both laugh]. And then it affects my day-to-day life, just kind of like, at the beginning of the year before I was diagnosed, it was really hard to like, go to class because I was in so much pain. And it was like, um, like disheartening, because I didn't know what was wrong with me. So it was kind of like, oh, like, what's going on?

**HK 08:37**

Yeah,

**AB 08:39**

It was not a fun time. And then other than that Crohn's disease affects my diet a lot, because I eat a lot of things. So sometimes that gets annoying, but

**HK 08:51**

[Inaudible] Yeah, I'm really sorry about that happened to you. That is a horrible thing. I also, you know, have a chronic illness as well. And you know, it's, it's not fun. Um, so, um, so getting diagnosed during a pandemic, do you think that added extra concerns for you, health wise?

**AB 09:13**

Um, yes, just because, um, the medication that I have to take lowers my immune system, so that makes me nervous. But I think that's about the only thing.

**HK 09:28**

Yeah, I get that I'm the same way. We've talked about this before we're on the same medication. So it is it's a really scary thing, because you never know if you're going to catch it or not. Um, so. So how do you manage being a full-time student during a pandemic as well as dealing with these health issues and do you feel like the like helped or hindered or helped or hindered your ability due to, like, be educated. So I guess in a sense, like, I know for me, I kind of felt like the pandemic was somewhat a good thing because I was able to, like do online classes when I wasn't feeling good. I didn't know if you had those same experiences.

**AB 10:13**

Yeah, I definitely have. I think, well, now it's a little different, just because art student, and like everything we do is like hands on. But, um, my professors are really accommodating. And they'll kind of be like, this is what we did, this is what you should do to like, not fall behind, and they'll like, they're willing to meet with me and all of that. So that's been good. Otherwise, I think, like the pandemic, kind of the option for online class, because a lot of professors like record their class now, just in case. So I think that's like a good thing. And it makes me less nervous about missing class. So.

**HK 10:56**

Okay, good. Um, so how do you feel like has the pandemic affected your mental health at all? And how do you practice self care to try to like, ground yourself, and, you know, make sure you're taking care of your mental health as well as physical health.

**AB 11:12**

Um, I think, I feel like for me, the like combination of the pandemic, and then getting diagnosed is what affected my mental health just because, um, during the summer, and all of that, it was like, really bad. So it was just, like, every day, it was just kind of like, oh, like, this is my life now. Um, but I would say, in order to, like, manage my stress about that, I love to crochet, very fun, very stress relieving. And then I do enjoy, like my coursework, like I, I love doing my assignments, because they're fun. So that's fun. And then I like to play guitar here with my roommates.

**HK 12:01**

So fun. [Laughs} Um, so I know, you mentioned the summer and just knowing background information on you, we used to be coworkers. So could you kind of tell us a little bit about how both the pandemic and being diagnosed with Crohn's disease affected your employment status, your jobs?

**AB 12:22**

Um, so, Well, now I work at Walmart. Um, and I would say, like, my managers there are a lot more caring than they were when we worked together. Um, so I think, like, I did have to call out of work a few times, because I felt so bad and like, I feel like some days I was working too slow, and all of that, because I felt so terrible. But, um, like, whenever I called out my managers were really understanding and like, the next time I was at work, they'd be like, are you okay, so? That's kind of maybe easier, but I will say, like, when I go back for, like, working over break, I am a bit nervous, just because now that I know that I have Crohn's, I'm like, Oh, my God. Like, what if I have an emergency during work?

**HK 13:18**

Yeah. Um, and so going back to your Crohn's, and I know you mentioned going home. Um, so how would you say Crohn's has affected - has Crohn's affected your life at home at all? Like seeing family members? Or just seeing your friends and you go home and visit for break? Have you gotten nervous with that at all?

**AB 13:37**

Yeah, I'm for like, family holidays. Um, I get really stressed out just because not everyone in my family even knows. So like, for Thanksgiving, it was kind of like, it was not fun. because I couldn't eat what other people were eating. So Chris-, I'm assuming Christmas is gonna be about the same. And then as far as friend wise goes, I mean, it's just, it's harder to like, get together at like, a restaurant or something. I can't really do that. Um, but I can still, like get together with friends and like, do things.

**HK 14:18**

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Um, so obviously, during the pandemic of vaccine has kind of been a hot topic. So when you first heard about the vaccine, kind of what were your thoughts on it? Were you like willing to get it? Was it a good idea for you? You know,

**AB 14:35**

um, I would say, like, when I very first heard about it, I was like, a little skeptical. But now with like, all the information and like, how it's FDA approved, I was like, willing to get it like, pretty quick. I would say so.

**HK 14:53**

Yeah, that's good. I'm glad. So um, have you seen the pandemic transform like the community around you? Well obviously, you probably have seen it transform communities around you. Um,

do you - er - Could you just tell us how you've seen it affect probably like the college communities around you?

**AB 15:18**

Yeah, I think, um, the pandemic just really kind of affects, like a lot of, obviously, the students, it's like, it's very hard, especially for the freshmen I feel to, like, make that transition into college while this is happening, because it's kind of like, like resources that they need, like, like counseling, or something like that, like, it's so full, because everyone is feeling this. And then also, like, they might not be able to get like that in person type of like, meeting, you know, so I feel like that's probably hard for them. And then with like, I think Eau Claire does like a pretty good job with still having events, but obviously, there's not as much. So I think it's really just, people are more they keep to themselves more, because there's not like an opportunity to meet someone.

**HK 16:12**

Yeah, um, so I Okay, I am on the last question already. Um, so knowing what you now know, now, if you could tell people watching this in the future? Um, what do you like? What would you say individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

**AB 16:35**

Um, I would say that we shouldn't politicize a pandemic. Um, I think that we should be listening to like the health professionals and scientists with like, how to go about this. And I think that everyone could just benefit from being a little bit kinder to each other. So

**HK 17:00**

yeah. Okay. Well, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to do this interview. I know you have to get to class soon as well. Um, but just I really appreciate it. The project thanks you so much, and I hope you have a great rest of your day. Thank you.

**AB 17:15**

Thank you!