

Transcript of Interview with Rachel Bryan by Zoe Vorndran

Interviewee: Rachel Bryan

Interviewer: Zoe Vorndran

Date: 03/23/2021

Location (Interviewee): Wexford, Ireland

Location (Interviewer): Indianapolis, Indiana

Abstract: Zoe Vorndran interviews Rachel Bryan on the impact that COVID-19 had on her personal and school life. Rachel also shares her perspective of what life was like in Ireland during COVID-19.

Zoe Vorndran 0:01

Alrighty, so we are recording right now. My name is Zoe Vorndran, and I'm here with Rachel Bryan. It is 2:30 p.m. on March 23rd, 2021. I am in Indianapolis and Rachel is in Ireland and this interview is being held via Zoom. So, Rachel, thank you so much for taking your time to talk about your experience of COVID.

Rachel Bryan 0:27

Thank you for having me.

Zoe Vorndran 0:28

Yeah! Before I begin, I would briefly like to review the consent and deed of gift form that you signed. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving lived experiences of the COVID-19 epidemic. And this project was designed for professional researchers and the public to create and upload their oral histories to our open-source database. The study will help us to collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19, as well as help us to understand the impact of the pandemic over time. These recordings, demographic information, and the transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive and the Indiana University Library System for researchers and the public. Do you have any questions about the project thus far?

Rachel Bryan 1:20

No, everything is good. Thank you.

Zoe Vorndran 1:23

Okay. So taking part in the study is voluntary, which means that you may choose to take part or leave the study at any time without any penalty to your current or future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview is being recorded and transcribed, and that these recordings and transcriptions will be deposited to the Journal of the Plague Year and Indiana University's library system. Your name will not be confidential. Do you have questions so far?

Rachel Bryan 1:59

Everything's good. Thanks.

Zoe Vorndran 2:02

In addition to signing the documents, will you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Rachel Bryan 2:10

Yes, I understand everything, and I agree to the terms.

Zoe Vorndran 2:15

And then I'm also going to ask you to verbally confirm that you agree to your interview being made available under the licenses, which I will read really quickly. So the first license is a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial, ShareALink for 4.0 International license. And then the second license grants permissions to the research and archiving teams associated with the COVID-19 oral history project, the Journal of the Plague Year and Indiana University to allow them to have the rights to reproduce, use, exhibit, display, perform, broadcast, create derivative works from, and distribute the oral history of materials in any manner or media existing now or developed later. You are also agreeing that the oral history materials may be used by the Voices from the Waterways at IU for any purpose, including, but not limited to marketing, advertising and publicity. And then you agree that IU will have final editorial authority over the use of the oral history materials. And you waive your right to inspect or approve of any future use of the oral history.

Rachel Bryan 3:24

Okay. Yes, so I agree to all of that. Thank you.

Zoe Vorndran 3:30

Okay, and lastly, I just want to get another verbal confirmation that you agree to make your interview available to the public immediately after this interview.

Rachel Bryan 3:40

Yeah, that's fine.

Zoe Vorndran 3:41

Wonderful! Okay. So, this is where the really exciting part comes in. So, could you just tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're from and what you're doing.

Rachel Bryan 3:53

Sure, so my name is Rachel Bryan. I'm currently living in Ireland, and I'm living in Wexford town. At the moment I'm studying at university, so I'm studying German and Psychology as a

double-major, and due to the COVID-19 I'm currently studying from home, and I'm in my final year of my undergrad.

Zoe Vorndran 4:16

And you're studying at Maynooth University?

Rachel Bryan 4:18

Yep. Correct.

Zoe Vorndran 4:20

Wonderful. So how do you think Maynooth University has handled the COVID-19 pandemic? Have there have been any regulations or changes to your schooling?

Rachel Bryan 4:32

That's an interesting question. First of all, actually for the first semester we had a few weeks where we had in-person lectures. So, I know that there was social distancing, so everyone had to say about two meters apart and everyone had to wear masks during the lectures. I believe that carried on for approximately five weeks, and we had lectures just for German because there were far fewer students, but for psychology everything was online. I found very quickly that once the number of cases were going up, they quickly moved to online teaching, and that's been the case ever since. I believe that was in September. I believe there were physical lectures for approximately five weeks or so, and then after that everything was online.

Zoe Vorndran 5:26

Wow, so how do you think- do you think that online learning has affected your studies or your peer's studies?

Rachel Bryan 5:37

In some ways, yes. I think for languages in particular, I think classroom engagement is very important, and I think that's been quite impaired quite a bit by the pandemic. What I feel is that there's sometimes a tendency for people to possibly be more passive during lectures online as opposed to in-person. And maybe it might be more difficult to have accountability as well because everything is being conducted online. I do think though there are some advantages. It's a lot easier to review materials, and I have to say that it's a new experience, but I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. I think good things have come from the pandemic as well, paradoxically.

Zoe Vorndran 6:22

Yeah. Do you think it's been difficult to adjust to online, especially since you started out in person?

Rachel Bryan 6:32

Well, I forgot to mention this, but previously I had worked in Germany, and as a cautionary measure, they shut down the school, so they were conducting online teaching. So it was a format that was already familiar to me, but I can imagine it was maybe disheartening for students who hadn't had that experience yet. I think for the most part I've been okay, but for a lot of students, I think it's been quite a challenging year.

Zoe Vorndran 7:00

Yeah, yeah. How do you- have you been able to contact fellow classmates or do you have an understanding of how they're dealing with the pandemic?

Rachel Bryan 7:12

We do have a group chat, but I suppose while we might discuss the pandemic very generally, I think in terms of the emotional aspects that might be more slow, more so restricted to friends, I suppose. We kind of just acknowledge that this is just the way things are and there's no discussion regarding the past or anything like that.

Zoe Vorndran 7:35

Yeah. I imagine that distance is very difficult for-

Rachel Bryan 7:40

Hmm.

Zoe Vorndran 7:43

So you mentioned that you were in Germany and that was when COVID first sort of started hitting Europe?

Rachel Bryan 7:53

Yeah, you're correct. Yeah, so I think believe that was around March.

Zoe Vorndran 7:58

Mm hmm.

Rachel Bryan 7:58

I could be mistaken.

Zoe Vorndran 7:59

Oh, no, I think you're probably right about that. So what was that like? How was the transition? How was living in Germany before and after COVID started to hit?

Rachel Bryan 8:13

This is actually quite an interesting question for me. I think it was declared a global pandemic in March, but I feel like it might have taken Germany awhile to kind of adapt to the

circumstances. Now I imagine this was a case in a lot of countries where I suppose there was recognition that there was a pandemic, but it took a while for social etiquette to kick in and for people to adapt to the abrupt changes. I think it was complete- almost like culture shock, essentially, trying to adapt to wearing masks and so on. I notice as well in supermarkets in Germany, so when I was going shopping that sometimes they'd request customers, when it was possible, to use credit cards or other indirect methods of payment rather than cash to help minimize the transmission of the virus, which I thought was interesting.

Zoe Vorndran 9:04

Yeah, was it strict at first or did it become stricter?

Rachel Bryan 9:12

Quite honestly, I think possibly language barriers may have played a role here, but I think quite frankly, I didn't notice many people wearing masks at first, but this is very preliminary as in the first few days it was declared a pandemic. I think there are rapid changes once I left the country, quite honestly.

Zoe Vorndran 9:32

And how was the transition to move back from Germany to Ireland?

Rachel Bryan 9:39

I found that with- when traveling by plane, obviously it was mandatory to wear masks, which I was quite relieved about, but quite frankly it only really hit me, the impact of coronavirus, when I actually went back to Ireland, to my hometown. Maybe it was the time of day, but honestly it was a surreal experience seeing everything closed and just how apprehensive my parents were in particular. Honestly, it felt like an apocalyptic film. I don't know why it took so long for it to hit, but I think it suddenly became very real when it's within your own home environment and everything you knew and were familiar with.

Zoe Vorndran 10:23

Yeah, absolutely. So did you see a difference between the way that the German and the Irish governments handled the COVID-19 crisis?

Rachel Bryan 10:39

I think partially, I would have kept up with German newspaper while I was in Germany. I would've read articles on my phone. I have to say there weren't many differences that I could perceive initially, so I don't think I'm the best person to comment on that because of the language barrier. But I can more so speak for Irish experiences, I think.

Zoe Vorndran 11:03

Yeah, absolutely. So were you at Maynooth at all or did you come from Germany and then you didn't go to Maynooth?

Rachel Bryan 11:19

So at the time I'd been working in Germany, so I'd been working remotely from approximately March to May with the school in Germany, and then there were the summer holidays. Then for Maynooth, I was there for about five weeks and then from that point forward, everything was online.

Zoe Vorndran 11:38

Okay, so having lived or been in both Wexford where you're at now and Maynooth, do you think that the communities have dealt with the pandemic differently?

Rachel Bryan 11:55

Mainly I probably could only speak for Wexford. I found that when I was in Maynooth, there were very strict rules regarding, I suppose, shared spaces, so I mostly would've kept to myself. I wouldn't be too familiar with the community in Maynooth quite rightly, so I wouldn't have noticed anything too different, I believe.

Zoe Vorndran 12:17

Yeah, and Wexford, is that a rural area? Urban?

Rachel Bryan 12:24

Well, I suppose I, more or less, live very close to the town, just a few minutes' walk. I think the population is approximately 20,000 people, so I suppose you could describe it as urban. Yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 12:40

Mhmm. Yeah. How have you seen changes in the way that people have conducted maybe their daily lives because of COVID-19?

Rachel Bryan 12:57

I suppose I could talk about it on a macro level. I suppose depending on what measures the government implemented, I found that people's behavior changed accordingly, but in general, I think a lot of people have adapted to wearing masks. Now, it's usually, I'd say a lot of people wear masks, but there is some apprehension about it. I believe it's mandatory to wear them in shops now, but I think it took a while for that transition to occur for people to actually wear one.

Zoe Vorndran 13:28

Yeah, so has the government limited or restricted mobility in Ireland?

Rachel Bryan 13:42

It has, yup. I believe when the first lockdown in Ireland was announced, I believe you could only travel approximately two kilometers away from your house and that was only for essential purposes. I believe they extended it to five kilometers since then, but mobility has been restricted a lot, and I believe capacity on public transport has also been reduced as well. And also, I find as

well, I think almost all, yeah, for the entirety of the lockdown, I think bar one or two exceptions, there has been a huge limit on social gatherings as well. So it's not possible to visit people's houses. I think weddings and funerals are also very heavily restricted. I think religious services are entirely online and so on. So there have been a lot of changes to life as we know it.

Zoe Vorndran 14:42

Yeah. I think everybody has experienced that in some way.

Rachel Bryan 14:44

Yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 14:48

Yeah, you mentioned transportation has been severely affected and I imagine that public transportation in Ireland is way different. I mean, I guess maybe that's a way that the government could regulate?

Zoe Vorndran 15:05

[unintelligible] ...limitations

Rachel Bryan 15:03

True, yeah. I forgot to mention that as well, but on buses and trains, it was, it was mandatory to wear masks as well. Actually, I believe when I was coming home from the airport – this is just a personal anecdote – but I remember the bus driver wearing a mask and there was a man that was approaching him not wearing a mask, and he seemed very distressed, the bus driver I mean, and he was telling the customer like, “Please, keep your distance. Please wear a mask.” And I think just that interaction, just seeing that, made me realize how serious the entire situation was. How it was affecting people and causing a lot of stress for people in their daily lives. And I can totally understand his fears, and quite frankly, I was amazed that buses were still running. I assumed the worse. Also with trains as well, I believe it's not possible to sit, the seating capacity has been reduced, so they had little, not banners, but I suppose they had signs on each of the seats so you couldn't sit beside anyone. So it was a lot more difficult, I suppose. It was a lot easier, I suppose, to maintain distance because that was implemented physically.

Zoe Vorndran 16:23

Yeah, absolutely. Yes, so you sort of mentioned this when you were talking, but you first learned about COVID and what were your initial thoughts and maybe have they changed since then?

Rachel Bryan 16:38

I'm a little bit ashamed to admit this, but I think it took me a while for me to fully appreciate just how severe the situation was. I think it was completely unprecedented and I think almost I was in denial. Not that I didn't comply with the regulations, I tried my best from the very beginning, but I think it really took a while for it to hit home and for me to realize that the pandemic

wasn't going to go away anytime soon. I think it was a very visceral experience when that realization finally kicked in.

Zoe Vorndran 17:15

Yeah, sure. I mean, I think that was a huge shift and everybody's mindset.

Rachel Bryan 17:24

I think as well it's completely- I've mentioned before that almost everyone currently alive has probably never experienced a global pandemic of this measure, I believe it's completely new to everyone, so honestly, it was just probably incomprehensible, honestly.

Zoe Vorndran 17:45

Yeah, absolutely. And perhaps that's maybe why things were slowly implemented. Do you have any thoughts on how your local or national leaders have been responding to this crisis so far?

Rachel Bryan 18:01

That's an interesting question. Now that I think about it, around this time for St. Patrick's Day last year, the Taoiseach – the prime minister of Ireland – made a public declaration, which is quite interesting because they very rarely have announcements on TV; it's usually only for something very serious. So he was urging everyone to stay at home. What I find interesting about his declaration, as opposed to other world leaders, was how he refrained from using the word lockdown and he focused more on cooperation, on maintaining a positive outlook, which I thought was interesting to contrast to other people in similar positions of power.

Zoe Vorndran 18:44

Yeah, that's an interesting observation. So I think in our, I don't know, our vernacular or vocabulary, isolation and like, the term isolation has become a huge term that people have sort of gravitated towards. Do you think that having these words like isolation and social distancing has affected the way that communities interact? And do you think maybe there's an emotional change in the way that people have interacted?

Rachel Bryan 19:26

A little bit, I mean, I think inherently we're social creatures, and I think the idea of isolation or keeping distance socially can be very upsetting to a lot of individuals, but I'd also argue as well that it can be helpful to have vernacular terms that everyone can understand. I've noticed that we've adopted very quickly to new terminology and it's been used more frequently. I think it's very useful to have common words that we could use in the discourse regarding the pandemic. But in terms of day-to-day occurrences, yeah, I've noticed that these terms would be used very frequently.

Zoe Vorndran 20:04

Yeah. So, maybe we'll talk a little bit about mental and emotional health. Do you think there have been ways in which COVID-19 has been affecting people's overall mental and even physical health?

Rachel Bryan 20:24

That's a good question. I think in terms of physical health, I suppose we have less opportunities to exercise. I know it's still technically viable, but at first it might have been difficult for people in Ireland to adapt to the two kilometer rule and exercising within those strict boundaries. I think, as well, I've heard from personal anecdotes and online by people with gym memberships, and I think that would have been quite difficult for them as well. Even if they had very robust and rigorous routine, I think that COVID may have very quickly dismantle that. I mean, the choice was taken out of their hands, so I think in terms of physical health, it has definitely been a detriment in that respect.

And then in terms of emotional health, I think mainly I believe the isolation might be huge factor and, as well, I believe it's affected a lot of sleep routines as well. People don't have the same routines that they used to have prior to COVID.

Zoe Vorndran 21:22

Sure. I had not even considered that. Going back to – sorry, we're going to go back little bit – you were talking about St. Patrick's Day last year and the way that, that has affected that celebration or whatnot and how, you know, your leader addressed that. How did you feel about that situation? Was there [audio cuts out] ...do you understand the community's sentiment about the St. Patrick's Day Parade being canceled?

Rachel Bryan 22:00

I heard most of that question. So you were asking about the sentiment around St. Patrick's Day and maybe in response to the leader as well, just to confirm?

Zoe Vorndran 22:09

Yes.

Rachel Bryan 22:11

Okay. Okay, for me in terms of the emotional impact, I think it was refreshing to see someone in a higher power acknowledging the pandemic and the effect it has been having on people. I think when an official figure makes public declarations, I think it draws a lot of attention to the issue, and I think that was absolutely necessary. I think it was a very- I don't want call it enlightening, but I just remember how transfixed both my parents and I were when the announcement hit. I mean, normally I wouldn't be very invested in current affairs, but I remember being completely transfixed by the entire experience and waiting anxiously for the Taoiseach to appear on the screen. In terms of the St. Patrick's Day celebrations, I think it definitely would have hit Irish people very, yeah, it would've been very detrimental. I think for a lot of people, they have a lot of nationalistic pride, and I think it would have been very difficult

to stay at home when it's all about celebration. And I suppose with the Irish drinking culture, I think people missed going to the pubs and whatnot and the parade celebrations.

Zoe Vorndran 23:27

I can see why that would be. Do you think that COVID has made you more aware of global or international events or leaders?

Rachel Bryan 23:38

Most definitely because I think prior to the pandemic, I would very rarely read the newspaper. I mean, it's not something I'm proud of, but I noticed when I was in Germany, I would have been reading about the pandemic every single day. Now, I think I try to minimize to some extent the extent to which I was consuming content about it because I noticed, at times, it would make me feel a little bit gloomy about the situation, but I thought it was in my best interest to stay informed and to... One thing I found interesting as well, this is a little aside, is just how it's affected so many countries. It's essentially impacted the entire world and I think that's very different from other occurrences. I think, say Ebola, I don't think it was felt as strongly in Ireland and other countries, whereas with COVID, it's impacted virtually everyone. So that's an interesting- just a little thought.

Zoe Vorndran 24:39

Yeah, absolutely. That's really, it's really enlightening to sometimes reflect a little bit. Do you think the media has covered it well or do you think there are ways they could have improved on the way that they cover COVID?

Rachel Bryan 24:55

I think in general, I'll only speak for Ireland, but I think for the most part they've been very transparent and thorough with the number of cases. There was a point where I believe close contacts weren't included in the figures, but other than that, I think it was more or less- it may have been under-represented at times, but it's still a good reflection of how the situation was progressing. So I think in general, they usually report on the total number of cases in Ireland and the number of deaths. Sometimes they also break it down by each individual county. So I mentioned how I was living in Wexford, I'd also know then looking at the statistics, how many cases were localized to Wexford.

Zoe Vorndran 25:39

Mm-hm. Yeah. Okay. So you don't think that the media-, you don't think that they've necessarily neglected anything in their coverage?

Rachel Bryan 25:56

I would say maybe they could possibly address the emotional impact more of the virus. I'm sure maybe it's been done, but I think for them most of the coverage has been predominantly very negative and I think it might be more refreshing almost to see the positive impacts of the pandemic has had. To kind of find some light in such a dark situation, I think that would be

beneficial for people, too. I think another problem, as well, with Ireland in particular is how the lockdown seems to never be ending as if there is no end, so I think that might be good for people to know that there is an end in sight, but they need to still comply with the measures and so on.

Zoe Vorndran 26:43

Yeah, absolutely. I think it would be great if there were positive stories.

Rachel Bryan 26:50

Mmm.

Zoe Vorndran:26:52

Have you seen any in your community where maybe people have helped out with others or have there been positive experiences out of COVID-19 for you?

Rachel Bryan 27:04

I would keep up more so with national coverage rather than local coverage, but I just notice even small gestures, I think people can be very mindful when you might need a little bit of space on the footpath and so on. I mean, it's so small that you might consider it insignificant possibly, but to me it means a lot to know that other people are supporting you and to know the impact that the virus has had.

Zoe Vorndran 27:30

Yeah. Okay. So maybe let's shift gears towards maybe like your family and how COVID-19 has affected them.

Rachel Bryan 27:40

Sure.

Zoe Vorndran 27:40

So have they, how has COVID-19 just affected maybe your family's day-to-day routines, whatnot?

Rachel Bryan 27:50

I might have to divert a little bit. So actually prior to the pandemic, both my sisters were living in China and Japan, so both of them went home very suddenly because they kind of anticipated that the pandemic would become very serious, and actually I follow similar paths moving back from Germany. But in terms of day-to-day activities, I think it's mainly restricted our mobility. So, it can be kind of hard to engage in the life that we once had in terms of extracurricular activities or just going on the town and anything we took for granted, essentially. Small things, like going into shops, I mean, we have to be very mindful. In terms of activities, I think my sister, my eldest sister, is very conscious about her health at the moment. She's pregnant, so I think she's very afraid of, I suppose, encountering people who may have the

virus, so mostly she's been staying at home. And then as for my sister, it's impacted a lot in terms of employment. At the moment she's doing online course, which I think is great. And then as for my Dad, he used to be involved in a Model Railway Club, but due to COVID that's come to an abrupt halt, but I believe he still has meetings on Zoom sometimes because he is part of the committee. And then for my mom, she still has to go to work. In Ireland, they differentiate between essential services and non-essential services, so my mom would fall into the former category because she works in the post office. So she still had to go to work for the entirety of the pandemic.

Zoe Vorndran 29:35

Wow, I can't imagine having all of you kids come back home.

Rachel Bryan 29:43

It's been years honestly since we all came home, so I think that was one nice thing about pandemic if you want to look at it that way.

Zoe Vorndran 29:51

Sure. I guess it brought your family closer.

Rachel Bryan 29:54

Yeah. I suppose you could say that. Yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 29:57

So has that been a difficult transition for you to come back or even for your parents to have a full house again?

Rachel Bryan 30:05

I think for the most part, I think it's been relatively smooth. I think quite honestly, I think my parents are quite relieved to have everyone home because I think they're very nervous about the pandemic. That's one thing I noticed as well when I came home, like I don't think there was ever really like a welcome home, how are you doing? It's more like my mother was immediately focused on even social distancing within the home. There was a room in the house that she told me, like, don't interrupt under any circumstances, basically, it was being allocated as a room in case anyone got sick. I'm sorry, I've forgotten your question. I got a little distracted.

Zoe Vorndran 30:49

Oh no, that's okay! That's very interesting that you guys have dedicated room for if someone got COVID.

Rachel Bryan 30:57

Yeah, well since then, it has been acquired by my sister, but actually there was a circumstance where a mom had to self-isolate. Actually, it happened more than once. I mentioned how she was

working in the post office, so I think, I'm going to be quite critical here, but I found in terms of their policy, it was very lenient. She was the only employee at the time wearing a mask, and there were one or two scares regarding employees or customers contracting the virus, so she voluntarily chose to self-isolate and lock herself in the room just as a precautionary measure. But yeah, and then at the time, my dad slept on the couch downstairs.

Zoe Vorndran 31:39

Wow, I'm sure that changes the whole dynamics within your house?

Rachel Bryan 31:44

Yeah. I think it has caused a lot of tension in the workplace as well, quite honestly. I think my mom would take it very seriously, and I commend for that, but I think some of her colleagues might think she's almost being, how do I phrase this, almost like a tyrant or maybe taking it too seriously. So I think it's caused some workplace conflict, I believe, but I think ultimately she's following her heart and I admire her for that a lot.

Zoe Vorndran 32:11

Yeah, absolutely, I mean, that's difficult I think when your values maybe don't align with the community or your coworkers or whatnot. And you mentioned that your dad is doing online or remote work?

Rachel Bryan 32:29

Well, currently he's, how do I describe him? I suppose he's like a house husband. I don't know, that doesn't sound right in English, but I suppose he takes care of the chores and whatnot, so he's been staying at home. Like his responsibility was always to take care of the kids, and he's kind of continued that role, but he would've been heavily involved in the model railway community, so that was his main hobby I think, and main social outlet.

Zoe Vorndran 32:55

Ah, so he hasn't been quite as effected?

Rachel Bryan 32:59

I think, yeah, in terms of employment, no. But I think definitely socially, he really does miss that routine and having responsibility. He's been able to do it on Zoom to some extent, but I find I suppose because there's so many of us here, it can be hard to find peace and quiet, and I admit I use the computer a lot for study, so I think sometimes it might be hard to kind of find your own space and all that.

Zoe Vorndran 33:29

Yeah, how have you adapted with just having so many people around and then also having to do your own schoolwork or your own work?

Rachel Bryan 33:38

I'm not going to paint a very glamorous picture here. For the most part it's been okay, but sometimes it's caused a little bit of conflict. I think previously when you're going to university, you don't really have to worry about noise because I suppose there is an expectation of, I suppose, school is silence. In terms of being at home, I mean, of course you want it to be a home environment as well. I think it's very difficult to balance those two environments in terms of it being a place of recreation and then also being a workplace. I think that's quite difficult. As well, we kind of changed the rooms around a bit as well, so the computer is in the hallway, so it's a little bit cold.

Zoe Vorndran 34:22

Wow. Do you have strategies to sort of balance work life, school life, and your home life?

Rachel Bryan 34:35

Honestly, that's a good question. I hadn't really considered that before. I think, I can't think of anything that we've really implemented. I suppose we're more mindful of each other when maybe someone's busy or maybe needs a particular room or might need a little peace and quiet and so on. But beyond that, I don't think we've done anything too special.

Zoe Vorndran 34:58

So has your family, or you yourself, have you guys sort of picked up any hobbies or done activities that you wouldn't normally have considered doing before the pandemic?

Rachel Bryan 35:14

I think my sister is actually the best example – my sister Jen. She currently is unemployed, but she's doing this course at the moment about computer programming, which was completely new to her. I know it brings her a lot of joy, and it's really lovely to watch her. I think she made this program that could calculate [unintelligible] and the change that you're meant to give a customer, which I thought was great. I mean, she has no formal background in programming or computers, so I'm really happy for her.

Zoe Vorndran 35:47

What a time to be going digital and doing that when everybody is going digital.

Rachel Bryan 35:53

That's another thing I was actually talking about with my friend just yesterday that had this pandemic maybe occurred a 100 years ago or even possibly 20 or 30 years ago, it really would have brought schooling to a halt. I mean, it would've been very difficult to adapt, but I suppose smart phones and laptops have just become so integrated into our daily lives that we don't really think of it as remarkable, but I just find it amazing that I can continue my degree and keep studying despite all of these limitations and restrictions to day-to-day life. Maybe I'm being a bit nostalgic, but I just thought it was amazing.

Zoe Vorndran 36:26

No, that's very true. I never considered what would have happened maybe a few years ago. Yeah. Technological changes has certainly made it easier, I'd assume.

Rachel Bryan 36:41

Another thing I was thinking about as well with the pandemic, maybe I'm reading too much into it, but it might be a little bit of the prisoner's dilemma where I suppose if you're exercising your own self-interests and put them above other people that it leads to a very undesirable outcome for everyone. I think very much the pandemic is like that as well – that you have to almost forego your own personal, I suppose, your own personal interests and beliefs just for, momentarily, just for the collective interests of everyone to keep everyone safe. I mean, we've all made small sacrifices in terms of maybe our work or social and recreational activities. But I think if you think more on a collective mindset as opposed to a more general one or personal one I believe, I think it's the best outcome for everyone.

Zoe Vorndran 37:35

Yeah, that's a really interesting point. So do you think that this sense of collectivity and having to think about community has created a sort of community sense, despite the fact that we have to self-isolate and social distance with others?

Rachel Bryan 37:51

I think to some extent, yeah, even just in small gestures like letting people pass or if there isn't enough distance, just trying to maneuver your way around without causing any inconvenience. I think it's small gestures like that, you do almost feel a sense of spirit and unity. Yeah, actually that's another thing I notice as well when I was walking with my sister on the town, I think I saw a little sticker on the bin saying essentially that the pandemic was a psychological hoax. So I think in general, there are probably two main groups: those who want to comply with the measures and then those who might think it's a conspiracy or hoax. Maybe I think there's an element of apathy as well with the lockdowns in Ireland because they are so frequent, even though that there is a promise of them being lifted, the deadline often tends to be extended. I think some people are fatigued. I'd argue it's completely necessary, but I can see why people might be frustrated in that respect.

Zoe Vorndran 38:58

Yeah, so has there been a lot of conflict between the one group saying that COVID-19 precautions are very necessary and then the other half maybe not taking them as seriously?

Rachel Bryan 39:14

Most definitely. I wouldn't notice that so much with my immediate family or with my friends, but I know definitely in my friend circle that there has been a lot of conflict, especially in terms of opposing beliefs about COVID. So maybe one friend might be very inclined to stay at home and follow all the guidelines, whereas others might engage in house parties and all of that. It definitely caused a lot of conflict and it makes you assess people in different ways. I think it's become a huge problem quite frankly.

Zoe Vorndran 39:44

Is it something that you have been able to discuss with your friends or is it very taboo? How is that?

Rachel Bryan 39:53

I think, yeah, with friends, it's generally okay. I mean, I think a lot of my friends are very like-minded, so I think I feel very comfortable discussing COVID, but I think it's also caused a lot of conflict as well. For other groups, not so much me personally, but I can imagine it causing a lot of trouble for a lot of people. I think as well with university, I think there was a lot of confusion as to what to do. I think some weren't sure – should they be online from the very beginning or should they conduct lectures in-person and essentially see how it goes? I think that was Maynooth's approach at first.

Zoe Vorndran 40:34

Yeah. I think that's a lot of people's apprehensions. Do you think Maynooth is going to consider going back to in-person come fall?

Rachel Bryan 40:47

That's actually a good question. I'm not entirely sure. I mean, it's not something that I had really considered, but I think at the moment they're being very vigilant at first. I think they had a sliver of hope that things will get better, but I've just noticed how the tone of the e-mails have changed and I get the impression that, not that they've given up that's pessimistic, but I think they've kind of resigned to online teaching for the time being, but we'll see. I suppose that's all I can say.

Zoe Vorndran 41:19

I think that's what most people can.

Rachel Bryan 41:22

Yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 41:24

So you mentioned frequent lockdowns, is, in Ireland, have they been on lockdown continuously or do they keep on reapplying new lockdowns? If that makes sense.

Rachel Bryan 41:40

Yeah, that makes perfect sense. I think they have different levels in Ireland, so they have level one to level five. I think mostly we've had experience with Level 5 and possibly I think the most lenient it's been is maybe Level 3, I could be mistaken. I think with level 3, you're allowed to integrate a little bit with people from other households, things like that. I think for the most part it's been Level 5. So I think with Level 5, you can have six people at your wedding? No. There are no organized events, no outdoor events. I think gyms are closed as well. I think restaurants have to only do delivery, so you're not allowed to sit within the restaurant. And with

school, I think almost all of them have been online, but I believe there have been exceptions for primary schools and secondary school maybe prioritizing students who are doing exams and so on. Yeah. There's a lot to unpack here, I guess.

Zoe Vorndran 42:48

Yeah, and you said it's been Level 5, like all around Ireland or in specific areas?

Rachel Bryan 42:56

I think they briefly discuss maybe restricting the lockdowns to particular areas, but I don't know what actually became of that, but for general, I think the lockdowns have been applied to all of the countries, so, well, except Northern Ireland, but that's another matter.

Zoe Vorndran 43:12

Yeah, absolutely. Okay, so I guess we kind of touched on this, but how has COVID-19 affected the way that you communicate with your friends and family? And you can take that in any direction you want.

Rachel Bryan 43:34

I think for the most part, I think it's really come up a lot in just conversations. I think people would have previously been talking about the weather. I think almost a safe topic is to talk about COVID because it's impacted everyone. I noticed my parents would take very seriously, so they constantly will be checking the headlines and see how many cases there were each day. So, I've noticed a lot of conversations at dinner really tend to revolve around COVID. I think it might be quite interesting to see in a few year's time just to see how conversation at the dinner table changes. It's something we've grown adapted to, but when you think about it, it's so strange.

Zoe Vorndran 44:20

Yeah. Covid-19 could probably possibly be a very political conversation though, I assume.

Rachel Bryan 44:26

Yeah, most definitely. I think I'd argue it can be a little bit taboo-y, so I definitely agree with you on that. I think it's okay to maybe make general comments, but I think it's good to exercise caution because I think there have definitely happen circumstances where people might think that they shouldn't have to wear a mask or so on. Yeah, they could spend hours talking about this.

Zoe Vorndran 44:53

Yeah so do you think conversations about COVID-19 has sort of overshadowed maybe other important conversations that could be happening? Or does it seem over-bearing?

Rachel Bryan 45:10

For me, I think for the most part, I think it's a nice conversation topic when you're not sure what to talk about, but I think there are times when sometimes I'd like to escape from it all. It can, especially if you're in a bad mood and you feel like it's ever going to end, I think it can kind of reinforce those feelings. So I think at times it can be overbearing. I know it's necessary and I don't blame people because it's impacted essentially everyone. And the things that we would have talked about instead, maybe like the gym or work and so on, I suppose COVID has taken away a lot of opportunities too, so I can see why people might immediately default to discussing it.

Zoe Vorndran 45:49

Yeah, that's true. I think it's an experience that everybody can relate to in some way.

Rachel Bryan 45:55

Definitely, yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 46:00

So do you know of anybody who has gotten sick during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Rachel Bryan 46:08

No one personally. I mean, nobody that I'm very close to you. I mean, I believe one or two of my classmates ended up with COVID, but this was after everything went online, so I never really got to see the impact of it per se. But I have heard hearsay and stories of people getting COVID, but it hasn't affected me on a personal level yet, but well hopefully it will stay that way.

Zoe Vorndran 46:33

Yes. Yes. I hope that for you.

Rachel Bryan 46:40

Yeah. I think that's another thing as well with the pandemic – I think for a long time it felt like a distant threat to everyone, but once you started hearing stories about people you knew, even just distant relatives or acquaintances getting the virus I think it made it a lot more real for people – made it far more threatening. I feel like with previous outbreaks or unrelated, not just COVID but other outbreaks as well, it always felt like a distant threat and not something that would ever impact you. Whereas with COVID, it always feels like it's looming in the distance.

Zoe Vorndran 47:12

Yeah, I definitely have noticed that seems to be the sentiment that when people are directly impacted by it, I think their outlook changes.

Rachel Bryan 47:25

Yeah, definitely. What really scares me, I've thankfully never experienced this in person, just the experience of COVID in hospitals. I imagine it must be very terrifying. Or even more so the

people who might not think it's real even if they have COVID. I just can't get my head around it at all.

Zoe Vorndran 47:44

Yeah, so have there been a lot of testing centers in Ireland?

Rachel Bryan 47:50

There were, yeah, so there's one actually in my locality. I haven't actually seen it in person, but I would be able to tell you where it was generally. I think a lot of them had been established. And quite frankly, I think a few people I know have actually tested themselves for COVID, so I think it's not uncommon for people to use them just to make sure they don't have the virus.

Zoe Vorndran 48:17

Are tests generally accessible to everybody? It sounds almost as if they are.

Rachel Bryan 48:23

That's the impression I get. I mean, maybe I'm ignorant on the subject, but that's the impression I got anyway. I believe you can go slightly more than the kilometer limit for essential purposes, so I don't think that would impact anyone in that respect. I think yeah, it's mostly accessible to pretty much anyone.

Zoe Vorndran 48:48

You keep mentioning the kilometer limit, and I keep wanting to ask this question, but I keep forgetting to ask it!

Rachel Bryan 48:54

Go ahead.

Zoe Vorndran 48:56

So do you have paperwork or how do they sort of regulate where you can go and why you can go?

Rachel Bryan 49:06

I'll be honest, I think essentially there are a lot of garda checkpoints. So there are policemen stationed around, dotted around, the county and they can ask you at anytime where you're going or they can stop you while you're driving at various checkpoints and ask you if your journey is essential, but quite honestly, I think it's very difficult to enforce. I mean, I'm not sure how it works for motor vehicles. Well, I think for people, I think it's very difficult to actually monitor people, make sure they're within their limits. I've noticed that in the town recently that even though we were allegedly at the strictest level of lockdown, there are so many people around, so it makes me wonder, they can't all be within their kilometer limit. I think, quite frankly, I think

although it sounds idealistic on paper, I think it's not being enforced; either it's not being enforced very well or it's impossible to implement.

Zoe Vorndran 50:03

Sure. I guess maybe it would be very hard to get people to comply.

Rachel Bryan 50:08

Yeah, most definitely. I think as well, a lot of people might lie about their journey being essential. Sometimes you're not entirely sure if your journey is essential or not. I mean, it's obvious if you need medicine or food, but I remember I had to move out my apartment in Maynooth and I was worried about being interrogated about my journey being essential. I suppose maybe you could argue it wasn't, but I remember being so nervous on the train. I was worried that someone would ask me what I was doing.

Zoe Vorndran 50:39

Yeah, that must have been a very frightening and stressful situation.

Rachel Bryan 50:44

Yeah. Thankfully, nobody asked, but yeah, I was worried about that actually because I had booked an apartment for first semester at Maynooth because I knew that some of my German lectures would be in-person. I only ended up using the apartment for a few weeks – that's just a little aside – but I have to get all my belongings out of there. I think COVID has affected a lot of people in that respect. Maybe being confined to certain environments might not help, like I worry about maybe people who don't have the best home environments, I think it could be very difficult to escape that. That's one thing I worry about.

Zoe Vorndran 51:19

Mm-hm. Yeah, definitely. So you don't need paperwork necessarily to travel than from place to place?

Rachel Bryan 51:31

Not if you're traveling for essential services, I mean if someone was traveling to the supermarket, I think it probably wouldn't be questioned, but I think if you were going to the airport, there would definitely be a lot of questions as to where you're going and why. I know, a few weeks ago there were a lot of people going – was it Venezuela? – for dentist appointments. I think a lot of people were trying to essentially cheat the system and tried to argue their journeys were essential when they wanted to go on holidays. They started enforcing fines, but that's the thing I think if you have enough money to go on a holiday, I think a lot of those people wouldn't mind paying a fine. It's not really a deterrent.

Zoe Vorndran 52:13

Yeah, that's really interesting. I never considered how travel is so different in Europe.

Rachel Bryan 52:23

Yeah. That's another thing with Brexit as well. I can imagine it being very difficult to experience not only dealing with Brexit, but then also dealing with the pandemic. I mean, they're worried by the economical implications of COVID, but I think it's very difficult to make those projections until you're actually there.

Zoe Vorndran 52:44

Yeah, definitely. Do you think that COVID-19 has affected the economy in Ireland just overall?

Rachel Bryan 52:23

Most definitely. I mentioned essential services and non-essential ones. So I believe in almost all circumstances, maybe bar a few weeks, almost all non-essential services have been closed down, so I imagine that would have been devastating for a lot of shops and businesses. I think a lot of people would probably- I worry they wouldn't be able to feed their families and so on. Now I'm sure there is support available for them provided by the government, but I can imagine the economic implications have been devastating.

Zoe Vorndran 53:30

Yeah, and I'm sure employment- there has probably been scare about employment? I don't know if you've experienced any of that fear about future employment or employment now?

Rachel Bryan 53:43

That's something I'm actually quite conscious about myself because I'll be graduating soon, but I suppose the economy seems to be devastated, so that might be quite difficult. In terms of our family, I think it hasn't really impacted us too much, but I know a lot of people lost their jobs due to COVID or gotten sick so they couldn't work for awhile.

Zoe Vorndran 54:07

Yeah.

Rachel Bryan 54:08

Oh, I forgot to mention jeez. I forgot to mention this. My neighbor actually had COVID, my next door neighbor. So they built like a makeshift shed and – not quite a shed because it looks quite beautiful, I mean, you wouldn't store tools in it – but we saw that our neighbors had been isolating in the shed. I suppose essentially we're spying on them and gossiping, but yeah, we figured out our neighbors had COVID, so I think my parents were very apprehensive about interacting too much with my neighbors, especially the ones that had developed COVID.

Zoe Vorndran 54:41

Yeah I guess-

Rachel Bryan 54:43

Yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 54:44

Okay, go ahead.

Rachel Bryan 54:45

Sorry. I forgot to mention my next door neighbor. It was literally on our doorstep!

Zoe Vorndran 54:52

Yeah, That's crazy. I don't know if you've noticed within your neighborhood, but I don't know if the interactions have been completely different. Like you said your parents were a bit paranoid or worried about interacting with your neighbors?

Rachel Bryan 55:11

Yeah, I think definitely my parents have restricted a lot of their interactions with people. I mean, during Christmas, it was a little bit different. I mean, we mostly kept to ourselves. But I think a lot of Irish people have been say, trying to justify their interactions by being outside because I think for a while there were some restrictions limited that you could interact with people outside. So I think people try to explain their behavior by saying, "Oh, I'm outside, it's not as bad as being indoors so I can still talk to people."

Zoe Vorndran 55:45

Yeah, so do you usually do holidays with your family or how has that been affected?

Rachel Bryan 55:53

I don't think we've really been going on holidays too much. I think for the most part it's relatively been unchanged, but I think we have to be more proactive when it comes to transport. I remember when I was moving myself out of Maynooth, I had to book my train ticket advanced. I think that was the only change in terms of procedure. And I think I elaborated before on the train itself, how it goes.

Zoe Vorndran 56:21

Yeah, so what exactly constitutes as essential travel or essential work? I mean, I know you've brought it up a little bit, but what's the line necessarily?

Rachel Bryan 56:35

That's the thing, I mean, they did define it to an extent about like groceries and so on, but it's a very difficult one to argue, I think, because I think some people might stretch the definition of essential a little thin. Or they might justify certain behaviors and claim it's essential when it may not be. Yeah, I think I mentioned weddings and funerals before, but there were a lot of restrictions around that as well. So I mean, you could argue, maybe they're essential services, but I think at the moment, you can have six people at your wedding. I'm not sure about

funerals, but I know they've definitely been impacted as well. I think maybe some services might have been moved online and maybe you could have ten people at your funeral. I could be wrong.

Zoe Vorndran 57:25

Mm-hm. Well and I know religion is a huge part of daily and social life in Ireland. And I don't know if that has also been affected or necessarily if that's essential?

Rachel Bryan 57:20

Yeah, I think that's an interesting debate. I think for the time being, services are online, but I think for awhile they were still holding services in the church, but they moved everything online as far as I know, but I could be mistaken. I mean, I'm not very actively involved.

Zoe Vorndran 58:02

Okay, so how does this pandemic compare to any other big events in your lifetime, whether that's a national or global event or does it even compare to anything?

Rachel Bryan 58:20

Honestly, the first thing that comes to my mind is COVID, so I think that this one definitely takes the crown because I suppose I experienced the impacts of COVID not only in Ireland but also to some extent in Germany. As well as my sisters when they were abroad. I think there's elements of collectiveness in that almost everyone on the planet has experienced COVID. I mean, I know there was the swine flu outbreak, but while I do remember there being some protective measures, I think we are told to sanitize our hands. Beyond that, I don't think it really disrupted my life very much. I honestly can't think of any other major events that's on the same scale as COVID.

Zoe Vorndran 59:02

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I don't know if there has been one. I thought that would be an interesting question because it just seems so crazy that this is something that is so global and affects so many people.

Rachel Bryan 59:17

Most definitely, yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 59:19

Maybe, hopefully, on a positive note, but what can you maybe imagine your life to be like within a year, two years, five years?

Rachel Bryan 59:33

That's an interesting question. I mean, I'm not entirely sure when things will quote uuquote normal, but I'm hoping that I'll have more of a renewed appreciation for things that I might have

taken for granted. I know sometimes I got very fixated on my work and I might not hang out with my friends as much as I maybe should have, but I think it really highlights what you might- What I'm trying to say is sometimes you might not realize how important something is until you can't have it anymore. So I think when something's taken away from you, you kind of appreciate it more; you notice it and realize that it's not always there or it could be taken away due to something like COVID.

Zoe Vorndran 1:00:16

Yeah, I think that's one thing that a lot of people have realized – are the things that we take for granted, maybe?

Rachel Bryan 1:00:23

Definitely. In terms of what I'd want to do. I'm not sure, I suppose I'd probably want to meet up with my friends more because I think that's something I've missed a lot. I mean, when the restrictions were lifted, when they were at the most lenient, I might have met up with one or two friends outside, but we would have worn face masks and kept distance from each other. But beyond that, I haven't seen my friends almost in pretty much two years because I was in Germany as well. So it's been a while since I've seen my friends properly.

Zoe Vorndran 1:00:55

Yeah. I can relate.

Rachel Bryan 1:00:59

Yeah, no I can imagine.

Zoe Vorndran 1:01:02

And so on the flip note then maybe, what's been the biggest challenges you faced during COVID, and maybe that is just not being able to see your friends, but is there anything that just pops out to you as a big challenge?

Rachel Bryan 1:01:18

Yeah, I think friendships is definitely one of the biggest ones, but then I think maybe it might have an impact on schooling a little bit as well. I think with lectures in-person, I think the major task is getting yourself ready and getting there, but I suppose with online learning it might feel it's more difficult to engage with the material I find. All of my lectures are pre-recorded so it can be hard to kind of simulate that same interaction you would have in the classroom.

Zoe Vorndran 1:01:49

Oh so, you don't have any synchronous learning then?

Rachel Bryan 1:01:49

Not for psychology, but for German we would. I think for psychology, they sometimes have little Q and A sessions that you can sign in for, but to be honest, I think I only went to one.

Zoe Vorndran 1:02:12

Wow, I can imagine then surely your interactions with people have been very, very limited then.

Rachel Bryan 1:02:21

Yeah. I think with German for the most part it's been synchronous, so there is an element of accountability there, but I could imagine for many people, it's very difficult to study at home. That might have been a huge challenge. I mean, it's impacted me as well to some degree. Yeah, definitely.

Zoe Vorndran 1:02:36

Yeah, I don't think anybody who was going to school thinking they were going to be in-person, thought they'd be doing virtual learning.

Rachel Bryan 1:02:45

Yeah, most definitely. I feel, particularly I could imagine it being quite a difficult experience for our first-year students and international students. I think I met a lot of my college friends in first-year college and it might be very difficult to return to college after the pandemic is over. And you're essentially in a new environment you never got to see before. You don't know where any of the buildings are. You might not have many friends either, so I think really those **kind of students in particular have been particularly hurt by the pandemic.**

Zoe Vorndran 1:03:21

Yeah, I agree. So if you hadn't been in school maybe before this, it may have been a different story for you to adapt?

Rachel Bryan 1:03:34

Actually, that's another aside. I keep thinking of things, but in Ireland, there's like this final exam you can do in secondary school – so at the end of high school – it's called the leaving certificate. I believe last year they had predictive grades instead of the actual exams that you do in person. Basically, I think what they did was assume based on your previous performance, how your grades would be and they calculated it that way. I'm not entirely sure of the mechanics, but I imagine that impacted a lot of students as well in secondary schools.

Zoe Vorndran 1:04:13

So could you explain that a little bit more?

Rachel Bryan 1:04:15

I'm not too knowledgeable about it, but when I was doing my leaving cert, you'd have different days and you do your exam in person, but I think the system they used last year, I'm not sure

now, but they essentially use predictive grades. So, I think they tried to be unbiased, but essentially, you didn't do any exams and I think they just assumed what kind of grade you'd get. I could be completely wrong on this, but it was completely different. I could imagine it being quite detrimental for students who maybe had been struggling through the year or maybe they don't have the best relationship with their teacher and that could impact their final predictive grades, I guess. I'm not sure what system they've implemented now, but it should be interesting.

Zoe Vorndran 1:05:16

And that was because of COVID, like that wasn't a system that schools typically used?

Rachel Bryan 1:05:23

Oh, yeah, it was constructed very spontaneously. So yeah, it's completely new.

Zoe Vorndran 1:05:31

Wow. Okay, and then I guess we'll end on this. If you could do one thing after COVID-19 is over, what would you do, anything in this world?

Rachel Bryan 1:05:46

Oh that is such an interesting question. I suppose in terms of a collective mindset, you'd almost want to cure things, other diseases or viruses. I mean, it would be great if cancer didn't exist. Very random thought, but I'm not sure. I think even just little things like having some normal features of life, like just meeting up with friends would be nice. I don't think of any grand wishes.

Zoe Vorndran 1:06:21

Yeah, no I get a small things are great too, like eating a donut in a donut shop without wearing a mask.

Rachel Bryan 1:06:28

That would be amazing! You can do that in Ireland, but just not in the shop. You have to take it away.

Zoe Vorndran 1:06:34

Oh yeah, you can't dine in or anything?

Rachel Bryan 1:06:38

No, but I suppose we've argued that donuts are essential. I mean, I suppose, yeah. I'm not going to protest it, I guess.

Zoe Vorndran 1:06:51

That's amazing. Okay. Well, is there anything that you would like to talk about or that we did not cover in this interview?

Rachel Bryan 1:07:02

I can't think of any burning questions, but I just think this is really such a wonderful opportunity and thank you so much. I think it's just wonderful to record history as it's happening because I find it's really good to preserve individual memories and just to reflect on things that happens and not just in one place, but just all over the world. I think it's incredible.

Zoe Vorndran 1:07:24

Well, thank you very much and thank you so much for spending your time and sharing your story with us because I think, you know, oral history is important and especially during these times it's very essential that we are able to collect these stories that have fundamentally changed our society.

Rachel Bryan 1:07:45

Most definitely. Aww, thank you so much. This has been wonderful.