

Sarah Heavren 0:01

We are recording. The following introductory conversation and questions have been structured off, but not copied from, the suggested introductory script in questions provided by Indiana University as part of the Journal of the Plague COVID-19 oral history project. My name is Sarah Heavren and I'm here with Abigail Kojoian. Today is February 4, 2021, and is 3:09pm. I am coming to you from Howley Hall on the campus of Providence College. And Abigail is speaking from her home. Abigail, I would like to review the informed consent form that you signed for participate participating in the project. This interview will be part of a collection in the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive, as well as the Providence College Archives and Special Collections. As stated on the release form that you signed the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive is a public digital archive project created and maintained by the Providence Public Library and the Rhode Island Historical Society in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis. The archive seeks to document and share the lived experience of Rhode Islanders from all walks of life during the global health crisis. Any audio or video recording of this interview and a text-based transcript of the interview will be contributed to both the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive and the Providence College Archives and Special Collections. Do you verbally agree to this?

Abigail Kojoian 1:26

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 1:27

I am briefly going to review the license on the release form that you said under this CC-BY 4.0 license, the creator will retain the copyright to their work and allow uses such as the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence Public Library, and the Providence College Archives and Special Collections to include the materials and the permanent collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society, and the Providence Public Library, and the public to have access to and share, adapt, modify and cite this work, for the CC-BY 4.0 license the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Providence Public Library, Providence College Archives and Special Collections, and the public must credit the creator when making any futre uses. Do you verbally agreed to this license?

Abigail Kojoian 2:16

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 2:19

Do you have any other questions before we begin the interview?

I think you froze for a second.

Abigail Kojoian 2:31

Oh, sorry. No, I don't have any questions.

Sarah Heavren 2:34

Okay, great. Thank you. All right. So, um, obviously you're a students, but do you mind, like, what, saying what your major is and the things that you're involved with on campus? Or if you have a job off campus or anything like that?

Abigail Kojoian 2:50

Yes, I'm a math major with a classics minor. And I play in St. Dominic's ensemble as a violinist.

Sarah Heavren 3:01

You're also part of ROTC, right?

Abigail Kojoian 3:04

I was, I'm not the semester, but I was for five semesters?

Sarah Heavren 3:09

Is that? Was your decision to not be part of it influenced by the pandemic?

Abigail Kojoian 3:15

No, it was not.

Sarah Heavren 3:18

Right. Everything's if influenced by the pandemic. That's fun to hear. Um, so you're a commuter. So that's exciting. So you, you drive yourself to campus. So like, What, um, how, how has the pandemic kind of influenced that? Just generally?

Abigail Kojoian 3:43

I'm like, Can I talk about like traffic from COVID? Or like PC-specific?

Sarah Heavren 3:50

Yeah, definitely, no, and anything, anything at all.

Abigail Kojoian 3:54

I think that the roads have been easier to drive on, I think because people are doing work from home or have online school. So find that it's, there's less less traffic, and it's the roads are easier to drive on because of COVID.

Sarah Heavren 4:13

So even though you're a commuter, you're still doing in person classes?

Abigail Kojoian 4:21

Sorry, Sarah. You just froze.

Sarah Heavren 4:23

Sorry. Um, even though you're a commuter, you're still doing in person classes for the classes that are not online?

Abigail Kojoian 4:31

Yes, I only have one in person, but I am doing it in person even though I commute.

Sarah Heavren 4:38

Okay, so now to get a sort of chronological understanding of your experience with the pandemic, we're gonna go back to the spring when all this--last spring--and all this started. So do you remember, like, where you were and what you were doing when you found out that our spring break was going to be extended because of the pandemic? And how, how did you react to that?

Abigail Kojoian 5:05

I remember exactly what I was doing. We were and my family and I were in Florida for the spring break. And my mom actually got a phone call from her friend who teaches at Johnson and Wales. And she said, Look out for the girls, because Johnson and Wales just extended their break. And so we thought no it's like PC is still on, we're gonna end our break, and we're gonna go back in a week. And then we got the email that said, We're not going back. And so we were, we were in Florida, when we got the email.

Sarah Heavren 5:40

Were you, you must have been pretty shocked to read that.

Abigail Kojoian 5:46

I was definitely pretty shocked. At first, I was pretty happy because I thought, oh, it'll just be like homeschooling again, like, I'll just do school from home. And we'll have online school, but then I did like it. But like we were talking about, like math online was was a challenge.

Sarah Heavren 6:04

Yes, 100% agree with that. So do you think having that background in being homeschooled helped you adapt to learning at home more, or was it very different because now everything was online, as opposed to just being at home, it was both at home and online.

Abigail Kojoian 6:24

I do think that being homeschooled, did help us to adapt, just because we knew how to I don't know, like, organize our time, I guess you could say, um, I guess it was more self driven work, then, then kind of like your teachers having you do assignments where you have to bring it in the next class, although assignments were due. I don't know, think homeschooling did help us, like, have that sense of like, self-discipline.

Sarah Heavren 6:56

So for the folks who don't know you, you have a sister, you guys are in the same grade. So did that help you guys at all?, You know, like, having, having someone in the same grade going through this experience together? Yeah, at the same school? with college classes. Do you think you guys helped each other get through the transition to online learning?

Abigail Kojoian 7:23

Yeah, I definitely think so. We didn't have any classes together last semester, or in the spring semester, when at first, when we first went online. But, um, just like the little things of being able to commute together, or having announcements made and like, being able to talk about it with with each other was, was nice.

Sarah Heavren 7:47

So once the semester ended, what was your summer like? Did you have any plans that were compromised? Or were you able to work at all?

Abigail Kojoian 7:57

Um, there was one thing that was compromised. Michaiah, my sister, and I usually work at, at a hospital, at Rhode Island Hospital. We work at one of their summer camps. And it's a camp for children who have chronic illnesses. So obviously, they couldn't compromise the children. So they had to have camp what they called camp in a box. So we couldn't work at the camp, like we usually like to do, but um, we were able to write them little notes. And they were able to have camp in a box, but obviously not the same as having an actual summer camp.

Sarah Heavren 8:34

What was camp in a box like, what, what did you have to do for that?

Abigail Kojoian 8:41

There were little activities that they put in the box. And we also wrote each camper a little note, like talking about, hey, we miss you, or, I'm sorry we couldn't be in person. But here's camp in a box. I hope you like it, kind of thing.

Sarah Heavren 8:59

Was that a one time thing? Like you gave them the box like at the beginning of the summer and it had activities to do, or was this something that you did kind of consistently throughout the summer, creating different boxes?

Abigail Kojoian 9:13

No, it was a one time thing. We did at the beginning of the summer, and the kids got to get it at the beginning of the summer and have the summer to do the different activities.

Sarah Heavren 9:26

So then, were you hopeful about returning to in person classes in the fall? Were you more skeptical about being a commuter? Were you thinking about taking the option to study online so to avoid exposing your family or anything like that?

Abigail Kojoian 9:46

We did think about it but my father, his, his work doesn't allow him to do work from home. So we thought well, if he's gonna go to work, then I think we could probably get a better education if we, if we do in person classes. So we decided to, to go back in person. But we did consider that option of staying home.

Sarah Heavren 10:11

Were most of your classes in person in the fall or where they split? How were they divided between online and in person?

Abigail Kojoian 10:20

Oh, my math class or our math class our real analysis class started off, like in person and then it went online. Latin started off online and then it went in person. So that's two. ROTC was in

person the whole time. Except for when the campus shut down. And then we went online, obviously. Ceramics was in person. And then my last class? I don't remember what it was, but I guess, I guess mostly, I guess, I guess half and half. They were half and half online and in person.

Sarah Heavren 11:10

Wasn't it the independent study you're doing with that?

Abigail Kojoian 11:13

Yeah, yeah. That's right. Wow, Sarah. Yeah, that was online. Wow. Really good

Sarah Heavren 11:23

I do my research. No, I didn't. Yeah, exactly. So how was ROTC different in the fall? You know, were you spaced out more? Did you, were not able to do things in groups? What were your workouts like? How, how did that adapt to the pandemic?

Abigail Kojoian 11:45

Yeah, one of the biggest differences that we had in the fall was that ROTC has a, Providence College ROTC includes many schools and includes Brown, Johnson and Wales, UMass Dartmouth, Bryant, Rhode Island, college, and CCRI. So we usually worked out all together, they would come to PC, all the other schools would come to PC on Mondays and Fridays to work out with us. And we couldn't do that anymore. So we would have just the PC people work out. And then the Bryant cadets would work out at Bryant and the Rhode Island College kids would work out at their own school. So that was one big thing that was separate. We couldn't work out together anymore. And then another thing that changed was, there's usually a ranger challenge competition in the fall. And that's a lot of fun. But because of the pandemic, we couldn't do it. So they postponed it to this semester. Because during Ranger challenge competition, you you just like it for three days, you just sleep outside intense with one another. So it's like, obviously couldn't sleep all in one tent. So that got postponed to this semester. And, um, and then did for different classes where all four years would be together, so freshmen, sophomore, juniors, and seniors would all be together, they split them up for those classes. So the freshmen were separate from the sophomores and juniors and seniors.

Sarah Heavren 13:22

So PC had this big outbreak in the fall. You do not live on campus. So you are not locked down in the same way that we were necessarily, but nonetheless, it definitely did affect you. So what was that like being a, being a commuter? And now seeing the lockdown happening?

Abigail Kojoian 13:48

Is this the first, the first lockdown? Or is it when we all went?

Sarah Heavren 13:53

The, the one that was in like the end of September.

Abigail Kojoian 13:59

Okay. Um, so the one where like, computers weren't really affected? Because we weren't. Yeah, I mean, we weren't really affected by it. We just transitioned to online learning. Which wasn't, I guess I was expecting it. So it wasn't that much of a shock. But like, we just made the normal transition like we did in the spring, so and the professors were really good about it. I thought that our math professor did a good job. Even though it's was really challenging to have the online math class. I thought he he transitioned well, so. I mean, it wasn't I didn't think it was too terrible.

Sarah Heavren 14:37

Were you kind of glad that I mean, you've been a commuter this whole time, but compared to maybe some of your friends who were living on campus or off campus, and now were pretty much confined to their dorms, were you glad that you could, you know at least go outside walk around your neighborhood?

Abigail Kojoian 14:56

Definitely

Sarah Heavren 14:57

See your chickens.

Abigail Kojoian 14:59

Yeah. I was definitely grateful for that. And also, just because I could see my family too. Um, I'm sure I've told you before, but we have cousins that live kind of across the street from us. So, um, we were still able to see them even though we were kind of like in lockdown. But yeah, so I was grateful to be home.

Sarah Heavren 15:30

So what was your winter break like? You know, what's the semester ended, we got through this time. There was oh, well, actually, I guess this is different for you. Because there was that, that last week that we switched to online learning at the end of the semester. So did that mean, well, it must have meant you weren't coming to campus anymore?

Abigail Kojoian 15:54

Right? Yep. Yeah, so actually, my Latin class was in person at that point. And so that one was shut back to online learning to the to Zoom learning. And ceramics was also, we were doing like art projects, we had to draw more pictures instead of actually getting to go to the studio and build things with with the, in the ceramics class.

Sarah Heavren 16:23

Did that one come as a shock to you?

Abigail Kojoian 16:26

The ceramics being online? Or...

Sarah Heavren 16:29

Yeah, the second wave?

Unknown Speaker 16:32

Yeah, I guess it was more shocked after they reopened. I thought, once they closed the first time, I thought, there's no way they're going to be able to regain it and go back to in person. So I guess I was more shocked by the fact that we were back on in person that I was for when we went online again.

Sarah Heavren 16:55

Did you feel when we actually were in person that you spent less time on campus? Were you pretty much only here for your in person classes? And then we go back home?

Abigail Kojoian 17:10

Yeah, I guess so. I don't remember my schedule last semester. Um, usually, if I have a class in the morning, and then another one in the afternoon, if they're in person, I won't drive home between, I'll just stay on campus. Um, I don't remember what it was like last semester. Um, but I think I think I probably spent less time on campus than, than a normal semester.

Sarah Heavren 17:43

So now going to winter break. What was that like? I mean, it's, you have a different experience, because you live at home anyway, versus you know, the college student who came in August and didn't go home until November. And then. So you've gotten used to living at home and doing school at home. And now, now it's winter break. So what did you do? Did you work at all? Did you just hang out with your family?

Abigail Kojoian 18:11

I actually took, took a winter class. I took differential equations. So that was that I think that lasted like three and a half weeks. So it was a good portion of the winter break. Which started up when we finished school on Friday. It started up on Monday. So we started right away. And that one was online, obviously. So yeah, I spent most of the winter break in my differential equations class.

Sarah Heavren 18:46

Did you feel burned out from doing so much online learning now? And now you're, you know, in your free time, you're doing another online class? Or you just kind of used to it now?

Abigail Kojoian 18:59

I guess I'm used to and now I think math is, was the thing that burned me out more than the online learning. I think math can have that effect. But the instructor was really was great. So definitely can't complain about that. But just the I think the math was more of a more tiring than the online learning. And they were asynchronous lectures, so we didn't have to worry about scheduling.

Sarah Heavren 19:31

So now here we are in the spring. You are still commuting.

Abigail Kojoian 19:35

Mm hmm.

Sarah Heavren 19:37

Are, how are your classes this semester? Are they mostly online, in person, split?

Abigail Kojoian 19:44

I have mostly online I have one in person.

Sarah Heavren 19:51

Does that make you kind of sad as a second semester senior that you like come to campus couple days a week for one class.

Abigail Kojoian 20:03

It does. But at the same time, I feel like having it having mostly online classes does give me, I don't have to worry about traveling. So it doesn't take us so much time. So I can get a lot more homework done during the day, when I don't have to worry about, I leave my house 45 minutes before my classes start. So not having to worry about leaving that taking that much time away from for traveling. I can get so much more more done during the day.

Sarah Heavren 20:39

Probably saving on gas too.

Abigail Kojoian 20:41

Oh, definitely. Definitely. Yeah. I only drive to campus twice a week.

Sarah Heavren 20:48

Wow.

Abigail Kojoian 20:49

Yeah.

Sarah Heavren 20:51

So you said if you started playing in the St. Dom's ensemble, again playing violin. How has the pandemic affected that? Like, is it, is it harder playing violin with a mask on? Is it not really noticeable?

Abigail Kojoian 21:08

It is definitely harder. I wasn't expecting it to be. But because the violin like I, I pinch it under my chin, it makes the mask ride up. So it starts to cover my eyes. So I have to keep pulling it down. Try not to pull it too far down. But every time I like pinch it under my chin. It keeps writing up. So I'm trying to find the balance between the like the right length on my nose, the right height on my nose. But we're working through that.

Sarah Heavren 21:41

So do you come to campus for rehearsals?



Abigail Kojoian 21:46

Yes, I haven't yet, because I'm just scheduling problems. But I will and next soon.

Sarah Heavren 21:58

Was there anything else that you were looking to be doing this semester that is now either not going to happen or is compromised so that's kind of dissuaded you from doing it or participating in it?

Abigail Kojoian 22:17

I don't think so. School takes up, takes up most of my time. So I don't really, except for Saint Dominic's I don't really do anything else on campus. I spend most of my day studying. So I don't think there's anything that I would have that the that the pandemic has prevented me from doing that. Kind of like homework hasn't already prevented me from doing.

Sarah Heavren 22:42

Would you say that, I mean, the time that the extra time that you're spending at home now is predominantly in class. But do you, do your parents enjoy having you home more? Have you been able to, I don't know, kind of have more family time now that you and your sister are home a little bit more?

Abigail Kojoian 23:03

Yeah, I think so. Um, even having meals together. We can have, well, my dad works. But having lunch with my mom and having breakfast with my mom, we get to do that. Which probably wouldn't happen if we were, if we had more in person classes, because the schedules vary so much. But yeah, I definitely think I think we're all enjoying it.

Sarah Heavren 23:31

So have you had to, I guess this is also different for you because you're not on campus. But for everyone on campus, when you moved in, you have to get you come up, you come to campus with a test result and then you have to get tested again. And then you have to quarantine until you get that second test result. So have you had to quarantine at all? Have you had to experience that?

Abigail Kojoian 24:01

No, the only thing we have to do is when we come for our first test when we first, not move on to campus, but come to campus for the first time, we get tested and then we're supposed to like self isolate for until we get our negative test results. But we haven't had to quarantine for like 14 days or anything. But we do have to just wait to get our results back.

Sarah Heavren 24:30

So as I'm sure you know, from the plethora of emails we get, there's a lot of emphasis on your pod, staying with your pod. So for us on campus or living immediately off campus that refers to our roommates. So how do you react to the pod dynamic does it not really affect you as much because you're only on campus for your classes?

Abigail Kojoian 24:58

Yeah, it doesn't really affect me this semester because, like I said, I only come to campus twice a week. Um, if I think if I were socializing more or trying to get lunch with more people or hang out with more people, maybe it would affect us more. But as it is, it's not really affecting, affecting me. But I think the way it works is commuters can like see people from other pods, but not necessarily like hang out with them constantly. So. But yeah, this semester hasn't really affected me that much with the pods.

Sarah Heavren 25:39

Do you feel any more social, socially isolated? Now that you're only really coming to campus for classes and then not really getting lunch with people or not really hanging out with them? Otherwise?

Abigail Kojoian 25:54

Yeah, I guess. Yeah, I would think so.

Sarah Heavren 25:57

How do you then cope with that, besides just bother your sister?

Abigail Kojoian 26:07

Yeah, I probably bother my sister. Um, I guess I would, in my one class that I have on campus. I guess I just talked to the kids more in that class. And even before class on for online classes, I like talked to my classmates. So I guess that's the most social I get with, with the pandemic, the way the way it's making online and in person classes now.

Sarah Heavren 26:38

Has that then given you the opportunity to spend more time with like you said, your cousins who live pretty much across the street? Are you now just sort of transferring that social energy more to your family?

Abigail Kojoian 26:54

I wouldn't necessarily say that just because I don't have a ton of time to like, hang out with them. But I guess I like the most social I, or like the person I most hang out with is my sister. Which is the way it's always been because being homeschooled we were just with each other constantly. So I guess we can compare to being homeschooled again. I just like spent a lot of time with her. We do homework together, we dinner together. We just, we spend most of our time together.

Sarah Heavren 27:30

So are there any challenges that you're still facing? Whether it be online learning or just adapting the pandemic, to the pandemic in general?

Abigail Kojoian 27:44

I don't think so. Not that I can think of off the top of my head.

Sarah Heavren 27:52

That's good.

Abigail Kojoian 27:52

It's like the biggest challenge is like wearing a mask.

Sarah Heavren 27:56

Yeah.

Abigail Kojoian 27:58

That's a, that's a, that's still a work in progress. Like I still notice it on my face.

Sarah Heavren 28:03

Yeah, especially if you're playing violin. That's gonna be annoying.

Abigail Kojoian 28:07

Yeah, I wasn't even expecting that to be a thing, but it's a thing.

Sarah Heavren 28:14

Yeah, it's like all the people who wear glasses, it fogs up. You know?

Abigail Kojoian 28:20

Yeah, that must be such. such a pain in the neck.

Sarah Heavren 28:25

You just be like me, I just stopped wearing mine.

Abigail Kojoian 28:27

Yeah, if I wore glasses, I think I would probably choose to wear contacts just because it would bother me so much. Yeah,

Sarah Heavren 28:36

I mean, when they fog up, it's like you can't see with them. You can't see without them. But anyway. Um, how do you think the pandemic has influenced your mental or physical health and well being? Have you been able to get outside more? Did you, you know, go for a lot of hikes or walks or something in the summer? Are you finding ways to stay active.

Abigail Kojoian 29:01

Yeah, especially in the summer. There's a track right, right around the corner. So from us, so I went to the track a lot. We went we took our dog on a walk a lot, so definitely got went hiking. So yeah, especially during the summer, we were we were a lot more active.

Sarah Heavren 29:23

Have you discovered any new hobbies or pursued any new passions or interests?

Abigail Kojoian 29:29

Oh, well, not necessarily new. But for the last like this past summer, I have been working on gymnastics. I have absolutely no experience with gymnastics, but I really want to be able to do to do gymnastics. And I don't know if it's because of the pandemic. Maybe it is because I did have a

little bit extra of extra time on my hands this summer. Um, but that was something I was working on.

Sarah Heavren 30:03

That's awesome. That's so cool.

Abigail Kojoian 30:04

Thank you. I got it. And I can't do anything but I was working.

Sarah Heavren 30:10

Not yet.

Abigail Kojoian 30:11

Not yet. It's still a work in progress.

Sarah Heavren 30:15

It is practice, you know?

Abigail Kojoian 30:17

Yes, exactly. I was working on getting flexible. I was working on handstands. I was trying to, I was trying to do some stuff. You know,

Sarah Heavren 30:25

If you could teach me how to do handstand, that's on my bucket list.

Abigail Kojoian 30:28

It's on my bucket list. It is so cool. I really want to be able to do it.

Sarah Heavren 30:34

We should we should talk to Olivia Dickinson she's to do gymnastics.

Abigail Kojoian 30:37

Yeah, we should we should get her to teach us.

Sarah Heavren 30:39

Yeah. Okay, anyway, that's going down in history. What, What do you think the things are that have kept you grounded? Has it been your family, your faith? Your dog?

Abigail Kojoian 30:53

Yes, all of the above, um, definitely my family, and definitely my faith. Um, and definitely my dog because we were able to be active with him, we were able to incorporate him on our walks or on our hikes. And definitely my faith, because when we couldn't go to church in the, in the summer for a little while, when they weren't, when they weren't having mass, it was something I missed. So, but then being able to go back to it was so, I was so grateful to be able to go back so that my faith definitely kept me grounded, and my family as well.

Sarah Heavren 31:35

So now, looking at head, what are your future plans? And have they been influenced or altered by the pandemic at all?

Abigail Kojoian 31:46

They have, and I feel like some ways that are, are good, almost, I've been applying to some schools, and the GRE has been waived for many of my schools, which was great. Um, but that was because of the pandemic. So I was, I was grateful for that part. Um, I guess the bad thing about the pandemic is that some of the schools to which I applied are having online programs, which is good and bad for some of the ones that are farther away. I guess it'll save me, save me a trip. But I also think that I wouldn't mind having them in person, like the classes in person, because it'll be a new environment and more difficult level of work, more difficult material, I guess. And, yeah, so I guess that's something that's, that's bad that's been affected by the pandemic.

Sarah Heavren 32:52

What types of programs are you applying to?

Abigail Kojoian 32:55

I've been looking at master's programs. Masters for math programs. I also looked at a couple of engineering programs. Um, yeah, so I, I applied to programs that are supposed to be online, but a lot of the schools have shut down just because of COVID. But hopefully, they'll reopen by the time, by the time it's time to go attend classes.

Sarah Heavren 33:22

So you're applying with the intention of starting this coming fall? Fall 2021?

Abigail Kojoian 33:29

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 33:31

Would you consider deferring a year until this blows over? Or at least blows over more?

Abigail Kojoian 33:41

I don't think so. I don't want to go through with it now before, before I get distracted by.

Sarah Heavren 34:01

So there's been news of the vaccine and lots of potential with that. So are you optimistic that, you know maybe we'll have a graduation, maybe classes will be in person for grad school in the fall, you'll be able to go outside or that you'll be able to play your violin without a mask?

Abigail Kojoian 34:25

Yes, and no. I think that we're, I don't know how PC is going to handle a graduation for us. But I don't think, I definitely don't think it will be a normal graduation. And I am not confident that it's actually going to happen. I think there's, there's a lot of risks that PC maybe doesn't want to take. So I do think that about the graduation. And as for wearing masks, I think people are even with a

vaccine are still going to be wary of of the Coronavirus, even if they know that, oh 70% of the population has the vaccine. I think there's still a population out there that doesn't trust the vaccine and doesn't put stock into it.

Sarah Heavren 35:20

Yeah, it's definitely something that will take time.

Abigail Kojoian 35:24

Mm hmm.

Sarah Heavren 35:27

Is there anything else you want to talk about that we haven't covered? You have any words of advice or positive messages to conclude with?

Abigail Kojoian 35:38

I really, I think talked about everything that that I can think of. Yeah, yeah, I think that's it.

Sarah Heavren 35:48

Okay, well, thank you for joining me today. This has been Abigail Kojoian, talking about her experience on the pandemic. So thanks for participating.

Abigail Kojoian 35:59

Thank you, Sarah.

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