

Sarah Heavren 0:01

We are recording. I am here again with Jake Turcotte, and today is March 21, 2021, and it is 5:04pm. And Jake would like to talk a little bit more about what it was like actually having COVID. So do you mind please sharing what it was like having the virus and having to be in the Marriott and ride that out?

Jake Turcotte 0:29

Sure. So it certainly wasn't a good time. I was at first reluctant to discuss my experience actually having COVID in like the first part of the interview just because I thought that people would judge me because I had the virus. But I eventually came to the realization that it wouldn't be justifiable for people to judge me based on that because it wasn't my fault at all. So yeah, I--it was a Wednesday morning, I was just getting up for classes, and one of my suitemates came in and said that he was positive. So we were all like, freaking out. We didn't know what to do. I don't blame him, but it was unbearable. So we had to go into isolation. So we did. And they weren't going to test us for the first like three or three days or so just for like, the COVID to like, like settle in your body. So once they test you, it'll be more likely that if you were positive that you'll show up as positive. However, that wasn't necessarily the case for me. A few days after I arrived at the Marriott I wasn't really feeling so well. I started to develop a slight cough. And that Friday night, I--it felt really strange. Like, someone was like grabbing onto my heart. So I realized that that wasn't right. So I call my parents and like, I don't know what to do. Should I, like, get checked out or what? And they said, Yeah, I should probably call it EMTs. So, PCs EMTs were supposed to come over. They didn't just because of I think staffing reasons. So Providence's actual, like, rescue came over. And they saw me. They kind of gave me the option, I can just wait it out overnight and see how I feel in the morning, or I could actually go to the hospital. I went to Miriam Hospital, which is one of the better heart hospitals in the state. And I got checked out. Luckily, my test results came back fine with like the heart and the chest issues. But, of course, I was tested positive then. So that certainly wasn't a good experience. So since I was there, and I got tested positive, I had to wait out the full 10 days, which--it kind of destroyed my mental health, just being all alone for 10 days. It wasn't a fun experience, and especially feeling sick. It felt--for some people, for some people, they're asymptomatic. I know a bunch of people on this campus who didn't really have any symptoms. But for me, it felt worse than a cold, which is typically what people, what people experience when they have COVID. I actually, I figured it would be worthwhile to, like write down everything that I felt day by day. So by day 10, I started feeling a little bit better, but I still didn't feel like 100%. It just, it just was very difficult. And I was very nervous the whole time because I have a lot of pre-existing medical conditions. I was born premature at 25 weeks. And due to my prematurity, my lungs weren't exactly fully developed. I actually had to get, I think it was like steroid injections when I was an infant, just to make sure that my lungs would properly develop so I wouldn't die from that. So due to, due to all those conditions, I had scarred lung tissue, and I had a lot of breathing issues when I was younger. I actually had to be on a respirator until I was three years old. So it was quite, I was quite nervous about having COVID because you see in the news, and just all around that so many people have so many, like, serious, long-term conditions. I was just so nervous about that. And I felt like it's important for me to share my story with COVID, that it's a serious, it's a serious thing. That it's not just Oh, yeah, I'm getting COVID some cold, oh, well, I'll be done in 10 days. It's actually a legitimate, scary thing. And I do have to say, when I did have COVID there were so many understandable people in my life. I had to ask from time to time

professors for extensions, but they were more than accommodating with. And also with CML staff, they were very kind to me. A couple of the friars checked in on me to see how I was doing and actually--so there's like a, like a check-in team that PC has, and one of the friars in the Priory that doesn't even work at PC, he's Fr. Edmund McCullough, he is like the Catholic chaplain at Brown, he called me a few times and asked how I was doing, which I really appreciate because I'm sure he's a very busy person. I just really appreciated how kind everyone was to me. And I wanted to highlight that, and also wanted to just really emphasize that COVID is a big deal. And at first I was afraid to tell people that I had COVID. But my mom even had to like, like, get in my head that like, Jake, it's not your fault that you had COVID, like you don't need to be embarrassed about it. It happened to you. Like prior to me getting COVID I was one of the most careful people on this campus. I didn't see anyone, if I need to talk to people, I either texted or FaceTimed them. And I didn't even like going to Ray, which is our dining hall on campus, because it's always so crowded. And even though the numbers are slightly better in recent weeks, that's only because I believe currently 860 out of the 4,000 students have tested positive for COVID. So I don't know what--that's a little bit less than a quarter. But those are still very high statistics. It's just crazy to know that there's like a one-in-five to one-in-four chance of you getting COVID on this campus, which I'm sure that that statistic will increase by May. I'm sure it'll increase to a quarter. It's just, it's crazy.

Sarah Heavren 9:19

So how long have you been out of isolation and back on campus?

Jake Turcotte 9:26

So it was, I came back on I think it was the last day of February maybe. So it's been almost a month since I came back. I certainly feel better now that I've been allowed to come back onto campus. But there are still things that that are clearly affected by COVID. I still have a cough that comes and goes. And it's just, it's not something like major, but I, it's not something that I desire either. I'm very fortunate that I came out of this with minor long-term effects that I know, of course. But like even having to go into the hospital, that was a major scare because like, say I didn't have COVID and I went into the busy hospital where everyone had COVID, I'm sure. That was just nerve racking, having to expose myself. So yeah.

Sarah Heavren 11:01

So besides the cough, have you been pretty much feeling okay?

Jake Turcotte 11:07

Right, right. Yeah, it's kind of a, it's kind of weird where I'm at right now, like, in terms of like my immunity, because I have until May 28, where I don't have to get tested. Obviously, we'll be off campus by then. But it's 90 days where you're deemed immune because if you were to get tested, they would just show up as positive because across those 90 days, you still potentially have dead COVID inside of you. So it's kind of, it's kind of weird where I'm at because even though I'm immune I'm still wicked cautious because there's so so many things, there's so many things about this virus that we don't know about that are still in development. Say even, for example, I were to get a different strain of the virus, God forbid. It's it just there's so many different things that you have to take into account.

Sarah Heavren 12:22

So now having the virus and knowing that there are these different strains out there, and also knowing that you have this supposed immunity for 90 days, are you motivated to be even more cautious? Or do you feel a little bit better about maybe seeing someone in-person because you know that you have this immunity for this window of time?

Jake Turcotte 12:52

I would say about the same amount of conscious as I was before. Because especially with Easter coming up, me coming home and my family, I wouldn't want to expose them. So God forbid, I were to get COVID again, even though it's very unlikely, I still don't want to risk that, because it's still a big risk, especially to my family. Some members are immune compromised, so I certainly wouldn't want to put them at risk due to my potential exposure.

Sarah Heavren 13:39

What did you think about the transition back to living on campus after being in the Marriott and having stayed there for 10 days and testing positive?

Jake Turcotte 13:53

It took it took a couple days to adjust. It's actually semi-funny. So, when we got off the bus to return back to our, to our housing, I--it felt almost like a walk of shame. Like I had all of my bags, I was just like, going back. I mean, it was a Sunday, not everyone was out, but everyone knows like the sign that someone has or has had COVID is that if you see people with like their luggage--so like I said, it was like almost like a walk of shame, like walk back to Suites, and to finally get settled in. In terms like adjustment, it was strange because like my suitemates, they were all coming back at different times because the one that was exposed, he showed signs earlier, he got to come back before any of us, and I came back a few days after him, and then my other two roommates came back after that, I think on that Tuesday. But I also felt almost pressured because I had to catch up on all this work that I missed, which wasn't fun. So on top of just getting out of, getting out of the woods with COVID, I had all this work that I had to catch up on and I just back to campus life, and it felt good to be back just because I wasn't cooped up in this in this tiny hotel room, pretending--not knowing what was going to happen to me in the future. But it was also, it was also, it was both a sigh of relief and something that I wish I could have avoided.

Sarah Heavren 16:03

Do many people know that you had COVID? Has it come up? Have people tried to talk to you about it? Or do you just try to avoid mentioning it?

Jake Turcotte 16:13

Up until like the more recent times, I hadn't really feel comfortable about it. But it was kind of obvious like when I was at the Marriott with my Zoom camera on in class, people saw that I had COVID. So--or at least we're at the Marriott and exposed or something. So people would be texting me like oh my gosh, you're at the Marriott? Do you have COVID? So the cat was kind of out of the bag at that point. So I didn't really feel the need to lie or to, you know, not tell people about it because, I mean, it's a small campus. Word gets around. Everyone knows everyone. So yeah, I mean, I'm perfectly comfortable saying I had COVID now just because it's not, it's no

longer, I no longer have it. I'm immune. I--and it's completely not my fault, which was something I had to come to terms with. But yeah.

Sarah Heavren 17:39

Do you think now having COVID makes you a little more empathetic to other people who might have had COVID and especially other people who are in a situation like you where they contracted it from no fault of their own?

Jake Turcotte 17:55

Certainly. It's kind of a mental thing with humans. Let me explain this. So I was speaking with another RA, and they were saying like when people don't wear masks and you see the other person not wearing a mask, you automatically think like it's a mental thing. That, oh, they're disregarding the rules. But in reality, it's probably just that, like, they just forgot their mask or something. So they just need like a gentle reminder. I feel like that's in the same way, it's like people with having COVID. Like, if you see someone that has COVID you automatically think oh, that was stupid of them. They were partying, I'm sure. But I'm sure that's obviously not the case for everyone. People, even though some people do not make the wisest decisions, leading to them getting COVID, to say people certainly get it by no fault of their own, which I certainly, I certainly do understand and relate with them better now that I have had COVID. It's difficult to think that way, but it's something that kind of just needs to register in your head and that no one, I'm sure no one, I think they, no one wants to get COVID and it's--so like, you can't, you can't automatically put blame on someone if they have COVID or blame anyone at all. It's, it would be no place of our own to judge others if they were to get COVID even without even caring about their safety or the safety of others, that would mean--it's not our place to judge.

Sarah Heavren 20:37

You don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but has having COVID changed the dynamic within your room and with your roommates, since you all went through this together?

Jake Turcotte 20:52

In a way that it unified us. We went through a similar experience, we texted each other and checked in and saw what we were doing throughout the process. And even afterwards, we asked like, Hey, how are you feeling today? At least in the first week or so because we're generally feeling better now.

Sarah Heavren 21:28

Is there anything else that you want to talk about?

Jake Turcotte 21:35

Not that I can think of, but if I can just say to anyone watching slash reading this: be careful and do not judge. That last part was a joke. But yeah, just be hopeful and stay safe, especially during these times, and hopefully, we'll all get through it.

Sarah Heavren 22:09

Okay, well, thanks, Jake, for adding on to that bit of your story. I think it's really impactful and will hopefully motivate people to stay safe or at least have a better understanding of what having COVID can be like.

Jake Turcotte 22:24

Thank you so much, Sarah.

Sarah Heavren 22:25

Thank you.

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