

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 and 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 Marelle Hipolito. Today is March 31 2021, and it is 11:02am. I'm coming to you from my dorm room on the campus of Providence College, and Marelle is speaking from her home in Virginia. Marelle, I would like to review the informed consent form that you signed for 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 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 agreed to this?

Marelle Hipolito 1:22

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 1:24

I'm briefly going to review the license on the release form that you signed. 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 Providence College Archives and Special Collections to include the materials in 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 the work. Per the CC-BY 4.0 license the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence Public Library, Providence College Archives and Special Collections, and the public must credit the creator when making any future uses. De verbally agreed to this license?

Marelle Hipolito 2:07

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 2:09

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Marelle Hipolito 2:12

Nope.

Sarah Heavren 2:13

Cool. So Marelle, do you mind sharing what your major is, what year you are, and what activities you're involved with on campus?

Marelle Hipolito 2:22

So I'm a theology major about to declare a poli-sci [political science] minor. And I'm part of the Board of Programmers and Campus Ministry and the Cowl at PC. Yeah. And I'm a junior, rising senior.

Sarah Heavren 2:41

And do you live on campus?

Marelle Hipolito 2:44

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 2:47

And are you studying in person or remotely the spring?

Marelle Hipolito 2:51

In person. I was remote last semester.

Sarah Heavren 2:55

So now to go back to when the pandemic was really just taking off a little over a year ago, do you remember where you were in what you were doing when you found out that spring break was going to be extended? And how did you react to that?

Marelle Hipolito 3:10

So I do I distinctly remember like me and one of my friends from PC that lives near me. We both took the same plane home and we were talking about how we think that whatever this COVID thing was just like another like Ebola or like EEE, like something that was just like a wave and like, it wasn't going to really affect us. And we said, All right, like see you in a couple of days. And it was when like, I was at home like for spring break not really doing anything. Um, I was supposed to go to France on the Campus Ministry pilgrimage, for spring break, and it got it got postponed, cancelled. And I thought it was no big deal. I thought it was going to be contained in Europe. I really did. And then it was like in Virginia when I was with my parents that they started to use the word pandemic and like epidemic and I was like, This seems a little bit more serious than I would think so. And that's--when we got the emails from Fr. Sicard or--I believe it was Fr. Sicard or Father--I don't know. But like we got the email from PC saying that like it was going to be extended until April and then that's when it started to dawn on me like oh, like this is going to be totally different than like whatever we think it would be.

Sarah Heavren 4:36

Were you concerned that you had only packed enough for, you know, like one week at home? Were there things that you had left at school that, now especially that classes were going to be online, that you felt you needed?

Marelle Hipolito 4:51

It's so funny. Every time I go home, because it's always by flight never by drive or train, like I always bring like my books home. And of course the one time I was like, no I'm not going to bring my books home, like for classes was the one time I actually needed them. So, and of course at the library and like PC provided like resources and like the rest of the world, they provided

online resources for textbooks that semester. So it wasn't really that much of a big deal. But I thought, oh, like, I need my notes. I don't know about this can't write a paper on something where my notes are 400 miles away, kind of deal. In terms of clothing, like not really, like, I have a lot of clothes both at PC and here at home. So, um, so it wasn't that much of a big deal. But it was definitely the books and I was like, oh, oops.

Sarah Heavren 5:48

How did you adapt to learning online at home?

Marelle Hipolito 5:51

It was difficult because, like, my, like, ever since I went to college, and like moved up there to Providence, ever since I moved up there, like, none of my regular study spaces here at home, like were longer study spaces. Like my room turned into a storage, both by myself and my parents. My, like the other room, like the study room that my family all shares, it turned into a playpen for my dog. Like, it was, like, it was kind of humiliating, that, like, my dog had more space for himself than I have space to study, considering I'm more expensive, but you know, I don't know anymore. I, so what I did was I found like, a desk, like just like, wiped everything off, put my computer and like that one piece of paper that I had left on and got into the mindset of like, this is where all the studying is going to be. Like, I knew that I wasn't going to pay attention like if I was just like, in my bed, or like, at the kitchen table, also from the kitchen table, but like, I just knew that it wasn't going to work unless like I was in one space for all this. So it wasn't as bad. It was definitely a difficult transition. But because I was already doing well in classes, like it wasn't that bad. You know, like, I was already going uphill, like I was a steady uphill. So like it was just a neutral, positive, if that makes sense.

Sarah Heavren 7:31

And how did being remote for the second half of the spring semester affect things that you were involved with on campus? Like how did that transform your CML position? And how did that transform your involvement in BOP? Did those things kind of just stop?

Marelle Hipolito 7:50

BOP stopped. It took like a halt because like it was in-person stuff. So like, what are you going to--how are you going to make events for people on campus when you're not on campus, neither are the people and neither are you. Like, I was--like that kind of came to a stop. And it was depression all around, like in that club. In terms of Campus Ministry, I'd like to think that because it's a community based like and founded in Christ, it's kept going more, but at the same time, because it's a faith-filled and centered community, it was, it wasn't--even though we did have like events and like things and ministries that did service in-person to people, even though that also halted, it was the camaraderie that like, kept it a little bit alive. Like every time I feel like everything, everything like extracurricular just like died. Like I feel like it just like came to a halt. But, if anything, that camaraderie and just like that, looking out for one another was still there.

Sarah Heavren 8:52

Once the semester ended, what was your summer like? Did you have any plans that were compromised? Were you supposed to have an internship or have a job?

Marelle Hipolito 9:04

So my plan was like, my plans were very like indefinite and I wasn't really looking for a job or like an internship at all pre-COVID anyways, but I wanted to fly to the New England area and like hang out with my friends. I was going to--my plan and hope was to rent out one of my, one of the rooms off campus that like you go into and say like my friends that live off campus, like one of their roommates like wasn't there for the summer so I would have lived in their house for that summer and then paid that friend's, like everyone that like, like all works out, that was my plan. So I could just like live like a nice relaxing summer, like on campus, probably work in the bookstore like as I usually did before, and yeah. So, but like that didn't work out. At the same time, it wasn't that big of a deal for me. Like I didn't get it as hard as a lot of people did.

Sarah Heavren 10:05

Were you hopeful about students being able to come back to campus in the fall? What--how were you trying to make the decision whether to study remotely or in-person, given the option?

Marelle Hipolito 10:19

So I definitely wanted to come back. Like last semester, I didn't want to be remote, I wanted to be in person. And even though I'm a junior, like, all my best friends are like seniors, so I want to spend as much time as I could with them. So the plan was always to go in-person. But then when we got that, I got that email in August saying that Virginia was a hotspot, and we would have to quarantine two weeks in advance, and me already expecting that we were going to get shut down in some way or manner because parties, I just, like there was like a deep inclining in me that like, I had to stay remote like not just for like, not just for myself, but for my parents. I spent, like I found it as an opportunity to spend more time with my parents and almost like practice for when I was a, when all my friends were graduated, you know, like just by myself. So I took that as an opportunity. It was hard in the beginning to make that choice because I didn't want to make that choice. I wanted to be in-person, but it worked out in the end. It was definitely that quarantining and like the distance and not knowing how it's going to work out that definitely got me remote. And I'm really grateful that I did it.

Sarah Heavren 11:29

So what did the fall look like for you? Obviously, all your classes were online. But CML is still continuing. And BOP was starting to try to figure out ways to do things online and in-person. So what was the fall semester like for you?

Marelle Hipolito 11:48

It was a, it was honestly very fruitful and graceful. I did well in my classes, having that mindset of just being at one place in my room, to like, do work, like really helped a lot. And like, because I didn't have to walk back and forth from classes and me and my short legs, we don't really walk fast, we don't walk, I don't walk at accelerated rates. So all that time of like trying to figure out where to go for food, or like, doing my laundry, because like, I don't know, it just like takes time to go back. You know, I mean, like, instead of just like having it in your house. All that time, like help with my productivity. And honestly, I was able to manage in BOP and in Camp Min to like do--more so BOP because I had more flexibility--like to do like more events. Like, if anything, it helped flourish, because like I was, I'm a very, like in event planning, I'm very oriented towards

themed stuff. So like, my first event was like about fried chicken. And then my second event, like the month before COVID hit was about like The Office TV show, and that had Dunder Mifflin. So like those are things that, those are things I was good at. So last semester, I was able to do all these like themed trivia that people went to--Taylor Swift Avengers, Grey's Anatomy, and so on and so forth, like virtual competitions, send in a video and we have social media to spread the word on a platform. So like stuff like that definitely helped a lot. But--what else was I going to say? So like, I was able to actually flourish a lot more than I usually did in BOP. I made a name for myself in there. And in Camp Min, I can't really pull the top of my head what I did. But definitely, it was more of the camaraderie feel of me reaching out to other remote students. And now I'm really close to one of the remote students that I reached out to, David and Haley. And yeah, like, God works in mysterious ways. And it worked out for the better. There's always a way, like, even in COVID. Like, if there's one thing I learned even in COVID, there's a way if you really want it, you really love it, there's always a way to get it done, of course, if God willing.

Sarah Heavren 13:59

So, you weren't on campus for the outbreak, but I'm sure your friends who were on campus told you all about it. So what was it like being at home hearing the news of what was going on and getting this information kind of, you know, from the people who are going through it? You know, what was it like knowing that your friends were going through that? Did that make you even more, I guess, satisfied with your decision to stay home?

Marelle Hipolito 14:26

Oh, I was, yeah, very happy that I stayed at home. But also I really felt for my friends who didn't deserve that because they weren't part of the outbreak. They just suffered from it. So that was, that was infuriating to know people who did do that, and then not even care about the consequences because they had their beach houses and other places to go to and skirt off to at the last minute. That was really like second-hand stressful for me because I didn't know what my friends were going through and I couldn't really help them. I ended up being able to help them by sending them cards, you know, like mail it as if I was like I lived in the 1950s, you know, like postcard. I was able to get one of my friends to get chicken for like my friends off campus, you know, like just a little delivery surprise for dinner like stuff like that. So yeah, like it was second-hand hard. Obviously, I didn't go through it, so I don't know for sure, but yeah, very upsetting.

Sarah Heavren 15:32

Did you find that for your classes, were they--did you have any asynchronous classes or were they all synchronous while you were online?

Marelle Hipolito 15:41

Thank God they were all synchronous, like meaning that they all happened the time that they were supposed to because there was no way that I would have done any of the videos like at all. There was at some point asynchronous videos for the first semester, so like last spring like a year ago, but like that was like okay because like it was a class I liked and it was only like 15-minute videos. If you give me a whole lecture, no, no way, I'm failing the class. Period. Delete it. So having it either, it doesn't really matter if it was in-person or Zoom, I would have paid attention

just the same either way but the fact that it was at the same time so, so, so helped because it made you have a responsibility, like that was imminent.

Sarah Heavren 16:27

Once the fall semester wrapped up what was your winter break like? Were you trying to make the decision again whether just study remotely or in-person?

Marelle Hipolito 16:38

When I, at the end of, by like winter break I was like yeah I got to get out of this house, I got to go see my friends, and it was also the right decision. Like at that point was like I know what I'm prepared for, whatever is going to happen, like I know how to deal with it seeing how everybody else dealt with it and it'll be great. But for sure like came back, yeah.

Sarah Heavren 17:01

You mentioned earlier that when you come to campus it's always by plane so were you nervous at all about having to go in an airport to take a plane?

Marelle Hipolito 17:10

So I didn't, so I definitely took an--like I go to the airport and fly for like breaks but like when I move in and out it's definitely by, it's always by car. So like that was fine. If anything, I wasn't nervous for myself, I was nervous for my mom because she was halfway through vaccine rounds so, but yeah.

Sarah Heavren 17:35

So now here we are in the spring semester, and how do you think it's going so far? Are you able to do more things in-person with Campus Ministry, especially with BOP, have classes in-person? What's your experience like this semester compared to last semester?

Marelle Hipolito 17:52

So in terms of BOP and Camp Min they've been better too because I'm able to help out with other people's events, I'm able to rely on myself for my own events. For example, last semester I had to plan, when I planned events I had to plan knowing that I had to ask somebody's helped to like do this and do that in-person, hang up posters, volunteer shifts, like I knew that for sure so like that was always hard to like gauge and like go around. But now like me, myself, and I. I can do it. Like, I don't want to do it alone, of course, like, but worst-case scenario I can always do it myself. So that's been a help in like BOP and in Camp Min. In classes, they have been more difficult. I don't know if it's because of the material or because in-person but definitely--I got COVID, like I tested positive--well first I was close-contacted and then with incubation I tested positive from that close contact the second third week of school and that like wiped me out. Like I didn't go to class or anything and the classes that I barely paid attention to I just stopped going to for a couple of weeks. So that kind of got me behind. I kind of got a bit behind and yeah, like it's like I'm getting back on track now especially with like communication with professors that become more lenient with more communication so that's been great. But for some reason like my classes have not been the priority. It's always been, just like for this semester, it's been the health and like spending time with my friends, like it really is. Like senioritis fever, you know, like even though I'm a junior but like with everything going on like the classes are not my priority

anymore. It's like what we can do like beyond that because it's like I'm balancing class, but it's just, yeah, like that's been hard especially catching up with COVID because like those like side effects suck.

Sarah Heavren 20:02

At this point, I mean, I guess it's been probably a couple months since you've had it, but are you feeling better? Have most of the side effects kind of gone away?

Marelle Hipolito 20:11

Yeah. So like a week or two ago, they started to like fade away. And I honestly like I feel like, I feel like more should be done. Like so, after I came out of COVID, I tried to get a peer support group going for those post-COVID effects like memory, short term memory loss, brain fog, like muscle spasms, or like anything like post-COVID effects. I tried to get that for students that were going--like me that were going through that. And I don't think it was ever approved, or was a follow through just because there's so many things going on. I don't think it ever was, but I really wanted to get that going because like, I don't think people realize how much it affects like the brain and people differently, but you don't know. Like, yeah, like, unfortunately there are people who always use excuses, not needing them. But then there are people who are like me who are like, how can I write a paper on this class material when I don't remember this class? Like I was out of it, you know, so, so yeah, I'm feeling better, but like, got to feel for those too who are so going through it or got it worse.

Sarah Heavren 21:23

So what, what kind of things have you been able to do with your friends now that you're back in-person and able to, like see them in person?

Marelle Hipolito 21:31

So, ironically enough, and honestly, like kind of blessing, my friends also were quarantined, and tested positive the same time that I did, but for different reasons, like our close contact, we were traced to different sources, like very different sources. And, but like the fact that, like, we all went through it the exact same time, I got the worst out of all of them. But, like, luckily for me, but now that we all just got it. like, at the same time, we have like a herd--we're very still cautious--but, and like, we want to respect and follow the rules, but we have like a sense of herd immunity. There's only one of us that hasn't gotten it and so if he hangs out with only us who can't give it to him, we're set. So being able to being able to, like, go to their house and have a little barbecue and drink. Because we're all of age. Like it's been great. And like, just like tan on the porch, like it's fun. And like even like go out on, go out on to like, like restaurants or like go bowling has been great. So doing our best, like, it's still not the same, but like, you make the most out of it.

Sarah Heavren 22:51

Do you have any more BOP events that you're planning for this semester?

Marelle Hipolito 22:55

Yes, I have five coming up. I have--yeah, which is really weird because like, usually you have like, Oh, you only plan like one pre-COVID and now I've planned 11 for last semester and 11

this semester. Yeah. So I have Star Wars trivia with a goodie bag coming up. And like after Easter and then a Saturday Night Vibes event that Saturday, where it's just like, Saturday night vibes like on the like, like literally Saturday night vibes on the lawn, like string lights, sunset, like you name it. And then the week after that I have a Hogwarts feast within Ray Dining Hall with Harry Potter trivia to follow, and Dunder Mifflin, aka The Office trivia, and pretzels, and then a spring photoshoot that people can register for on the lawn. Yeah, I'm excited for those. It's going to, I'm going to be burnt out by the end of it. But it's, it's so worth it. Like I joined BOP not knowing I was going to get a family, but I did of very impactful people in my life. But definitely always joined BOP for the main reason of like, having events for the student body. And now in a time where the student body doesn't even know the rest of the student body, you got to do more events for them. So. So yeah.

Sarah Heavren 24:20

Have you felt that the pandemic has kind of forced you to be even more creative with your events?

Marelle Hipolito 24:26

Oh, yeah.

Sarah Heavren 24:26

It seems like you know, in the Morning Mail, it's like if there's anything going on, it's it's something put out by BOP. It's like BOP is trying to carry student activities right now. So have you been trying to think more creatively about what events to plan, as you're planning more events than usual?

Marelle Hipolito 24:44

Yeah. It's like ironically, it's the all-bets-are-off that motivates you. Like, Oh, so if all bets are off, I can do more. I have more leeway. I have more flexibility. So what can we do with this leeway and flexible You know, so it's stuff like that.

Sarah Heavren 25:08

So one of the big things with living on campus is the idea of your pod, pod being usually your roommates. So what has it been like going from living at home and having your parents and your dog, I guess, be your pod to now having your pod on campus? What's it like living with your, with your pod this semester?

Marelle Hipolito 25:32

So I only have one roommate, luckily enough, Dina and she's an RA Suites, which means that we are in a four-person apartment, but because it's just the two of us, we each get our own room. So I have two beds, and she has two beds. I have a bed that I sit on, and I have a bed that I eat on. And it's been great. Yeah, it's been great because like, I wasn't really friends with her outside of like rooming. Like, trying to become friends with your roommate in that way. And like, yeah, like, it's been nice. Like, I don't really have people over, I usually go to like, other people's houses, you know, or, like, go out. So, yeah. Yeah. Like, it's been, like, yeah.

What have been the greatest challenges that you've faced through the pandemic?



Oh, so like, I'm, a very impatient person. And usually like, and I'm always one to, like, not try to make excuses and just keep doing things, even if times are hard. But now like, because you don't know what people are going through in a pandemic, where you don't know how people are reacting, you don't know if somebody's still suffering from the side effects or they have like a family problem, like, like the amount of like, you don't know what someone is going through has expounded. So taking a step back, and like thinking, Okay, like, let me be patient, let me be understanding, open minded, but at the same time, still expected things you still need to expect, you know, I mean, like, from people, like, that's been, that's been one of the hardest things to gauge. One of the other things that's hard, like, I have a solid group of friends. So even pandemic or not I know I'm going to be with them like, at some point, another. Like, our relationship, our friendship doesn't change if we're like, 400 miles away, or two miles away and still can't see each other, you know, like, our technology has always provided--God bless, but it's the people that you want to hang out with that you are, like, want to see that you're not on that foundation yet. Or you're trying to, if that makes sense, like, but it's hard because you won't, you have to make plans. You don't just like come across them when you're like walking to class. So.

Sarah Heavren 28:07

have you discovered any new hobbies or pursued any new interests?

Marelle Hipolito 28:13

Comic books, weirdly enough, I love the Avenger Marvel, comic books and the movies. So--and coloring like in my free time, but when I was remote, I don't have any free time in-person. But remote, I would just like color and read comic books. It's been fun.

Sarah Heavren 28:37

What aspects of normal PC life do you miss the most?

Marelle Hipolito 28:44

Parties and bars, I can't even hide it. Like I miss the crowd. The crowd feeling so concerts, dances, I miss it so much.

Sarah Heavren 28:58

What are the things that have kept you grounded through the pandemic? Has been your faith, your family, your friends, certain activities?

Marelle Hipolito 29:06

All of the above. Definitely the support of my family and having friends has definitely helped a lot. And honestly would not get through it without it. But also like, having things to do like having that bigger purpose of like, I have to plan an event. Well, I don't have to, but I should and will plan an event because there's a freshman out there who has no idea what the sense of community is at PC and probably feels all alone. If she has roommate issues, that sucks even more. So might as well try to plan an event that she may or may not be interested in. It's always that other person. So having that bigger purpose has definitely like driven me. Like even with the struggles in BOP and in Camp Min and the time commitment, like if it helps and changes the day of one person, that's all that matters. All that work, definitely worth it, you know. So.

Sarah Heavren 29:59

What are your future plans and how, if at all, has the pandemic influenced them?

Marelle Hipolito 30:12

I had honestly not thought that much like, surprisingly, like, I know that this summer, I probably would have stayed at home or tried to, like, hang out with my friends like, and I can do that now just like, fly by plane, or like, you know, like drive there. Like, it's totally fine now. I mean, obviously, we can't just like, like, go to a concert. But like, I don't know, if I would go to a concert anyways, you know, so like, not like, not that much. I'm like, weirdly an introverted person when it comes to the rest of the world.

Sarah Heavren 30:53

You mentioned earlier that your mom had gotten the vaccine. So are you hopeful about the vaccines being distributed, that we're getting closer to being able to open things up and you know, maybe in the near future, be able to have things like concerts, or at least, you know, be able to be around your friends and not have to worry about COVID as much?

Marelle Hipolito 31:16

For sure. For sure. I just want to see the bottom half of people's faces again. I don't know when that's going to be, but I really want that. Because I don't know, I can't like recognize people. I'm like, Are you my best friend or not? You kind of look like him. So yeah.

Sarah Heavren 31:32

What are your thoughts about what the fall semester is going to look like?

Marelle Hipolito 31:37

I think it's going to be a lot more normal. But I still think precautions are going to be taken. But so yeah, I don't know. I think it'll be okay. I'm pretty hopeful for it.

Sarah Heavren 31:55

Is there anything else you want to talk about that we have not covered? Do you have any words of advice or positive messages?

Marelle Hipolito 32:06

If there's a will, there's a way. There really is. Sometimes, when there's a will, and there's something significant to take on or address there's a way, in a pandemic or not. There always is when you have that heart and that will, there's always a way. And what's meant to happen will happen. I think that the uncertainty has taken a toll on me, taken a toll on people around me, people I care about, and what's meant to happen will happen. It's just so hard. But like, whatever was meant to happen--it's definitely because of my faith--but whatever is meant to happen will happen. And you just don't know how, you just don't know how long it takes, but it'll happen, you know. So yeah.

Sarah Heavren 32:57

Thanks, Marelle, for taking the time to meet with me and talk about what the past year has looked like for you.

Marelle Hipolito 33:03

Of course, no problem.

Sarah Heavren 33:06

This has been Marelle Hipolito sharing her pandemic experience.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>