

Interview with
MARGARET YUNKER

April 14, 2021

**THE PANDEMIC YEARS: COVID-19
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**UTAH TECH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
ST. GEORGE, UTAH**

#2021-003

Utah Tech University provides access to its collections as an unaltered, authentic historical record to aid in the research and understanding of history, while acknowledging their impact on various peoples and groups. Some collection materials are reflective of past cultures and prejudices, including images or words that are inherently offensive, insensitive and harmful. The University does not support, condone or endorse these harmful ideas, behaviors or attitudes, and they do not reflect the official opinion of the University. Rather, the University embraces a culture that prioritizes diversity and inclusion, as demonstrated in the University's Mission, Core Themes and Values.

Final editing was completed in 2021.
For permission to use any part of this transcript contact:

Special Collections and Archives
Utah Tech University Library
Holland Centennial Commons 330
Utah Tech University
St. George, UT 84770
(435) 634-2087
specialcollections@utahtech.edu

INDEX

Biden [President Joseph]	10, 11
Black Lives Matter [movement]	9, 11
capitol siege [U.S.]	10
Disneyland	4, 5, 8
election [U.S. presidential]	10, 11
Fauci [Dr. Anthony]	11
masks	5, 6, 12
protests	9
school	4, 5, 6, 11, 12
Trump [President Donald]	10, 11
vaccine	6, 7
Yang, Andrew	10

MARGARET YUNKER

Margaret Yunker was interviewed by Sabrina Gilbert on April 14, 2021, through video call, and recorded through voice recorder. Margaret Yunker was in her home in Little Valley, Washington County, Utah; and Sabrina Gilbert was in St. George, Washington County, Utah at the time of the interview. She talked about living in Utah during 2020-2021 with a daughter and husband, going to school, as well as touching on growing up in Utah, and how these couple years have seen a change.

SG: Alright, this is Sabrina Gilbert. Today is April 14th, 2021. I am interviewing Margaret Yunker for [the] DSU [Dixie State University] pandemic years oral history project. What is your name and could you spell it, and where are you from?

MY: Hi. So my name is Margaret Yunker, as you stated, I do go by “Maggie,” if you want to use that. The spelling of my name is M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T Y-U-N-K-E-R, if you want to use Maggie, it is M-A-G-G-I-E. And I am born-and-raised here in St. George, Utah.

SG: Alright, and could you give us a little more background on you, kind of thing?

MY: Yeah, so like I said, I was born and raised here in St. George, Utah. Grew up in Santa Clara, then after I got married I kind of moved around, staying in the [Washington] County. I lived in Hurricane for a while. And then we’ve, my husband and I, we’ve settled out in Little Valley near Washington Fields. That’s where we currently are, with our ten-year-old little girl.

It’s just the three of us and we love to travel. We love Disneyland. And we just kind of love doing things together. So it’s lucky we like each other, so that’s good. [Laughter]

SG: So, could you tell us a little bit about, like, your daily life before the pandemic?

MY: So, as a DSU student,— I’m also a full-time student— my life consisted of waking up at six-thirty in the morning, getting my daughter to school, getting myself ready and going to school. And then, I would be done right as she would get off the bus and we would spend our evenings doing homework, and if I didn’t, that’s if I didn’t have an evening class.

During breaks, my family and I would go to Disneyland, we had annual passes. And so we would go every, you know, month or so.

And every summer we would plan a bigger trip, usually international. We would go—we’ve been to London [United Kingdom], we’ve been to Sydney [Australia], we’ve been to Tokyo [Japan]. And, you know, just exploring the world around us.

SG: That’s really cool.

MY: That was pre-COVID. [Laughter.]

SG: So then, what was it like right when it [COVID-19] hit? When did you first hear about it? How did your life change right after it happened?

MY: So, I was actually in class, on campus. I was in my world geography class [REDACTED]. And, it was just, she just, in class just made an offhand comment about this disease that was kind of going rampant in China. And she was like, you know, “We should probably— we should probably keep an eye on this. This could turn into something big, you know.” And that was back in, like, February when she said that and then—

We were planning a March spring break trip to Disneyland. And, you know, I had taken the precautions of, you know, planning on going. So I didn’t buy any masks at that point, but I definitely bought hand sanitizers, and sanitizing wipes, and, you know, all of these things to just kind of keep us clean, and, like, any of the areas that we sat clean. We weren’t nervous until we started seeing the numbers rising faster. And then, we decided, like two-three days before we were supposed to leave, to just go ahead and cancel our trip. We didn’t have to, we didn’t have to pay for tickets ’cause our passes were still good. And luckily our hotel, we were able to cancel that, we were within that twenty-four-hour period. And then the day that would have been our first day in the Disney, in the parks was the first day that they closed.

SG: Wow, that’s crazy.

MY: Yeah, so that was, like, the immediate shock, and then everything went into lockdown. And schools didn’t go back into regular session. We did it, we did the homeschool thing, both my daughter and I. And it was really difficult for me, as a mom, because I wasn’t, because I was in school.

SG: Yeah.

MY: I had to finish my classes, I was carrying eighteen credits at the time. And so, I had to finish all of those online. And then, but, and so, that meant I didn’t have the time to devote to her when she was struggling with stuff. Because she is just like me, she is a very personable person. She loves in-person learning, on hands learning. And so, going virtual for her was very difficult. She just, and so she struggled trying to find her rhythm, and— and how things were supposed to go.

SG: So, how were you two able to overcome it?

MY: We just sat in the same room and did homework [laughter] in the same room. We hunkered down together. And she had her little laptop, I had my laptop and my books spread out all over my bed and, if she needed help, I was right next to her.

SG: What does your life look like now?

MY: Now, in comparison, things are definitely more relaxed. I mean, we’re more than a year since. So, she’s back in school full time.

We actually just finished, last week, a dance concert for her school that she was in and I was able to go volunteer backstage. I was one of maybe five moms backstage that was wearing a mask the whole time. And the kids didn't wear masks because they were in full makeup, and so they didn't want to, like, smudge it. Yeah, it was a petri dish of [laughter] things, because now my daughter is at home, sick.

SG: Yeah.

MY: You know, she doesn't have COVID or anything, but she's got, she had, she came home with a cold and with a stomach bug. And, you know, and so she's— she's kind of dealing with the aftermath of being around that many kids for the first time in a year without masks.

SG: Yeah. And how has the community of like St. George, and specifically where you live in the Valley, kind of changed?

MY: It's like during that first couple of months, my neighborhood was, I mean, we just kind of banded together. I mean, we couldn't social, I mean, we couldn't social interact like normal, like we couldn't have block parties or barbecues or anything like that. But, we did virtual scavenger hunts. Not virtual scavenger hunts, it was like they weren't in person, so like, you would, each house would have a different item in their window or on their porch, and on days where kids, you know, were riding their bikes outside, they could go find them. We would, for milestone birthdays, everybody would decorate their houses for those kids that were celebrating milestone birthdays. We had a neighbor rent a food truck for four hours and parked it outside her house for everybody to go get dinner.

SG: That's cool.

MY: So luckily, you know, my neighborhood was really good about keeping everybody active and connected even though we were all kind of hunkered down. Now, I mean, kids are outside playing with each other and, you know, things are getting more back to normal in my neighborhood than they were.

But as for the community, I've noticed there has been a lot of people who don't necessarily want to follow any kind of guideline. So, they don't wear their masks unless they're told to, and then they wear it grudgingly, or they refuse outright and have to leave the store.

You know, on Facebook there's a lot of moms who are against vaccinations and against their— they want their kids to be able to just go ahead and wear— go to school like normal, no masks. And, you know, granted they found that COVID doesn't necessarily affect kids the same way, like they can still get it, but they are more carriers and they can take it home. And that's why, you know, that's why everything is still so important. Just because we have a vaccine doesn't mean it's gone.

SG: Yeah.

MY: It's still here. And so, we still need to take precautions, and I am seeing that as the mandate is lifted and people are just— They want to go back to normal and they want their normal to come sooner than I think it should.

SG: Yeah. So then, have you gotten the vaccine and your thoughts on that?

MY: I get my second dose tomorrow.

SG: Yay!

MY: I know, I'm so excited. So, my husband has an autoimmune disease, and so he's immunocompromised. So, that kind of, once we realized, "Oh, COVID is like an actual thing, and it can kill you," meaning my husband, we really took every precaution that we did for almost a good year. We had just one group of friends, like one other couple, one other family, that we hung out with, and that was it. And, they have vaccinated and now we've vaccinated because my husband is at a higher risk.

No, it's just,, to me, it's smart. I've done— I've read research on the vaccine, not just, you know, Facebook knowledge, but actual research. And, you know, they've been working on this vaccine 'cause COVID is a strain of SARS. And so, they've been working on a SARS vaccine for over ten years. And, that's where they've gotten the base code for the COVID vaccine. So this vaccine has actually been in development for over ten years, but it's just now that they've figured out how it's supposed to work and how it's supposed to respond to this specific bacter— or virus. And so, you know, people that say, "Oh, you know, you're the Guinea pigs." And it's like, "Well, no. They have actually done the trials." And it's— the science is there, you just have to look for it.

SG: Yeah. Yeah, so you said that you hung out with one other couple. How did you connect with other people outside of that couple?

MY: Marco Polo [app] was actually a really big thing for my family and my friends that, you know, weren't, that I wasn't able to connect with. I mean, we had a Marco Polo thread going with my sisters and with my husband's family. And I mean, it was every day I woke up to like four Marco Polos, and then, like, I would go to bed and I would have already sent three, you know.

So, it was just it, you know, technology now has been able to connect, keep everybody connected. And I think this, as sad as it has happened, I think it couldn't have happened at a better time, to keep people connected to each other.

SG: Right.

MY: Yeah, we just have— We just have the technology. Like, at Christmas— my family is very, very into Christmas and they also had COVID.

SG: No!

MY: Yeah. So, all but two of my siblings, me, and my one sister. Everybody else had COVID during Christmas, so there was no way I was going to be anywhere near them. And so, I was like, I'll set up a Zoom call and we'll do Christmas Eve over Zoom.

SG: Yeah.

MY: And we did. You know things had to get cancelled, but, you know, we made it work.

SG: Yeah. So, the real question is, do you pay for Marco Polo Premium?

MY: No. [Laughter.]

SG: We don't either.

MY: Right, no.

SG: I just had to ask, you were talking about it and I was like, "I wonder—."

MY: There are other things, like I paid for it, like I paid— I joined more streaming services—

SG: Yeah.

MY: — in the last year, I don't think that's too [inaudible due to laughter].

SG: What streaming services have you signed up for that you weren't?

MY: Oh my gosh. Starz. I mean, we already have a lot, but we did. We added Starz, we added, we thought about adding Peacock, but we didn't— Showtime.

SG: Peacock, there is a free version.

MY: Oh, okay. I'll look into that. But yeah, I mean, we already had a ton.

SG: Yeah.

MY: But that's just what we did, that was our entertainment.

SG: Yeah. You couldn't go outside, you couldn't go to Disney!

MY: I couldn't go to — I know, I could not go to Disneyland. This spring break though, we actually bit the bullet and we went down to Disney World for spring break, and it was the first Disney Park that I had been to in over a year. And walking through the turnstiles in the Magic Kingdom and seeing the Castle, I just, like, burst into tears 'cause I'm that kind of person [laughter].

SG: I would have done that too, you're good.

MY: But I mean, Disney property, you know, they're very strict. You have to— You have to have a mask on, unless you are stationary and eating. Like you can't walk with a cup in your hand and have a mask off and drink, or whatever, like even if it's just water. In order to do that, you actually have to sit down and have a drink of water, or sit down and eat a snack.

SG: [Whisper] wow.

MY: So yeah, that was a lot, 'cause it's very humid down there. And so, we went from a very dry heat, well it wasn't even hot yet—

SG: No.

MY: — here in St. George, to warm temperatures and humidity, with a mask on for about twelve hours a day.

SG: That's crazy.

MY: Yeah, so like, the only time we really could take it off was when we were in our hotel room.

SG: Yeah.

MY: So. But we came home and none of us got sick.

SG: That's really good.

MY: Yeah, because Florida is very much open.

SG: Yeah. Alright, now, obviously there's more than just the pandemic happening in 2020-2021, so I'm gonna ask you a few questions on those things. Like, what are your thoughts on the BLM [Black Lives Matter] protests that happened during the summer of 2020?

MY: I am a proud supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement. I think— I feel like they— The people who were protesting— it was almost a ticking time bomb to when everything would have exploded for the Black community. As a historian [Maggie is a secondary education major for history], you can see the marginalization and the systemic racism that has existed in our country for over 200 years. And there comes a point when, you know, they say, "Enough is enough." And it just so happened to happen when life for everybody else, for everyone in the world, was in chaos as well.

SG: Yeah. Do you think the pandemic had anything to do with that?

MY: I think so. I think it, everybody had so many, so many emotions already built up inside, being under lockdown; being scared; being worried about their health and their safety, and the health and safety of their family and their friends. I just think it all came to a head, and people were like, "This is something we can stand behind. This is something that we can see that needs change. And this is something that we can change." And they took it, they took a stand, and I think it was much needed and there— you know, voices were heard that had never been heard before.

SG: Alright, what was it like in Utah and St. George?

MY: There were protests here. A lot of St. George people— kind of would say, you know, "Yes, Black lives matter. Black lives matter, but all lives matter, or Blue Lives Matter." And it's like, yes, they do, but, those lives aren't the ones that are being targeted. Now they're [Black Lives] the ones, they are the lives that need the help and the support right now, you know.

And I love the analogy of the two houses right next to each other. One of them is on fire and the other one is not. And the firefighters are spraying trying to get out the one fire and then someone comes up and says, “What about the house next to it?” and they’re like, “Well, this one is actively on fire. We need to take care of this one first.” If, you know— and that’s the best analogy is this is where the concern is, we need to take care of this.

SG: That makes a lot of sense, right. So, after the summer happened, you also had the election in the fall, and then early ’21 you had the [U.S.] capitol siege. So, what are your thoughts on the election? The siege, all the conspiracy theories around that? That whole thing? Which, I know it’s a lot, like a lot of questions there.

MY: Oh boy. Yeah, no, it’s fine. So, I was a [Joseph] Biden supporter. Actually, I was an Andrew Yang supporter, but he didn’t get the nomination, so, you know, I switched to the Biden-[Kamala] Harris ticket when they were nominated and they were the official candidates for that party. And, yeah—

Well, honestly, when [President Donald] Trump got his social media blocked, when his Twitter account was cancelled, when his Facebook was cancelled, and he didn’t have that platform, I could see a change in people. They weren’t always so mad. And I really, honestly think it was— I mean, everybody, anybody who listened to his rhetoric and his constant negativity and yelling, you know, that affects you psychologically. And if you were hearing that constantly, yeah, you’re going to be angry at the world, and you’re going to be angry at the people that he’s angry at. And so, I just, I did, I saw that change.

The siege on the capitol, like, I was just— I was in shock when that happened. Like, I was like, how— How could people even think that that’s okay to do? Like, I mean, you had the bear man pig running around with a podium. Like, how is that even an okay thing for you to think that, “Yeah, we’re going to go take the capitol”? And, you know, it was unfathomable to me, because that’s hallowed ground. You know, I’ve been to the Capitol, I know what that feels like inside that building. And, I was just lucky that— or I was just happy that luckily anybody who was there was able to get out safely.

One of my favorite images of the day was the two young ladies who were carrying the hopper box [the box that was holding the electoral votes], and they were being escorted to safety. And it’s, like, they’re interns, but they had the know-how and the forethought to grab that box, because that was just as important. So, it was really, it I mean, it wasn’t just an attack on democracy, it was an attack on our nation.

SG: Yeah.

MY: And, yeah, that’s my thought on that.

SG: How did you see those things, and, like, what happened in, kind of the St. George, Utah area?

MY: Really, in St. George during, like that whole day, you didn’t really see any big difference. I mean, there were definitely the Trump trains and they called themselves the silent majority. And I’m like, “Yeah, when there’s eighty cars driving down the street and

honking, yeah, you're really the silent majority. I don't think so. Like, you're making more noise than anybody else."

Our friends had their Biden sign stolen from their yard.

SG: Wow.

MY: And I mean, I've seen other neighbors who have had Biden signs or Black Lives Matter signs that have been stolen as well. You know, and it's like, that's private property. I mean you, I've not seen anybody from the other, what they call the other side, the leftist side, go and take Trump signs down.

SG: Yeah.

MY: Like, I just— 'cause it's, you can support who you support. You can have an opinion and that's great. I mean, that's how we should, but we should be able to live in civility, and be able to understand and to listen to the other side. That's how it should be. That's, I mean, people shouldn't hate someone just because they don't think the same way that you do.

SG: Yeah. And how do you think that the government at all levels, local, federal, even at, like, a university and school district level with your daughter, handled the pandemic, and handled the election, and all the backlashes in between?

MY: That's a big question, too.

SG: Yeah, sorry we are ending on two really big questions.

MY: Right? No, you're good.

So, I mean, I don't know if you've seen the interviews with Trump over the last year. But, I mean, he played the pandemic off like it was nothing. And with how many people listened to him and take everything he says as gospel truth, you know, I mean that caused a lot of civil discourse in communities. And you know, when he refused to wear a mask because he said he didn't look good in a mask. You know, people are like, "Oh yeah, if he's not going to wear a mask, I'm not going to wear a mask." You know.

SG: Yeah.

MY: You know, I think Dr. Fauci, he tried to do his best. I mean, yeah, there were some things that he changed his mind on, but that's science. Once you have evidence of other things, of other things working or other things not working, that's when the science changes. I mean, it's not black and white. That's not, this is how it is, and this is how it's always gonna be. It's, yes, washing hands and staying six feet away, that's good. Let's add a mask to that, because we have seen that, you know, those help as well. And when people discredit that for saying, you know, and discredit him and other doctors, by saying, "Oh, he changed his mind. You know, he flip-flopped. He did all these things." And it's like, no. You know, he just, as we learned more, as he learned more, as scientists learned more, as medical field learned more about the virus, they upped their protections to protect us.

And, you know, I think the medical, all the medical professionals, whether they were researchers or doctors or nurses right on the front lines, now they were the ones who saw it day in day out. And they're the ones that need to be commended for their bravery and their compassion and their strength for how they handled it. Government or not, they were the ones who were saving lives.

Local governments, you know, I think any governor or mayor who tries to keep as many people safe as possible by implementing things like lockdowns or mask mandates got vilified way too much. You know, they were just trying to do what they thought was right for their constituents. And yeah, and it just, it breaks my heart that people can say those types of things of officials that they elected themselves. And yeah—

Schools did a great job.

SG: Yeah.

MY: I'm just going to say that right now. My daughter, she goes to Vista, and so it's a charter school that focuses on performing arts and technology. And so, during the lockdown they, you know, they were able to be there for their students. They still had dance class, they still had their technology classes, they were just on Zoom.

And then, when schools were able to reopen, they actually offered three different categories for kids to come back to school. So there was full time, which was just like normal school, they just had to wear a mask. There was blended, where all your academics were online, and your electives were in-person. And then, there was fully online.

And, you know, I think for her [Maggie's daughter] going to school, being an, you know being an only child, going to school full time was the best option for us, just so she could help get that social interaction with her friends, you know. But I know other families who refuse to let their kids wear masks for six-seven hours a day. And so, they did the blended option where their kids were at home for their academics and at school for their, all their extracurriculars. It was, I mean, it worked out for them.

SG: Yeah.

MY: I think teachers are another unsung hero of the pandemic, definitely.

SG: Definitely.

MY: That whole situation that we have found ourselves in.

SG: Alright, do you have anything else that we didn't touch on, that you want to say?

MY: No.

SG: No?

MY: No. I mean, I know that psychologically, it was rough on everybody this whole year. I've noticed more and more gray hairs in my temple area, from the stress [laughter].

SG: I don't see them, you're good [laughter].

MY: Oh, that's because it is freshly dyed. [Laughter.] Luckily, I do that at home, so I didn't have to go to a salon.

SG: There you go.

MY: So, I do it myself.

Oh, but my husband's beard got out of control. We're not super high maintenance and so for us, things like that being closed was just fine.

SG: Yeah.

MY: So, for here, his beard just got out of control.

SG: I think everyone's did, honestly, all the guy's.

MY: Oh, yeah. I mean if you're gonna live like a hermit, you've got to look like a hermit. Right?

SG: Yeah.

[Laughter.]

SG: My wardrobe was all sweatpants.

MY: Oh yeah. I bought so many pairs of leggings. I'm just now getting back into jeans. I'm like, "Oh, I'm going out of the house, I should probably put pants on."

SG: Yeah. Alright, anything else?

MY: No, I think that's really it from my end.

SG: Alright, thank you.

MY: You're Welcome.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]