

Interview with
HALEY STROMBERG RICHINS

April 19, 2021

**THE PANDEMIC YEARS: COVID-19
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**
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HALEY STROMBERG RICHINS

Haley Stromberg Richins was interviewed on April 19, 2021 by Chloe Wimmer. She related her experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic.

CW: Alright, this is my oral history project interview with Haley Stromberg Richins. Okay, so I just have my list of questions, just whatever. So, tell me a little bit about yourself: where you're from, your schooling, your work, all of that.

HR: Okay. [Laughing] I'm so bad at interviews. I'm from Highland, Utah. I went to American Fork High School; we graduated together [laughter].

CW: We sure did.

HR: Um, I got married in 2020, January of 2020. I'm married; his name's Kole Richins, such a stud.

CW: [Laughter.]

HR: Kind of just, you know, casual, I guess.

CW: What's your major in school?

HR: I am majoring in the social science composite for teaching for, like, secondary education.

CW: Very nice. Okay, so my first question is, you mentioned you were married January 2020. As we know, that was right before the pandemic hit. So how did the stress of, like, the COVID-19 lockdown affect your new marriage?

HR: So, we got married, and we went on a honeymoon, and everything was fine. I remember being in my class and everybody, like, before we got married, and they were talking about this, like, this disease that was going on in China.

CW: Yeah.

HR: And I honestly thought to myself, "Oh my gosh, like, who cares?"

CW: Like, that's far away.

HR: Yeah, and I was taking a geography class, and so I'm like, if I have to learn about it, then that's great, I get to learn about it. But I didn't think that it would ever affect me personally. I just thought it was something that I was gonna have to learn. Um, anyways, so then we went on our honeymoon, we got back, and everything was fine. We moved in with his parents, and nothing was, like, horrible or anything like that. But then the

pandemic, like, hit in March. And he still worked, but I lost my job. I was a sub. And so, I lost my job as a substitute teacher. And that was really, like, heartbreaking. And then, all of my classes went online. I actually remember the first time people were talking about going online, and I was like, “That is so pathetic. Like, it’s just a sickness. Get over it, it’s not that big of a deal.” But like, I didn’t know the statistics of, like, what was going on.

CW: It was a weird time.

HR: Mm-hmm. And I remember taking a test in the testing center, and it was a timed test. And literally, there was, like, a message that went on my screen and, like, a message that was being heard over the intercom. And it was, like, “News about the COVID pandemic,” it’s been declared a pandemic, like, we’re closing, like, after spring break. No, in[-person] classes.

CW: That’s scary. It probably felt like a movie.

HR: Yeah! It distracted me from my test! And I was kind of upset, but then, and then I went to class, like, later that day, and I was just really upset and I was talking to everybody about it. And I was, like, just really angry. Why do we— why is this sickness affecting my education? So, I don’t think that answered your question.

CW: [Laughter.] I like how you went off on different stuff. So I’m probably gonna tie it in.

You were living with your in-laws, you were newly married, I know you were kind of having your own health problems and had some health scares at that time. I remember you saying you were at the doctor’s a lot. So just, like that whole time, like, did you feel stressed, because I felt that you were stressed?

HR: Yeah, I was extremely stressed. It was definitely a lot going on. And like, my health was not 100 percent where I wanted it. Not just like my physical health, but my mental health. And so, I kind of was going through a lot of, like, changing my medication for my anxiety and depression, and that had a toll on me, with my medication. And then, on top of, like, being isolated from the world, [that] was also affecting my mental health because I consider myself pretty social.

CW: Yeah.

HR: I remember trying to reach out to people, not really understanding the gravity of the pandemic.

CW: Mm-hmm. Well, I remember you texted me like, “Do you want to hang?” and I was like, “Um, we are staying home!” [Laughter.]

HR: Exactly, exactly. Honestly, Kole and I, we would go to restaurants and stuff, and they would be closed—

CW: And you'd be like, "What the heck?"

HR: — so we would have to get takeout, and it just didn't make sense to me. Like, I understood— like I just didn't really understand how big of a deal it actually was.

CW: Mm-hmm, yeah. Or that it was going to last for so long.

HR: Exactly. And so, it scared me. And yeah, and then, now, with my health and stuff, like my mental health, it definitely had a toll on that.

CW: Yeah. So, since you guys were newly married, like, I take it, you were spending a lot of time together. Do you feel like it brought you closer or, like, caused any problems?

HR: I honestly think that, if anything, the pandemic— I mean, I can't really say that it was the pandemic's fault that, like, caused anything. But like, we had some hardships that we went through the first little bit being married, because like, I was constantly inside and I would be doing homework all day, just staring at my computer screen. The only sunlight I would get was if I went outside. So, Kole still had his job. And so, he was working, and he would come home from work, and then he was like, one day he was like, "I'm going golfing" and I was so upset, [it] caused this, again, a big fight because, like, I was stuck inside all day. And, like, he wasn't really affected by the pandemic. It was just kind of like, "You don't understand." So I think, in that sense, it kind of brought, like, it kind of drew a wedge between us.

CW: And that's hard.

HR: But I think that also was because we were living in his parents' house.

CW: Mm-hmm, yeah.

HR: After we moved, and I got a job, and things just kind of started to, like, settle down a little bit better, it ended up bringing us closer. Because now the pandemic was something that was like, "Oh, well, we can't hang out with anybody but each other." So then, after we were removed from his parents' house, and we had our own situation, our connection did grow stronger.

CW: Yeah. Because, you can compromise more in that way. You're touching all the things I wanted to ask. So like, did it feel like you kind of strained your relationship with your in-laws, living with them, or was it like—?

HR: Absolutely.

CW: [Laughter.] I was curious, especially being quarantined with them. It's like, oh my gosh.

HR: So um, usually, his parents were both working, too. And they didn't lose their jobs

because of the pandemic. So they would go to work and then instead of, like, eating out, like they usually would, they came home for lunch. And so, like, during the pandemic, like all I was doing all day, every day was homework and school. I remember there was this one time that Kole's dad came home from work, like during lunch, and he made himself a tuna sandwich. And he was listening to his phone, on like full blast. And he was chewing like, so loud. I was so fed up. I was like this— I have a video of me like—

CW: Just like breaking down as you—

HR: — just breaking down. The tuna stunk and it was just so bad. I mean, I love them both for their own ways. But I would say my connection would be a little bit stronger with his dad than his mom. And that moment was really hard for me.

CW: [Laughter.] Well, it's like, you've been in the house, you don't know the last time you left, you just want to be alone.

HR: Exactly. And it was even— it was just— and I felt bad because it's like, this is their house, they have every right to come home and have their stinky tuna, but I was stuck there all day! And it's like, if I wanted to get out I would be just wasting gas, I don't know. And then I felt, like, from society like, "You're not doing your part being inside."

CW: So, you're like, "What do I do?"

HR: Exactly. So that was really, really, really tough.

There was also another experience that I, like, slaved away— I love cooking. And so, I kind of used COVID to learn a couple different techniques with my cooking. And so, I slaved away for this dinner for Kole and I, and I didn't have enough to make everybody some. So he gets home from work and I'm like, "Hey, I have food" and then we sit down and we start eating, and his mom comes out of her room and starts talking to Kole the entire time we were eating. And it was like, I am so upset right now because here I have been, like, slaving away trying to make this the perfect meal, and we didn't even, like, have—

CW: — it ended up being like that.

HR: Well, what was interesting about it is, I brought that up to Kole because, you know, communication is key.

CW: This is true.

HR: So I brought that up to him, and he was like, he's like, "No, Haley, it's not that big of a deal." And then, like two weeks later, he's like, "Okay, I totally see what you mean." And then, by the end of it, he was fed up. And like, he was like, "I just want my privacy." So I remember having dinner with them. Like I was in a better mood that day or whatnot, and so, like, I wasn't irritated by it. But like, we had a conversation after, and he was like,

“I want to get out of here so bad. I’m so fed up with this.”

CW: I know. I’m sure, that’s so hard. Like, we never really talked about it. But it’s like, you just want your privacy, and especially if you’re supposed to be all staying at home. I’m sure that was so hard.

HR: It’s like, because it’s like, we usually— what our plan was before we got married was we’re gonna live with them, but we can go and visit my parents, and rent, like go rent, like go and have, like a little vacation, because we’re saving rent money. And so we could stay in a hotel, and, like, do all these different things, as if, like, society was open. But, because society was closed— and like, I mean, I’m sure that there were probably hotels that were open.

CW: But it was still like, what are you gonna do?

HR: Exactly. [Crosstalk.] Yeah. And so, it’s like, what’s the point of doing this? So we literally, like, stayed in the house. All day, every day, like nothing was open. I remember going to— we went on a hike one time, and that was like the one time we ever, like, got out of the house. And it was really nice because it brought us together.

CW: Yeah.

HR: Like a nice little thing to escape from reality. But at the same time, like, it was just like, well, now we have to go back to this house.

CW: Yep, you just have to go back to the house and do nothing. Oh my gosh, it was such a horrible time.

HR: Oh yeah, the longest three months of our lives.

CW: So, at what point did you guys move out into your current apartment?

HR: So, we got married in January, and then we lived there until the end of April. So we were there for about three months, two of which were pandemic.

CW: Yeah. Two months too long. [Crosstalk.] So were you happy to move out?

HR: Extremely happy. Like, it was crazy, ‘cause like, we talked about moving out, like we talked about getting our own place before we were married, and like, when we began, like, when we first were married. But he like, it was just kind of like, something like, no, we’re just gonna live with his parents. We were planning on living there a lot longer than we did, just because it’s like, hey, it’s free, like saving money on rent. But once I started, like, my mental health started getting worse and all these other factors played into it, we started looking and we found a place and it was, like, within our budget, and it just like worked out; everything worked out. And so, by the end of it we both, like, wanted to get out of there so bad, but it just kind of, like, worked out the way it did.

CW: Yeah, seems like it worked out really good.

HR: 'Cause like, it was just crazy, 'cause we had no plans on where to live, how much, like, our budget should be. And then, like, one day, he sat down and, like, did a budget, what would work and what wouldn't, and then we found a place that fit into our criteria. And it just, I don't know, we've been really happy since we moved out of their place

CW: I'm sure. Yeah, that's good. Um, you kind of touched on this, how you would like to start cooking during the pandemic. Were there any other things you did just to keep yourself entertained when you weren't doing school?

HR: So I got, I guess, like when it first hit, cooking was one of them. And then, like, it was sunny, so I would go outside and, like, I'd read my book for my class and stuff, and just try to get some sun. And then we binge-watched *Survivor*. Like, it's crazy, that used to be my favorite show, and now I'm kind of sick of it.

CW: Mm-hmm. It's the best.

HR: We watched a lot of TV. I got really, I mean, I've always really liked running and stuff, but I started running a little bit more and, um, yeah, I guess that was, that was pretty much it until, like, after we moved and then I got a job. And then it was crazy. Like my job made it seem like there was no pandemic at all, because like, I worked in customer service.

CW: Tell us what your new job was.

HR: Yeah, so I worked at Sand Hollow, just like the rental company on the beach. And it was fun. I was just, like, their front desk person. And it was, like, I don't know, like almost, there was like, no COVID restrictions at all. So it did not seem like COVID was even happening.

CW: Well, it's like you're serving tourists that just wanted to get out.

HR: Exactly. And everybody was from, like, California and [Las] Vegas, and it was crazy busy because everything was closed down, like, nationwide, except for Utah. And so everybody was like, "Let's go to Sand Hollow, because that's, like, the closest thing to the Pacific."

CW: Well, I remember there being days that I saw on the news, like, there was a line all the way down Sand Hollow Road and it closed because there wasn't enough room for everyone to come in.

HR: Yeah. The capacity was full. They counted the spaces for parking and when the parking was up, then they would stop letting people in because, like, now the beach was too full and that's against COVID [restrictions]. But like, it should have been way before that.

CW: Yeah.

HR: It was so crowded.

CW: I was gonna say, it was probably so crowded!

HR: There were a couple customers that were really, like, mad. Like, they came in and nobody was wearing masks and, like, nobody was giving the six feet rule. And so, I remember dealing with a customer and he was like, “None of you guys are abiding by COVID rules, we’re gonna get you guys shut down.” And threatened B.A.S.H., The Beach at Sand Hollow, they threatened that company. It was crazy, because it was like, to me at that time, like, I just was like, kind of upset about it. ‘Cause it was like, it went from, like, society being, like, it was weird to wear a mask. Like, I remember seeing pictures of people in China and the pollution was so bad that they would wear masks, and I thought it was like, “Who would ever wear this mask out in public? That’s just weird.” To that being like the new norm, people complaining about it, and, like, threatening to get people shut down because of it.

CW: Yeah, it’s crazy.

HR: I mean, it was a definite, like, it was a really fun job until I had to disappoint a lot of people because we were so busy. And the company, literally you’re doing boat rentals and it’s bound to happen every once in a while, but our boats would go down because, like, the way that they were treated on the water from the last customer. So we would have to disappoint a lot of customers. And that took its toll on me, as well. Like, with my mental health and stuff.

CW: It’s just stressful.

HR: It was so stressful. I went to the doctor’s more in 2020 than I ever have in my life. And what’s crazy is I’ve only had one COVID test the whole entire time. All of it was because of my mental health. There was one time I was so, like, I just kept getting really bad stomach aches. And I was like, “Oh my gosh, I’m dying. I’m pregnant. Something’s wrong with me.” Like, everything you could imagine. And it turns out, like my job was giving me such bad stress that I was giving myself ulcers.

CW: Yeah, I was gonna say, stress-induced ulcers?

HR: Yeah.

CW: Oh my gosh.

HR: Yeah. And like, I was so fed up with everything. I’m like, “Oh my gosh.” So the summer was supposed to be, like everybody, like, on social media says it was like their most relaxing summer ever; they didn’t do anything. Not for me. It was definitely really, really

stressful.

CW: I think that's how it was for a lot of people who were returning back to work, and it's like with new restrictions, that made the workplace so hard. But it's like, you want customers because you've been shut down for a few months.

HR: Exactly.

CW: And you want to have a booming business, yet make everyone feel safe. It was really—it's a hard balance for businesses.

HR: It's so true.

CW: Yeah.

HR: B.A.S.H never did. Like, they never went out of their way to make anybody feel necessarily safe until, like, the State Park of Sand Hollow made it required for their employees to wear masks. But that was, like, after the summer.

CW: Way after the fact!

HR: Yeah. It's like, okay, where were you in the middle of July when it was like, there was, like, a zillion people on the water? Like, even safety patrol officers were like, "There's way too many people out on that lake right now." I remember—so I got promoted to not just work the front desk, but to also do, like, the boat stuff. And there was a rescue we had to go on. And I basically drove this person around looking for his wife. That was the emergency, it was a windy day and, like, his wife went paddle boarding and he lost her. And so, we actually go and, like, drive around the beach. And I remember driving this boat and, like, almost getting hit by all these other people. And usually, like, on windy days, it wouldn't be as packed as it was, but it was so busy. It was crazy. Anyways, that was a little tangent.

CW: So, you quit there, right?

HR: Yeah, I quit in, um, I think it was like the end of October. No, it was. Yeah, the end of October, beginning of November. So I had a really bad burn accident at their place. Like, from their grill in their kitchen. It was like an autopilot that you wanted to turn on with a lighter. Somebody turned the gas on. So when I stuck the lighter up in there, a big huge flame came and like singed off my eyebrows, my lashes, my hair, part of my hair was gone. It was horrible! And like, I literally went through, like, the worst depression anybody could have experienced. I mean, not could have, but like—

CW: But like, for you that's how it felt.

HR: —for me. I felt horrible. Like, I didn't even recognize the person that I was, I didn't even wanna look at myself in the mirror. And also, like, I went from being like that super

optimistic, like, super helpful worker that got promoted to a lead position, to somebody who felt so bad about themselves and so depressed and, like, literally was so worried about what everybody else was thinking about her, that, like, it was just driving me insane. So I had to get out of there. And I was also getting really, really busy with school.

CW: So, I know you've been doing— after B.A.S.H , you did a few other jobs. Like were you subbing again? The schools were back in session?

HR: Yeah. So, I did sub. I would go and I would sub [a] couple different classrooms. That's kind of how I would make my income for the last part of 2020. But then, like, when I signed up for school for 2021, my schedule just didn't allow me to, like, work. So I basically just, you know, subbed until I couldn't.

CW: Now you're just focusing on school, which is good.

HR: Yeah, it's been, it's been really nice, like, focusing on school. It's been like, I've been like, I've had one scare with COVID. And it's crazy, because like, last semester, people took advantage of the resources and, like, doing Zoom, so a lot of professors have, like, buckled down on, like, you can't Zoom-in in this class anymore unless you have COVID, or like, somethin' like that. And so, I think that's been kind of frustrating for me.

CW: Mm-hmm. Teachers become less accommodating. Even though times are still tough.

HR: Exactly. Like, I remember, there was this time that I was visiting my family and I wanted to just, like, Zoom into my class, and it was for my friend's wedding. And so I went, and I asked my professor. I'm like, "Hey, is it possible that I can Zoom in?" Because he has his class for credit, like attendance is required. And I was like, "If I Zoom in, can I get attendance credit?" And he was like, "No, you can Zoom in, like, listen to the lecture, but I won't give you attendance credit." And it was just so frustrating, because I was like, "Okay, I know that I'm not, like, COVID-related or anything, but shouldn't these resources be used for situations like mine? At least I'm wanting to come to class."

CW: Yeah, exactly. And that's, like, a big thing that's been incorporated in people's lives, is just Zoom in general. Like, we realized we don't have to meet with people in person for unnecessary meetings, when you can just Zoom online, or people that, like, have adopted a work-from-home model.

HR: Exactly.

CW: And it seems like the schools haven't really done that, 'cause from what I hear, Dixie's [Dixie State University] gonna go all the way back in-person.

HR: Right.

CW: But it's like, maybe Zoom should still be considered maybe for students, like, with chronic illness, or just someone that's struggling with mental health?

HR: Well, and I just think, like, having the option of, like, meeting, like, the students halfway would be super beneficial for institutions.

CW: Yeah.

HR: But that was just my personal experience.

CW: That's a very good insight. Well, I was gonna ask, you were doing a few online classes before anyway, weren't you? So like, how was the transition online?

HR: So yeah. So I did. When COVID first hit, I was doing an online class; it was my first online class. And it was like, I loved the way that it was, like, set up and stuff. And you would think the online class wouldn't have been altered or changed because of the pandemic because it was already online. I was mistaken. Like, all of the tests, even though it was an online course, were still administered through the Dixie State testing center. So, all the tests that I had to take, I still went to the testing center to take them, and when COVID hit, he had to change it, and he didn't do Proctorio, so he changed his whole, like, final to be a final essay, or somethin' like that. And the class itself, like the content and the way that it was taught was the same, but um, like the assignments were changed. And I actually really liked the way that this professor reached out because it wasn't like he pre-recorded the whole entire semester and then just had us, like, fill it out. Like, he was present the entire time. And he adapted his class when it needed to be adapted because of COVID. So like, he understood that the world was, like, going through chaos, and that he wanted to keep his students to be able to succeed the best that they could, so he made things more available.

CW: That's good.

HR: Yeah, so I was used to online classes, but definitely not the way that, like, COVID has made it. I took a summer class in 2020. Another reason that gave me ulcers. And that was all online, but it was through Zoom, so it was like I was in class, but I wasn't in class.

CW: Yeah, like, it is different online versus, like, a Zoom class, too.

HR: Exactly. And so, like, that was a new experience for me. And I liked the class, and I honestly liked it being online, because his tests were open notes, and I got two classes out of the way that I was actually dreading for my degree. But like, it was just weird, 'cause like, my camera was always off, and so my attention span went, like, out the door. Like, there was even days that I would, like, turn my camera off, and I would be mute, and I would just be watching, like, TV on my phone—

CW: Right, doin' something else.

HR: — while the class is going, because it's like, “Why do I have to pay attention when it's just going to be open notes on the test?”

CW: Seriously. And that's been a huge thing, is I feel like some teachers kind of have dropped the ball. So even though it's annoying when they're like, "Cameras on, always paying attention," I do think in the long run, it's really helpful. 'Cause unfortunately, this has harmed a lot of student's learning, in a way, because for someone like me, I would rather be engaged or else I'm in another world. I don't wanna be online, I'd rather be in-person. That makes it really easy when you're on Zoom to be paying attention to something else. It's hard. Hopefully, we can adapt back to how we were before.

HR: I know. I think people, like being a sub and stuff and talking to, like, administration and stuff, like, after the pandemic hit, all the students were very cooperative and with wearing masks and stuff, because they wanted to be there. But like, towards the end, like that was the beginning, towards the end, people were, like, only wearing the masks on their chins. And so, that was kind of hard to get after them because they're like, "We've been here enough, like I'm not getting COVID."

CW: Well, the rules didn't change, so—

HR: Yeah, a lot of students were like, 'Well, I already had COVID, so I'm immune to it.' And it's like, "Okay, but you can still spread it." You don't want to —

CW: It's just hard. It's like, you can't tell this person, "Oh, you don't have to follow the rules, but the other kids do." And especially for kids, they're not gonna listen to that.

HR: But I do think, like, people are ready for life to get back to the way it was.

CW: Yeah, that's what I was gonna touch on. Like, we're really at the turning point of getting back to normal. Do you feel hopeful about that? Like, you're ready for that?

HR: Yes, especially with the vaccine. I just think that society is definitely on the ups rather than—

CW: For sure, rather than going back down.

HR: And I think that we've progressed in a way that is just unheard of, like, in history. That's the great thing about being, like, a history major. I can, like, witness this.

CW: This is historic.

HR: I know. I can witness, like, life-changing things that are happening today. But it will go down in the history books. But, like, it's crazy, 'cause like, the economy dropped, but then it, like, had the biggest change it ever experienced. And a lot of people are still worried about it falling again. But honestly, I think that considering our history and our background, I don't think that it will, at least to the point that people are worried about. 'Cause I feel like we've been given this and we were able to bounce back.

CW: Totally. Yeah, I was gonna say, like, you see how, you can see how low we went, like we won't go that low again.

HR: Exactly. And I think the biggest thing is, like— Okay, hold on. I lost it. I don't know, I just, I'm very, very hopeful. And I think, like, just like seeing the way that we went about everything, like, I feel like even though it might have seemed chaotic at times, and like the government was against us at some points, like some people would argue that, for the most part, I think that we've grown closer together, united.

CW: I agree.

HR: And I think that, if anything, only positive outcomes are to be in the future.

CW: That's so good. You naturally went to, like, the final thoughts I wanted you to close on. Like, so good. Because I was gonna ask you what you've learned from 2020?

HR: Yeah, that's basically what I've learned.

CW: Community, bein' here for each other—

HR: Yeah, and just, like, to stay optimistic. Like, even though you're given the worst situation that you could possibly be dealt, it's like, there are really good ways to, like, view it, and, like, there are ways to stay positive. And I mean, I'm not always, like, a super happy person. I mean, I take antidepressants for goodness sakes. It's changed my opinion on the world and, like, you can choose to, like, have a good outlook on life if you just follow by these certain guidelines, I guess.

CW: Very nice. I love that. That was a good final thought, a good thirty minutes, and —

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]