

Interview with
LAURYN ELIZABETH SYPHUS

December 5, 2020

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

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LAURYN ELIZABETH SYPHUS

Lauryn Elizabeth Syphus was interviewed on December 5, 2020 in Washington, Utah by Emily Syphus. She related her experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

ES: Alright, this is Emily Syphus recording. It's December 5th, 2020; we're in Washington, Utah. If you just want to start with your name?

LS: My full name?

ES: Yeah.

LS: Okay, sorry [laughter]. My name is Lauryn Elizabeth Syphus. I'm seventeen years old, born February 28th, 2003. I was born in Washington— St. George, Utah. I live in Washington.

ES: And you go to high school, correct?

LS: Yes, I go to Pine View High School [inaudible].

ES: And what sort of stuff are you into?

LS: I like film and TV shows, and anything like that. I like to read and draw and hang out with my friends— friend [laughter]. That's it.

ES: Perfect. Alright, so we'll get started. So, when did you first hear about the outbreak and about coronavirus?

LS: Probably in February, I would think. When it was just coming to the U.S. and stuff, and people here were freaking out about it. I mean, obviously, I don't hear a lot about Chinese news.

ES: Right.

LS: So, I didn't hear about it until— but in March, that's when everything really started happening.

ES: When you first heard about it in February, were you concerned at all?

LS: I mean, I was concerned just 'cause the world was concerned. But personally, I was kind of like, "It is what it is. There's nothing I can do about it, so why care?" I don't know.

ES: Gotcha. When was the first time you did start to worry about it?

- LS: I'm not really worried about it. Okay, so I'm not concerned about dying from it, or even getting it. Eventually, everyone's going to get it, but I'm more concerned about how the world's different now. I don't know if I want to go to college right now, because it's not the real college experience when everything's shut down. So I'm kind of like, I don't think—I don't know.
- ES: So, has coronavirus affected your life, daily life, a lot then?
- LS: Yeah, I mean, obviously, school. We have to wear masks and stuff, and have to—I don't know. School's super weird with masks, and we're sitting far away from each other, and stuff. And I go to school for hours and have to deal with it. And then I go to work and have to deal with it and wear a mask there and be super cautious about it. And so, it affects my life a lot in that way. But also, even things that I feel like should be easy, like going to the store, are difficult because I have to—it's been months and I'll still go to the store and I'm like, "Oh, I need a mask." I'll get to the store doors and be like, "I don't have my mask!" And it's annoying.
- ES: So, you still forget about it sometimes?
- LS: Yeah, it's so weird, because how can you forget about it? It's been going on forever; it's like the new normal. But I don't know, I just want it to end and then it doesn't, and it sucks.
- ES: What about things as far as mental health? Do you think that [the new normal] has had a big impact on it?
- LS: Laugh out loud, yeah. So, I have depression and anxiety, and so Mom is like, "You need to go to school because you need social interaction." So, it was hard not being at school, just for that. But then, for doing school work, it was helpful because I didn't have to deal with the social aspect. I didn't have to worry about seeing people, or I don't know—what's the word? I didn't have to keep up appearances. I just sat at home and did my own thing.
- ES: Uh-huh [affirmative].
- LS: And— what am I talking about, again? Oh, mental health. It's so weird because a lot of people were so lonely and stuff, and I'm lonely all the time, even when I'm with people. It was kind of interesting to see how the world deals with this new thing that I deal with all the time. It was kind of like, "Suckers, I live like this" [laughter]. But, it was just weird for people to be freaking out about stuff like that when I'm like, "I deal with this stuff on a daily basis."
- ES: Do you think people have been better about mental health, things like that, since the pandemic happened? Or has it changed at all?

- LS: I think so. A lot of people are more aware about [it] and I see articles that are like, “How to keep up with your mental health while going through quarantine,” and stuff like that. And it’s interesting to read them because— I mean, obviously, it’s nice to see that and stuff, but, at the same time, a lot of people don’t get it. I mean, I’ve had depression for years and years and people haven’t, and they don’t understand people can deal with this their whole lives and not get over it. But then, there’s me, “Oh hi. I deal with this literally all the time, like every day of my life.”
- ES: Do you think people have that mindset where you’re dealing with loneliness and kind of a depressed state in quarantine, and here’s how you get over it super easily? Do you think people treat it more, like, flippant, or do you think the awareness has helped people understand?
- LS: I think it’s helped people understand, but at the same time, there’s no way they can fully understand unless they actually experience it. I’m trying to think. Because people get the isolation and the loneliness, but there’s lots of mental pain that people don’t get. And when you have the isolation, the loneliness, and stuff, it’s different when there’s also this other component of— I don’t know how to explain it.
- ES: Like depressive states, that part? They’re only getting half of mental illnesses, like depression sort of thing?
- LS: Yeah, because it’s depression and stuff, but at the same time, you can be in a really dark place, but nobody can tell. But, like obviously, people know you’re isolated because they are. too. So, they get some points of it and a lot of people are talking about, like, the loneliness part about it. But at the same time, they’re not really talking about the pain. I don’t know, my generation’s obviously more open about it anyway, and I think it’s helped for sure, but people are always like, “Oh, you’re not alone. There’s so many people that struggle, too.” And I’m like, “Okay, I know. But they don’t have my thoughts and they don’t know exactly what I’m thinking all the time,” you know?
- ES: They may understand the idea of it and in general, but even if other people have depression, they’re not experiencing your depression.
- LS: Yeah, yeah.
- ES: Gotcha. You mentioned masks. Is that what you would say is the biggest change in your daily life? Or are there other things that you notice, or you think about more that you didn’t six months ago?
- LS: Yeah, so obviously, masks are a visual difference, but also, I mean, obviously, people don’t stay six feet apart. But I always try to, or try to keep my distance in general. [I’m] just more conscious about being like, “Oh, I’m standing pretty close to this person, it’s not necessary.” So, just kind of consciously being like, “Hey, this might help them and me, so I’m just going to back off a little bit. I don’t need to be this close.” Restaurants and stuff have blocked off things, but some places don’t. But I’m just like, “Oh, I’m

going to stand this far behind them.” Except for, ugh, anti-maskers. I’m triggered. Argh, are you dumb?

ES: So, that’s one of the questions I was planning on asking you: How do you feel about the mask protests and things like that?

LS: I’m like, “It’s not that big of a deal.” I was so triggered when I was reading this article on the news when this anti-mask protest they did in Washington, or whatever, or St. George. And I saw this poster and it was like, “George Floyd once said I can’t breathe.” And I was like [sharp inhale], “No. That is not— it’s a cloth over your face, chill yourself. Stop.” And people that go into stores think they’re being discriminated against because they’re not being let in a store because they’re not wearing a mask. I’m like, “It’s their policy, it’s not your store, go somewhere else.” And it’s frustrating. I hate it in restaurants now, that you have to wear ‘em before you sit down. I mean, I get it when it’s crowded, but today, it wasn’t that crowded and I was like, “Eh.” But I get it, and it’s helping people.

I don’t know. I go back and forth because it bugs me sometimes, but I do it anyway because it’s not that big of a deal. Why would I rant about this when it’s helping people? Oh, the worst is when— Okay, teenagers suck anyway, but at school when kids don’t wear their masks over their nose. I’m like, “It’s literally not doing anything; you are dumb.” Or people at work. You have to wear masks to order, and then you sit down and then you can take off your mask. And people will come up and I’ll be like, “Oh, sorry, I can’t hear you,” and they take their mask down and they’re like, “Blah, blah, blah” and lean in. And I’m like, “Are you stupid? That is the whole point of a mask, so you’re not talking and spitting in my face.” Even if it’s not COVID, that’s gross. Don’t spit in my face.

I don’t know, what else? What’s another question?

ES: How did you get your information about coronavirus? Through the news, social media?

LS: Mostly through the news. I used to be on the news every ten seconds. I had to get away because it stressed me out. But also, we have family in town, so, obviously, I was hearing that. And Lee, our uncle, works at a hospital, so I trust his information. And hearing second-hand information, kind of. Like people who work in hospitals and what they are hearing. Our governor before Thanksgiving was like, “Our hospitals are being overrun, we need to be careful. No more than ten people in a gathering,” but I saw this and it was like— “Oh no.” My dad ran into this guy and he was like, “Yeah, my sister-in-law works in a hospital, so I texted and was like, ‘Yo, is this true? Are you guys overwhelmed; what’s happening?’ And she was like, ‘No, that’s not even true. We don’t even have a floor that full. And most of the people we have on those floors are trauma victims from car accidents and stuff, not COVID.’” That’s fake news, and so that’s another reason I stopped looking at the news, because I don’t trust any of it. [Laughter.] Don’t trust your government kids.

- ES: Do you think the election had anything to do with coronavirus? How do you feel those two overlapped?
- LS: Yeah, definitely, 'cause Trump and Biden both believe different things. And from what I understand, I don't know if it's true or not, but Trump didn't care that much, L.O.L. [Laughing Out Loud] and didn't wear a mask and got COVID. But he didn't want to shut anything down and he was kind of like— I don't know exactly what his stance was, but that's what my impression was. And then Biden wanted to shut things down and recover first. And for me, I was kind of like, "It is what is," you know? I can't control anything, so why worry?
- ES: Uh-huh [affirmative].
- LS: But I think that was a big reason why people voted for who they voted. What's going to happen with corona[virus]; what are they going to do if they win? How are they going to handle this crisis? And like I said, I don't know anything 'cause I don't care and I'm not eighteen, I can't vote, so [it] doesn't— Obviously, it affects me, but I feel like it doesn't directly affect me, so I wasn't too worried about it. But they were saying, "Oh, he believes this, we're going to do this for the country if this happens, and we're going to do this, and this," but I was like— I don't know, I'm just ranting now. But I feel like that was the main talking point, what we're going to do. Like, "If I win, I'm going to do this about corona; this is how I'm going to handle it."
- ES: Gotcha.
- LS: I don't know. I didn't watch any of the debates or anything, but I feel like that was definitely a part of them.
- ES: Does how you feel now about coronavirus and everything, has it changed from your original thoughts? About how you said you were worried about it, but you weren't too concerned because you weren't concerned about getting it, has that changed now that it's been going on?
- LS: It's so weird. Dad's cousin died from it and I didn't know him, but that wasn't a big shock for me or anything. I wasn't freaked out after that. I wasn't like, "This is real, he died from it." And I know a lot of people have lost loved ones, and it's still not real for me. And I don't know if it will be, I'm trying to— Hmm, just give me sec.
- ES: You're good; take your time.
- LS: Even having friends that have had COVID or have had to be in quarantine, I don't know. I want to get it so I don't have to go to school, and that sounds awful, but I think it would be to have an escape from the stress of it. And it's so frustrating going anywhere; that's all people talk about. Corona this, corona that. I'm like, "I get it, I don't need to hear about it more. I'm living it, I don't need to hear everyone talking about it 24/7." Even this, I'm fine doing it, but I don't want to relive [inaudible].

ES: There's a lot of focus on it right now.

LS: Yeah, and I just feel like that's all anyone's talking about.

ES: Are there specific things you wish people would talk about more?

LS: No, I just wish people would get over it [laughter]. It's happening; it is what it is. I feel like there are bigger things happening in the world. I feel like there's too much emphasis on the effects it's having, and not enough on trying to solve it. Everyone's like, "Oh, it's doing this to the country; it's doing this or doing this to the world." That's the overwhelming news and like, "Scientists are trying to figure it out, and they found out this about the vaccine, and this. Oh, more deaths, more deaths." I'm like, "Okay, why do I want to hear more about the negative things?" I guess there's a vaccine now or they're coming out with one, and I'm like, "That's good news, that's going to help people." But when they're just talking about all the negative things and saying, "Oh, deaths are going up, and the holidays are going to make everything worse, and the country is going to get shut down again." And I know a lot of countries are going back into lockdown. I'm pretty sure the United Kingdom is, and I know California went back down into lockdown, someone told me that today. They're talking all about that and not enough about what can we do to help it.

ES: You think people are focusing more [on] what's happening, but not how to solve it or fix it or help?

LS: Yeah, exactly. Which is so funny because I am not an optimist, but in situations like this, why are we talking about how everyone's dying and focusing on the election. And I'm like, "That seems unnecessary and we should be focusing on solving the problem instead of freaking out about it."

ES: Do you think that we should have stricter regulations? Do you think the regulations we do have are unreasonable? Or good where they're at?

LS: I think it would be good. I mean, obviously, it would suck to shut down the country, but that's what I want to happen, just because I hate everything and I don't want to go to school [laughter]. But I think it would be good if we just shut down. Had an actual hardcore—

ES: Strict lockdown?

LS: Yeah, and everyone just stayed home. I don't know. I don't even know if that could work, if just no one went out. But, like, you can't— it's so frustrating 'cause you can't do that, because people need to work and they need money. But at the same time, I think it would be helpful if people would stop going out. I understand that people want to start opening up restaurants. I know they obviously have, but when they open things, people are like, "Oh, it's fine, we can go out now." But it's more like, no these people need to

get paid. People think that just because things are opening up, they should go out, which is hypocritical of me because I go out. But also, it's the thing, I need to get out of the house or I go stir-crazy, you know?

ES: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Do you think that's where a lot of people are at with the coronavirus? What's your perception of the world in general? Do you think they're like, "We just need to get out and do something"?

LS: What do you mean? Like do something, like everyone's stir-crazy?

ES: Yeah. What's your impression of people's, in general, feelings about coronavirus?

LS: I feel like a lot of people don't care enough. They care enough to wear their mask when it's required, but they don't care enough to be proactive about it. I don't know, like, consciously being like, "Do I need to go to the store?" But also, it's hard to tell people's intentions, because I go to the store just so I can get out of the house, but— I don't know. It's weird because I feel like I'm helping people, I want people to feel like they have a purpose when they're doing their job. Okay, like, I go to Target. If you work at Target, obviously, it's kind of boring if there's no customers. When I go, I'm kind of like, "Oh, I hope me being here is allowing people to work still," 'cause obviously, there's going to be no business if nobody comes.

ES: Right.

LS: So, I feel like— I literally said that a billion times, it's fine. I don't know, I don't want to talk about this.

ES: Okay.

LS: I don't know what else to talk about.

ES: Are there other things about coronavirus that you've noticed in public? What's one of the things, like mindsets of people, that you've noticed have changed? Or have they?

LS: Well, in my experience so far, we've spent a lot more time with family. Just because there's been a lot more down time because everything's closed, and so there's more time to spend with family and doing things together. And because during quarantine, we're all stuck together, so we were able to hang out together. But at the same time, I get mad every time I drive around and I see a different state license plate. I'm like, "Oh, go back to your state, stop traveling. It's 'rona!" But at the same time, my family's been coming to see us. But also, they wouldn't come if they didn't think it was safe.

And I know when we first went into lockdown and everybody was like, "Let's start making bread," and everyone was trying to find new hobbies, and I was like, "L.O.L, that's me." Except I deal with the isolation and the loneliness all the time, so I'm constantly looking for a new hobby; that's why I watch so much TV, to kind of escape.

And it was interesting to see people kind of scramble to figure out what to do with their time. I'm like, literally my life, literally my life is— [inaudible]. I don't know the song. I don't know what else to say.

ES: So this year, with the death of George Floyd, there was a lot of protesting and a lot of social unrest and things were happening. How do you think that's affected either coronavirus or just people in general?

LS: I thought it was super ironic when people were like, I mean the super liberals were like, "Wear your masks!" But then they were going to protests with, like, thousands of people and not wearing masks. Or wearing masks, but not social-distancing at all and being way too close to each other. And obviously, I think what happened was wrong, but I think people went about it the wrong way with all the looting. And I feel like everybody's like, "You need to do this to get attention, to fix things." And I'm like, "That's not really going to help." And when we're going through this as a global pandemic, I feel like that needs to be focused on a little more. It's different because it's all political, but he died and it [was] unlawful and there are a lot of deaths, Black people that die unlawfully and don't deserve it. Obviously, nobody does. But at the same time, there are people dying of coronavirus. People, in an effort to speak out for George Floyd, they were also— it's kind of like a slap in the face to those who lost people to coronavirus. I don't know, I just thought about that, it kind of makes sense, but I don't know.

ES: Do you think people use George Floyd's death and the social unrest to pursue agendas with coronavirus? Do you think there's overlap there, like with the election?

LS: Yeah, I think so. Oh my gosh. I can't say that. Well, eh. There's obviously a lot of racism in our country and lots of historical racism too, obviously with slavery. And I think that a lot of people in the election, they bring that up. And like I said, that was a lot of the focus; it was like, if you win the election, what are you going to do about racism in our country, and what are you going to do about coronavirus, and things like that. And obviously, those are the biggest concerns globally right now, I think is racism and coronavirus, 'cause everybody is dealing with it. Everybody's affected by racism and the pandemic. Hmm, I'm trying to think.

People are being affected by it, but I feel like a lot of people don't realize that they're being affected by it. Like me, I'm uneducated about the politics in the country right now, like what different parties believe and what different candidates believe. And I think a lot of people are that way. And so, when they don't know and they're getting all their information from the media, it's— what's the word? I don't know, it's giving the people the wrong idea that, "Oh, this person is going to be a good president because of this one thing that they said one time." I don't know, that's it about politics, because I don't know.

ES: Is there any other thing that you wanted to talk about with coronavirus, or just anything in general about what's happened this year?

LS: I just want it to end because it lowkey sucks. It's just so frustrating because I don't know what I want to do. I don't think college is for me anyway, but I definitely don't want to be paying for college if it's not going to be a good experience because of coronavirus.

ES: Like online schools?

LS: Yeah, a lot of people that I've talked to at work that are in school right now, a lot of them are taking a break this semester 'cause they're like, "I don't know what's going to happen." Everything's kind of up in the air. And even high school graduation, everyone's kind of figuring out what to do and they're preparing to go back online if need be. And that's what makes me the most anxious, school stuff, because I'm a senior. I'm trying to graduate, and I'm scared; I feel like I'm going to be stuck. I don't want to just keep working if coronavirus is going to be a thing. I just wish I knew how long it would last so that I could know what to do with my life.

ES: How to plan.

LS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. That's it.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]