

Interview with
JACKSON PARKER GRIFFITHS

November 18, 2020

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

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JACKSON PARKER GRIFFITHS

Jackson Parker Griffiths was interviewed by Whitley Johns on November 18, 2020 in his home in St. George, Washington County, Utah. He talked about what it was like living in St. George during 2020 with the [COVID-19] pandemic, racial injustices, and election going on.

WJ: Okay. Can you state your name and spell it out for me?

JG: Jackson Parker Griffiths. J-A-C-K-S-O-N P-A-R-K-E-R G-R-I-F-F-I-T-H-S.

WJ: Okay, awesome. So, just to get some background on you, can you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you're from, how old you are?

JG: A little bit about myself. I am currently married, no kids, I am twenty-three years old, and what was the last one?

WJ: Just a little bit about yourself, like where you're from.

JG: I was born and raised in St. George, Utah. And I have been here most of my life.

WJ: And where do you currently work?

JG: I currently work at Dixie Regional Medical Center.

WJ: And then, is most of your family in Southern Utah or do you have family spread out?

JG: My immediate family, most of them are in St. George. I have two sisters here, and then I have four siblings up in Utah County, two brothers and two sisters up there.

WJ: Okay. And you said you work at the hospital here.

JG: Yes.

WJ: What do you do there?

JG: I am a surgical assistant in the operating room.

WJ: And how long have you been doing that for?

JG: I have been employed there for a year and roughly nine months.

WJ: Okay. So, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, tell me about what you were doing in your life, and at work as well.

JG: Well, before the pandemic I was working— I personally, in my personal life I was engaged and married before the pandemic hit. And then at work, I worked five eight-hour shifts a week in the operating room. We did about roughly sixty surgeries a day and I would be involved in about five to eight of those surgeries.

WJ: And then when COVID first hit, do you remember where you were and what that changed at the hospital for you?

JG: Well, when COVID first hit, I was living here in St. George with my wife. We were actually in Hawaii on our honeymoon when things began to lock down, so that sort of sucked. And then at work, when the pandemic hit, it took probably about a month for things to drastically change at work.

WJ: And can you kind of tell me about those changes at work?

JG: Well, after a month of COVID being around elective surgeries were cancelled. So, in the operating room, that's about ninety percent of the surgeries a day are elective scheduled surgeries. And then ten percent are emergency surgeries that need to happen right away. So, when COVID hit, elective surgeries were cancelled and there were honestly, probably only about ten, maybe fifteen surgeries that would happen every day COVID. That being the case, the operating room staff had to be dispersed and reassigned to other areas of the hospital. Personally, myself, I was first reassigned to E.V.S., kind of like a housekeeping position, and I was assigned to clean high traffic areas because of the cautiousness, I guess, that people had just about germs at the beginning of COVID. So, I was cleaning door knobs, entrances, exits, and then after a couple of weeks of doing that they reassigned me to the night shift in the emergency room [ER] and I was actually assigned to transport and take care of COVID patients directly.

WJ: And what was that like? Were you nervous to get the virus or did you think the hospital had it handled pretty well?

JG: I think the hospital handled it pretty well, in terms of how much we knew about the virus, because at the current moment we're still learning about it day-to-day. I was not nervous about getting it just because they had us wearing these ridiculous suits that filtered air and there's a lot of contact precautions that took place when I was working in the ER. The nice part about that shift actually was that I would also be called upon to go into the emergency surgeries at night time, so I still got to do my normal job, not under obviously various circumstances, but I still got to work in the operating room, which was cool. But never once was I ever nervous about getting the virus at work.

WJ: And then when the virus first hit, did you see a big change in your personal life outside of work, and the community in St. George?

JG: Well, being also a student, I don't necessarily have a really vast personal life or social life, and I really didn't see a big difference in my friendships or anything. I still hung out with the same people, the same friend group and we'd play pickle-ball, and we never

really worried about it. But as far as the community and businesses went, it was pretty, it was pretty relaxed here in St. George. I started seeing a lot more hand sanitizer bottles and people wearing masks, but businesses stayed open relatively for the most part, and I'm sure there were a couple differences, like you had to schedule if you wanted to go to some places, but I didn't see any places close down.

WJ: And then, with some of the changes that were happening throughout other places in the U.S., did you feel like that was— how do I want to phrase this— Did you feel like St. George had it easy because they weren't getting as hit as hard with the pandemic and that led to less riots and protests and things like that?

JG: Well, St. George being a relatively smaller city, we don't really even have the numbers for big protests, or the age groups. St. George is pretty much a place to go retire. I mean, sure we have a college, but when COVID got busy and started to become more of a concern that was that was really in the summertime, so our college wasn't, wasn't really occupied by anybody. So there weren't a whole lot of, there weren't a whole lot of young people to come here and riot or to protest. We've seen more political protests than COVID protests here, if that answers your question.

WJ: Do you think the pandemic, like, was a big reason for a lot of the maybe racial protests that went on, because people were in quarantine for so long and then all these protests started to rise? Or do you think it was solely due to the racial issues that people were having?

JG: I think it was completely due to the racial issues. I don't think that racial protests had anything to do with the pandemic because the pandemic guidelines were set to not be in big numbers, and so for people to gather in big numbers, it didn't have to do with the COVID-19 at all. It was all about Black Lives Matter, and they pretty much were spitting in the health department's face, saying like, "Oh, you're telling us to not form big groups, but we're forming big groups," so it, it was, it was all racial, racial policies there.

WJ: And did you see a lot of those protests here in St. George, or did you feel like it was the same kind of thing as the COVID protests?

JG: Yeah, no there was maybe one, maybe two smaller Black Lives Matter protest, Black Lives Matter protests, and they were later in the summer, when students and the younger population of St. George started to come back. Yeah, it was, this is a very conservative place, and especially in bigger more libertarian cities, that's where big riots or big protests [were]. And considering this is a small conservative town, we, we never really saw any, and none were ever violent, so—.

WJ: And do you think St. George was more concerned more about the pandemic than the racial injustices, or did you feel like just because of the small numbers of this town there was no way to really tell the difference?

- JG: You could definitely tell the difference. St. George was definitely more concerned about the virus than Black Lives Matter, just because mainly more than half of St. George's population is above the age fifty-five to sixty. Obviously, more serious patients or serious individuals that should be concerned about COVID— St. George is not a young town at all, so they were definitely more concerned about the virus rather than Black Lives Matter.
- WJ: And then, kind of a side question— do you know anybody who has gotten the virus, or have you personally been infected with COVID-19? And could you kind of tell me about those experiences or your friends' experiences?
- JG: Well, considering I worked directly with COVID patients, I definitely know some. I, myself, have it right now, so that's kind of funny. My personal experience with it, I, I did experience symptoms; it wasn't bad for me because I'm a young, healthy individual. At the hospital I had seen older patients and even a couple younger patients that were not healthy individuals who struggled with the virus quite, quite severely and had to be placed on oxygen and other medication to keep them from dying, honestly, so. But for me, though, it wasn't bad; it was just like having a cold or flu, and it lasted, it lasted maybe a little longer than my usual cold. Usually, when I get sick it's for about a week or so; with COVID, I had symptoms last up to about two weeks.
- WJ: And there's been a lot of talk, especially with the election that's been going on, of shutting down the country and shutting down businesses so that COVID stops spreading. From your personal experience from having the virus, do you feel like the United States needs to shut down or do you think that's a little premature?
- JG: I do not think that the country needs to shut down, I think it depends on the area, I feel. Like a place, like, for example, St. George, I don't think any businesses need to shut down, but I think people who are at higher risk are the ones who should quarantine. People like myself, I feel should be free to— I mean anyone should feel free to go out and do whatever they want, but I feel like personally concerned about having COVID that you should quarantine yourself and socially distance. But I do not think that the country or any, any business needs to, needs to stop running due to the virus.
- WJ: And then, do you feel like the virus had a big impact on this 2020 election that's just passed?
- JG: Yes, I do. I completely believe in the conspiracy [that] it is a man-made virus. It has been noted over several platforms on the Internet that this virus was man-made. When it comes to who made the virus, we know it came from China, but if someone was to tell me that someone in the Democratic party or some group affiliated with that party was to hire some person in China to create this virus to, to really slow down America and place the blame on some individual, I would, I would completely believe that. I don't think that it is just by chance that the virus made it to the U.S. and that all of these places were shut down. I think it was completely man-made. And it affected the election 100 percent.

WJ: And do you think it kind of took over the election and was the main topic, or do you feel like—

JG: It was—

WJ: — there was more to the election?

JG: It was not the main topic of the election at all. COVID in the election and in the debates was only mentioned, honestly, just a handful of times. What I think it did affect the election was a social media platform base. When the virus hit, the first thing we were told is everyone was told to stay home and to quarantine and to social distance. Given that fact, people stayed home and the only thing they do when they're home is they watch TV, and on their cellphones, and that is when, that is when the Democratic party and the Republican party, but mostly what I saw was, was a, a lot of socialist-based news. When quarantining and COVID became a thing, you'd turn on the TV and you'd see everything point to a more feminist, socialist, Black Lives Matter news base and that was a platform for the quarantine. That was, everything you saw on ads and on TV and on sports TV was all Black Lives Matter, all pro-Democratic, all, even the— even the LGTBQ— even that group was heavily put into, “Hey, if you're gay or lesbian, you can't vote for Trump or you can't vote conservative.” It was— so I feel like that had a very big impact on the, on the election.

WJ: Do you think COVID should've been a bigger topic in the election and a bigger push on social media, or do you feel like it's not as important as those other topics?

JG: I think the other topic— well what other topics are we talking about?

WJ: Like, the ones that you said, like Black Lives Matter, just the racial injustices going on.

JG: Honestly, I don't think, I don't think any of those necessarily need to be talked about. Well, maybe for some people. For me personally, I know already where I stand, and I don't need to be persuaded in any certain direction. I have a general respect for everyone and anyone as long as they're doing good. I don't think that, politically, those things need to be discussed. I don't think that they, any one political party, Democrat or Republican, should claim to have any of those groups in their party. I do not agree, agree that Black Lives Matter is a Democratic party. They totally are, and I'm against that, I'm not against Black Lives Matter, I'm against that they are under a Democratic ruling. Also, the gay and lesbian community, they are totally a Democratic party and I don't agree with that at all either. I don't think that any of those groups should be fully under one political party.

WJ: Do you think those two parties kind of controlled the election, and Biden knew that he had control of those, so he just made those his main arguments in the election?

JG: One hundred percent, yes. I agree with that completely. I agree that he— I agree also that he totally put the Republican party under a— he kind of tagged them as, “We do not support Black Lives Matter. We do not support the gay, lesbian, bi community.” He

totally put that on President Trump, saying that, “Oh, he’s a racist. Oh, he hates gays.” And that, I feel, had a very large impact on the younger generation and their voting.

WJ: How do you feel like Trump handled all those accusations and how that changed how he ran for the election again?

JG: Well, honestly, I, I watched most of his, I watched a lot of his speeches and I followed him very heavily on social media, and I think he handled it as good as anybody could have, because he didn’t, he didn’t address those things because he knows where people, he knows where he stands, and that’s his business. He didn’t focus on Black Lives Matter, he didn’t focus on the gay, lesbian, bi community, because those people know where they stand, they know where they’re gonna choose, and he focused on what actually was going to make the country maybe financially and politically better. Socially, the country is in its own hands, honestly. We, as the people, decide if we are happy, if we are productive, if we get up and go to work. We decide that, but he decided, he decided the circumstance for us and so I think he handled it just fine.

WJ: And then, how do you feel, like when the virus first started until now, Trump has handled the pandemic of the country? Just kind of give me your thoughts on that.

JG: Can you rephrase that question?

WJ: Yeah so, how do you feel like Trump handled the virus—

JG: The virus.

WJ: — getting into the United States and, like, from the start until even now, how do you feel like he handled the—

JG: Well—

WJ: — whole situation?

JG: I think, [inaudible] like I answered the last question. I think he probably handled it as well as anyone in his situation would have. The only problem that I’ve had with, with Trump in regards to the virus is that in the past recent months he has kept mentioning a cure, that it’s here, that it’s coming fast. I think he should be more honest in those statements. I do not think that we are— personally, I don’t think that we’re close to getting a cure out to the general public like he says that we are. I think we’re probably a few more months out away from that, and he says that it’s here. But he’s been saying that it’s here for, for a couple months and I haven’t seen it and I work in the healthcare field.

WJ: Do you think now that Biden has been elected, do you think he’ll change the way things are run with the virus and make a bigger and better difference than the current president did? Or do you feel like any president would’ve handled it pretty similar and can only do as much as they can?

JG: Well, if Biden does end up getting put into office in the following year, I, I do not think he's going to do anything differently than has already been done. I think that his statements on, on confronting this virus head-on were, were fully just a base for his presidential run, a base for his, his campaign. If he is put into office, I don't think he's going to do anything different. I think he just said that so he could get support in his campaign.

WJ: And then, with the virus happening, and the racial injustices, and everything, what do you think in the next few months or even year, your life will look like? And then also, what this town, St. George, will kind of look like, and what will change?

JG: In the next year?

WJ: Yeah, in the next few months or in the, in the next year.

JG: I'll be honest, I don't think, I don't think anything will change in the next few months or year. I, yeah, even with Biden being elected, he's not going to, he's not going to do anything. So, I don't think anything's going to change.

WJ: Do you think the virus will still be here in the next year?

JG: You know, that's a good question. The— our current president, President Trump is still in the office. He's got one more month if he's not reelected to get this virus, or to get this cure out to the general public. If that cure doesn't get out in the next month, I don't think it's even going to get out. With the Biden campaigning group, if they are elected this next month, I don't think they're going to do anything about a cure. I think they're going to just keep what we're doing right now, quarantining, social distancing. He hasn't said anything about a cure, at least from what I have heard. I haven't heard him mention a cure once. So, I think in the next year, if Biden is elected, we're going to be doing the same thing that we're doing now.

WJ: Do you think the hospital will change very much?

JG: No. The hospital, as of right now, we are back fully operating in the operating room. When the operating room was down for three or four months, the hospital was not making any money, and so the hospital cannot run without surgery. At least, here in St. George, that is where a big chunk of its profit comes from. So, it [inaudible] excuse me, when I said it wasn't making any money, it was still having an income, but the hospital was not having anywhere close to where the income is when surgery is up. So, I don't, I don't think anything will change there.

WJ: And then, what do you think, do you think anything will change in your personal life in the next year with the racial injustice movements and the pandemic may or may not find a cure, but do you think that will change your personal life in any way?

JG: As far as my personal life goes with racial injustices, I do not. St. George doesn't necessarily have that problem. I mean we, we have a very large Hispanic community here in St. George, as well as a very large Polynesian community, but as far as an African American community goes, it's not very big, and so we don't, the ones that we do have here, those individuals, we, we don't treat any differently. I personally grew up with a handful of African American friends. I did not treat them any different. They never gave me a reason to treat them different, so that's not going to change.

And then, as far as COVID in the next year, I think if we have to do what we're doing right now in the next year, I think that the St. George community is going to get really fed up with all of it and I think we're probably gonna see less masks worn. I think we're gonna have less restrictive guidelines just because this is such a conservative town. It might, it might, I mean, this town would never go as far to, you know, to have a mafia or anything. But as far as their rebelling would go, I think people would drop the masks completely and I think that businesses would open right back up if we were told to keep doing what we're doing right now.

WJ: Alright, well that's all the questions I had, so thanks for doing this interview with me and being so open.

JG: Thank you. You're welcome.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]