

Interview with
COURTNEY CHRISTENSEN

November 29, 2020

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

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COURTNEY CHRISTENSEN

Courtney Christensen was interviewed by Haley Stromberg, on November 29, 2020 in a house in Highland, Utah. She talked about her experience with living during the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HS: Alright, hi Courtney! If you could please just state your full name?

CC: Courtney Nicole Christensen.

HS: And you're— you were just barely married into that name, right?

CC: Yes, my maiden name is Stromberg

HS: Perfect. How old are you?

CC: Twenty-three.

HS: Twenty-three. And where are you living?

CC: Murray, Utah currently.

HS: Awesome. What is your family like?

CC: My, like, biological family or my in-laws?

HS: Yeah, let's start with your biological family.

CC: So, I have two younger sisters, um and parents. I feel like we have pretty close relationships, so— we get along. I mean we have our arguments every once in a while, but I feel like we get along really well.

HS: Awesome! And what about your in-laws?

CC: So, my husband is the middle child; he has one older brother and one younger sister. His brother and him claim that they've never really had an argument, so they get along very well. And his younger sister just graduated. And then his parents, they seem to get along with us very well.

HS: Awesome. And you just married him this year, correct?

CC: Yeah, in March of this year.

HS: Awesome. Okay, and then, tell me about where you grew up.

CC: So, I grew up in Highland, or American Fork, Utah. It's a really nice area. We lived in— it was an area where you didn't feel like you ever, like, needed money but at the same time you never felt like you were at the top of the top. So you always felt, like, pretty good in general. I had good friends, good neighbors. We were able to participate in

extracurricular activities, which was fun.

HS: What extracurricular activities were you into?

CC: I was— sports. So, soccer was the big one. Swimming also was pretty big. Gymnastics for when I was younger. Those were the three main ones. But, growing up, we lived right next to a field so we were able to go out and throw a football; we had a basketball hoop so we could go shoot hoops, and stuff like that.

HS: Okay. What characteristics, would you say, has shaped you to who you are today?

CC: Characteristics? So, like what I would describe myself as, kind of?

HS: Yeah.

CC: Um, I don't know, I feel like I'm a pretty giving person. I always try, maybe that's because of, like, being the older sister, you are always trying to make sure that your younger siblings have what they need. I would say that, I try, I guess. I would think that I am somewhat funny. I'm kind of funny. Um, very honest. I've been very honest and obedient. That's one thing I've noticed about myself, that's I tend to be very strict by the rules, I guess.

HS: Okay, and then what is the most important thing about you that people don't understand?

CC: That's a hard question. The most important thing about me that people don't understand. Um— I would say— goodness that is hard. Something that people don't understand. Um— I feel like, with our family, like growing up, like extended family, we had a few, I guess, people that went against social norms. And so, I feel like a lot of people don't realize that I'm open to talking about different things and have had experience with certain things. And so, I feel like that is something that people don't really know.

HS: Okay. Alright, so this presentation, presentation/project, is for an oral history documenting our experiences with COVID-19 and how it's affected us personally. So, I'm going to ask you a few questions according to your personal experience with the pandemic, okay?

CC: Okay.

HS: So, my first question is very broad, and feel free to answer as broad or as in-depth as you like. How has the virus affected you?

CC: Well, my husband and I literally got married and then two days later it was declared a pandemic. So, our entire marriage has been in the COVID-19 pandemic. And so, there's obviously been pros and cons. I mean, pros: I feel like we've had, I mean we still kind of are in a nine-month honeymoon stage because we're not allowed to see anybody really. It's been us two for the most part, and family, obviously, which has been nice. Another pro was with me living in Murray and my job in Provo, switching online was able to help me keep my job. And I was very fortunate that I was able to do that, 'cause I know a lot of people lost theirs.

It's been a con because it has been hard not getting together with extended family or friends. I've definitely felt a void there, I guess, so that's been hard. Luckily, I haven't known anyone who's contracted the virus, so I don't know anyone who has passed away from it, but that is definitely one thing, I think, is hearing people who I know's loved ones either passing away, or you know, being sick with this virus and causing health issues. I think that's probably the worst thing that I've seen with this.

HS: So, you said that you switched online for your work?

CC: Yes.

HS: And would you mind telling us where you worked?

CC: Yeah. So, I currently am still there, and I'm working at the Provo missionary training center. And that is where missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, once they receive their mission call, if they need to learn a language, they have a longer stay, but every missionary comes in and kind of learns what they are going to be teaching. And we as teachers, I'm a teacher there, we either teach them the language as well as how to teach, or for English speakers, they just learn how to teach in general. But I teach Ukrainian and so, it's been an adjustment, definitely, being online, but it's still been really fun.

HS: Okay, so, besides the commuting back and forth from your house to work, saving you some time and effort—

CC: And money.

HS: And money, yes, how else has going online affected you, for both pros and cons?

CC: One of the biggest pros, I think, is the missionary has a longer time to adjust to missionary life, because the missionary schedule is so strict on things that they need to do throughout the day, including different language studies, personal studies, just a few things they need to do. And so, I think that's probably been really nice for the missionaries, is being able to stay with their family through that and kind of adjust that way before they just kind of move out and they're completely on their own. 'Cause a lot of these missionaries are eighteen and just graduated high school, so this is their first experience away from home.

I think one of the biggest cons though, is, I definitely prefer teaching in-person because I feel like you can make a bigger and stronger connection with the missionary. Obviously, it's easier to read a person when you are in-person because you can read their body language as well as you don't have to worry about technical issues, right? If the video or audio cuts out, that's been something that's been hard.

HS: So, do you feel as if, maybe, you've become robotic in a sense, with going online? It's hard to communicate your humanization?

CC: Yeah, I would— I would say it's definitely become harder. It isn't impossible. Like, it's really cool to see that even through the, you know, screen, you are still able to develop

really strong relationships and connections, and help these missionaries kind of get started and work through the problems they face. But it definitely is more challenging to do that online than it is in-person.

HS: Well— I want to talk more about the beginning of the pandemic when it first happened. So, you said you got married, —

CC: Yep.

HS: — and then right after, everything was affected by COVID-19.

CC: Yeah.

HS: You want to explain how that was? Any stories you'd like to share?

CC: Yeah. I uh, well, I remember we were standing in our line at our wedding and people were coming through, and we had a few people— right— now, I want— yeah. Remember this is back before everything had been said about social-distancing, about masks, anything. This was way before that. And we had people come through a line, and a few people said, like, "Sorry we're not giving hugs, just because of the virus." And at the time, we were kind of like, "What? really?" like okay, like, we're going to respect them obviously, but we kind of didn't think much of it. And then, sure enough as the night went on, we found out that the NBA had officially closed, we found out that the MTC closed, we found out a few, like, celebrities, like [mumbled], had contracted the virus. It was kind of surreal. But again, it was our wedding night so we weren't super, you know, paying attention to everything.

But then, once we got on our honeymoon and we realized— okay, all of these parks had closed down and— um— we just kept getting email after email of announcements of, "Alright, University of Utah is online; Utah Valley University is online," everything started becoming virtual, as we were on our honeymoon. And— I mean, even— we— you know— we are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and so we were planning on going to church on Sunday, and even that got moved. So, we were just blown away at the fact, we— we joke with each other that our wedding shut the world down 'cause it was such a great party. [Laughter.]

HS: Wow that's— that's crazy. So, where did you guys go on your honeymoon?

CC: We went to California. And our plan was— um, I should preface this: to our knowledge, no one contracted the virus at our wedding, so that was good. That has been a huge blessing. We're very grateful that nothing happened there.

HS: Oh yeah.

CC: But afterwards, yes. We went to California. The plan was first to go to Sea World, and then when we found out that Disneyland was closed, and everything was closing down. We didn't want to risk getting to Disn— Sea World and then, you know, either having it cut short, or not being able to be in there, so we were just like, you know, we'll just stay in for most of it. [We] went to the beach, I think once, and just kind of hung out, out on

the pier.

HS: Wow!

CC: Yeah! It was fun.

HS: Was traveling a problem? Did you— I'm guessing you flew.

CC: Yes, we did. So, flying to California wasn't too bad. Everything was still new. Everything about masks was brand new, so you saw a few people in masks at the airport, but not very many. And yeah, flying there was fine, other than the fact we hit turbulence. [Laughter.] And then, flying home was actually kind of nerve wracking because we were just wanting to get out. You know, we wanted to come home, and we had heard that, you know, of the mass hysteria. We were afraid they were gonna close the airports. But luckily, we were able to fly in, and everything went really well. We were able to get back, and it ended up being really good.

HS: Good. Alright— so— when you came home from your honeymoon, what was the biggest change that COVID made that shocked you?

CC: I think, I mean, it wasn't immediate, like from when we came home, but I think, in general, the biggest shock has been masks. You know? I mean it's crazy to think it's normal now to see people in masks. You know, I'll even find myself kind of freaking out at home like, "Oh, where's my mask?" because I'm so used to having to wear a mask. And so, I think that's probably one of the biggest, like, differences I've noticed.

HS: And you are a student, correct?

CC: Yes. I'm at Utah State.

HS: You graduated with your bachelor's degree,—

CC: Yeah.

HS: — the same year COVID happened, and got married—

CC: Yes. So— [laughter]. Huh, that's true, I just realized— yeah. I graduated from UVU [Utah Valley University] with my undergrad. Um, and everything with our graduation was kind of crazy. And then I started my graduate program at Utah State this fall.

HS: Alright. How did COVID affect your— your experience with school?

CC: Good question. So, like I mentioned earlier, we found out that UVU, like all the universities, went online. So again, I was grateful 'cause I didn't have to commute down to Orem, 'cause I was at Utah Valley at the time, and so I was able to finish my undergrad online, which wasn't ideal. But at the same time, it wasn't the worst thing, because I was able to save money from, like, having to pay for gas, and save myself that headache of traveling. But it definitely made doing the assignments, and understanding the assignments and everything, you know, became a little harder because the professors were just kind of thrown under the bus having to figure out how to make their courses

online in such a short time.

And then, luckily starting up at Utah State, they, by that point, we have been in the pandemic for a few months, and so people were familiar with Zoom. And our program is offered either virtually through Zoom, or you can gather in-person at the Kaysville Center for Utah State.

HS: Let me just finish writing this note down—

CC: I think the other last thing about my education that— how it's been affected was obviously the graduation ceremony itself. You know, you didn't get to walk across the stage, like everyone always, like, dreams of almost. But I have to say, I thought, especially UVU, I'm not sure about other universities, but UVU did a fantastic job to where they still made it meaningful. It was still, you know, a proud moment. You were able to go, you know, it was actually really nice. You didn't have to sit there forever, [inaudible] drive through, get your diploma, and then you had the option to go and listen to the commutation and [inaudible] and everything, so I thought that was really cool. I really enjoyed it.

HS: So, question for you. What was the program like, if you want to explain in detail, for your graduation program?

CC: Yeah. So, we, the UVU divided its campus up into the different colleges. And so, I graduated from the psychology department, which is the humanities, so we were able to, it was kind of like a parade is how they had it organized. Where the graduates were the parade. So your family was able to decorate one car, if they chose to, and they drove you through the line where you were able, the graduates were able to get out of the car, go up and collect their degree and a few other trinkets that they had, take your picture, and you got to see some of the professors from our college, and then you jumped back into the car, went to another place to take pictures if you chose to. And then you went over and they kind of had it set up like a drive-in theatre, and so all the cars went, and either backed in, or— however they turned their radios to the channel, where we were then able to listen to the president of the university, President Tuminez, as well as a few other guest speakers, like Gil Miller. And there was a concert provided; we had a fly over, so it was really good. It was a good production. They did it really well done.

HS: Nice. So, you said that you graduated with your undergrad in psychology—

CC: Yes.

HS: So, is there anything that COVID has done that has changed your field of study or that you see playing an effect on your future career?

CC: Yes. So, I'm specifically wanting to become a school counselor, and, I mean, it's evident, you know, the changes that have been had to make— had have been had to be made in school; it's been crazy. You know, students aren't— I don't know, I've heard mixed reviews. Obviously, people are very grateful to teachers for all of the effort that they have been putting in, but the parents as well as the teachers are aware that it's a challenging year for students, you know, because they've been asked to do so much work at home.

You know, and when you're a kid, you don't want to do work at home, you know, you want to leave it at school. And so, I think as a school counselor, you know, our entire purpose is to give the child the best opportunity for education ever, that they could ever get. And so, I think it's going to be an interesting dynamic to work with these young kids and help them achieve their goals when they've been dealt this, you know, kind of very unique opportunity and challenge.

But it's also been interesting, you know, in the classes I'm taking now, we talk about the different impacts that anxiety and depression and all those different mental disorders have on students, and I think that also needs to be, you know, kind of brought to attention. You know, these students, as well as the teachers, are having a lot of— a lot more anxiety than they used to. And with the social-distancing and the isolation, depression rates have gone up. And so, I think it's going to be really important for everyone to kind of, not only take into consideration their physical health, you know, and making sure that they, you know, steer clear of the virus, but also taking measures to continue to help their mental health as well. You know, even if that's something simple like meditation or, you know, going outside for a walk, just kind of getting out. I think that's something that's really important.

HS: Alright. On that note, is there anything that you have done to help with staying positive personally, and has affected you— has made you feel more optimistic about the virus?

CC: I think, like I said, for me— getting out is a huge one. I've had a few days where, especially since um a lot of my schoolwork, you know, is all online other than going to class. And then my work is online. And me and my husband are currently living in a basement apartment and so, oftentimes, if I don't make a priority for it, I could stay inside the house all day and get everything that I needed to accomplish, but I just feel absolutely horrible afterwards. You know, the lack of sunlight and fresh air really gets to me, I've noticed. And so, I have to make a point of it every day to, even if it's just for a few minutes, get upstairs, get some sunlight, go outside, breathe in some fresh air, kind of relax. And I think it's also important that people find things to do. Like I've been— I've just had these random little crafts and little things that I've, you know, kind have done to keep my brain busy to help me still feel productive even though I have been inside. Whether that's like, I'm currently making a bin for our blankets and so I feel like, you know, as simple as that is, it's given me something to do, you know, helping me feel productive and not being just stuck inside. Exercise is huge as well, getting out and doing something active.

HS: Nice. Would you like to share some examples of your projects that you have done?

CC: Um—

HS: You said something about the bin, but is there anymore?

CC: Yeah, so we had the bin. Like I said, my husband and I, just newly married and living in a basement apartment, I've been trying to look to see if there is any, you know, different things that we need, and one was, we needed more storage space because we didn't have much. And so, I— kind of, outlined and drew and measured out some measurements for

my husband to make bookshelves. And so, him and his gran, he and his grandpa were able to, you know, go actually put them together and do it. But that was a really fun project, was designing and looking and seeing how we can create more room for us. You know, the holidays have been really nice because it's involved, "Okay, I need to decorate," you know. I need to, you know, kind of make our home feel festive and still enjoy the holidays. You know, cooking is definitely something, finding different recipes or digging up old recipes, to prepare food. Different things like that. Cleaning has actually, I've really enjoyed cleaning as well. I've definitely noticed that I don't have as much stress or anxiety if I'm living in a clean space.

HS: Have you— there was a time when COVID seemed to have been getting better and the cases were dropping, did you feel like that was, promoted optimistic views for you?

How did that affect you?

CC: Yeah, I definitely, I mean, I remember when this first started, I— me and my husband were talking about it, and we thought it would last maybe a few weeks, you know? And then those few weeks came and went. So, then we thought, "Okay, probably by summer, it would be gone," and then summer came, and it was still there. And so, I feel like it's constantly, you know, just getting longer and longer and longer. But I remember at the time that you, like, you're mentioning when it seemed like, "Okay! We're finally on the mend," you know, things are getting better. Um, I definitely think it had some, promoted some optimistic views because I definitely, obviously, I don't think I'm the only one who is excited for life to kind of go back to what it, I guess more along the lines of before, right I definitely think there will be some long-term changes made in society, but I think for the most part, I am excited to be able to walk into a grocery store and not have to worry about having a mask on, you know, feeling guilty for standing too close to someone in line, having to constantly be aware that I'm not, you know, clearing your throat or coughing if I'm standing next to someone, making them feel uncomfortable. So—

HS: Do you have any idea on what the long-term changes could be?

CC: I definitely think, I mean, my father-in-law for example, his job, he usually is working from home. Before the pandemic, he worked from home most of the time, however he would fly out for conferences and for meetings. And I remember them talking about, I think it was in the first few months of COVID, one of his coworkers mentioned that the company that he works for has saved over, I want to say, a hundred and thirty thousand dollars because they are not flying people to and from meetings. You know, everything has been done virtually. And I can imagine that companies moving forward, you know, if they've been able to test and see, "Okay, actually, we don't need to have everyone come here for this, you know, two-day seminar, we can do this online." I think that is definitely gonna be a change that could be done. I think hospitals could also be more— I could see them staying— not strict, but along those lines, just more, you know, we will use strict, for lack of better words, but more strict in their guidelines, you know, to provide safety and health. I could definitely see that being something. Those are the two that come to mind.

HS: And then for the last couple minutes, I just want to ask you; what has kept you optimistic during this hard time? and what has been something that you have been able to find joy and hope in?

CC: [Sigh] As far as what has kept me optimistic,— I would say is thinking about all the things that I've been able to learn and to kind of overcome during this pandemic. You know, there has been a lot of things in my life that I've always kind of said, "Oh, I don't have time for this," you know, or I have to, you know, move on and one of them being mental health, you know. I feel like, typically on a day to day, you know, you have work, you have school, you have family you have to worry about. And I don't think, up until this point, my life I've had so much time to be on my own and to really, like, kind of see, "Oh, you know what," like, "I'm actually having a really hard time right now." And kind of learning and developing skills to take care of, you know, my mental health. But then also, like I mentioned, you just kind of— I've— I've noticed that I've developed a few different talents, whether that's being creative with those different projects, or learning to cook, or, you know, finding that I actually enjoy cleaning.

It's also been very helpful to think about the different things that I have been fortunate to have. You know, for example, my job kind of puts that in perspective. So, I think being grateful and recognizing the things that you have. But especially the fact, with my husband, he has a grandma who's pretty old, and so it's been, we've been nervous for her, I think the most throughout this experience. So, being able to look and say, like, "You know what, I— above all, I'm grateful that she's strong, that she's healthy, and that she is also optimistic." I think building on each other's strengths, and being able to support one other, because there have been plenty times that I have gotten down, you know, and I've been fortunate enough that my husband was able to pick me up at those times, or was able to reach out to other family members, and it's been good.

HS: And then, what are your hopes for the future with this pandemic? You sug— you said something about going into stores and not having to worry about wearing a mask or standing too close to people—

CC: Yeah.

HS: But is there anything more that you're excited about? Are you excited about the long-term changes that could be beneficial to our society?

CC: I think, yeah. For the things that could be beneficial to society, I definitely think that would be awesome. But um, I also am looking forward to not feeling limited, I guess, in what we are and are not allowed to do. You know, because I will say at the beginning of the mask wearing, I was for sure one of the people who thought, "Are you kidding me? Like, I have to wear a mask? This isn't going to even help," you know, and I definitely had that attitude. But, you know, as more and more studies came out, and more and more information came out, and you realize, no this is not just going away, like, we have to do something. You know, I think it's, in a way it has felt limiting at times, but definitely not just limiting. It's also been very, I think, helpful and protective. But I do think that once we are allowed to go out without masks or having to social-distance, I feel like it will be a breath of fresh air. I'll be able to just enjoy life and yeah, that's one thing, I'm excited

to be able to travel again. That's one thing is being able to get out and travel. Even if it's just, like, to the other side of the state, [laughter] you know? I think that will be really nice.

HS: Awesome. Do you think that there is anything specific that's going to help the pandemic come to an end?

CC: I think just us being unified. You know, you still hear about people who refuse to take safety measures, just because they're not at risk. And, it's mentalities like that that are going to prolong this, in my opinion. You know, I feel like once a vaccine is created, you know, and it— if it— when it's successful and everything is able to start kind of coming on the mend, it's not just going to be an automatic thing, but we're still going to have to work for and see it through to the end, to the point where we can then join, or go back to normal life.

HS: Perfect. Well, thank you so much for taking the time and letting me interview you. It was fun and— informational, I guess [laughter] to learn about your personal experience, so thank you for sharing all of your thoughts. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

CC: No, just thank you for the questions. It's also been kind of cool to think about how I've experienced COVID. It's been cool.

HS: Awesome. Okay, well then, we will end there.

CC: Awesome!

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]