

Interview with
JANA GERBER

November 23, 2020

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

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

#2020-003

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

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

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

INDEX

exams	6, 7
flying	5, 6, 12
in-person classes	8, 9
NYU [New York University]	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
online classes	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
quarantine	4, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16
screeener [daily health screen]	16
Spring Break	4, 5
technology	16, 17, 18
testing [COVID-19]	5, 12, 13, 17

Jana Gerber was interviewed by Sabrina Gilbert on November 23, 2020 through a video call, and recorded through voice recorder. At the time of the interview, Jana was in New York, and Sabrina Gilbert was in St. George, Washington County, Utah. She talked about living in a time of COVID-19 in college, in Arizona and in New York.

SG: Okay, can I start with you telling me a little about yourself?

JG: Yeah, my name is Jana Gerber, I am 20 years old. I'm from Tucson, Arizona, but I go to school at New York University [NYU] in New York City.

SG: Alright, and how has your 2020 been?

JG: My 2020 has been stressful and very emotional.

SG: Explain.

JG: Having to switch to online classes at the beginning of the semester in March was very stressful. I did not do well with online classes so my grades really struggled and such an abrupt change of both how the classes were run and also moving back home. Just going back for spring break and having to stay there for like the next like six months was a lot to go through. And then— with— everything shut down. Going back to New York in the fall to resume classes seemed like it would be a fun idea, but we hadn't really recuperated from the first wave of COVID, so everything was still very overwhelming with doing constant tests and having to quarantine and symptom checks all the time just to get into buildings. And still a lot of classes being online. And having to implement new safety procedures when I would go to labs. It was all very stressful. And then September— personal events got very emotional and were really hard on my family, so going through that in an already stressful year made everything more difficult. And 2020 has just been a lot of unexpected challenges piling on top of each other.

SG: Well, that's true and I know a lot of people are dealing with that. How was it like starting COVID in New York?

JG: Starting out, my Spring Break started around second or third week of March, and— the week before spring break started I went back to classes and labs on Monday and we'd been hearing about COVID for a couple months. It had hit Washington and Arizona about the time I went back after winter break. And it was just something you heard about on the news. We had heard that New York was getting more cases and we should be careful and wash our hands a lot.

And then, while I was working in a lab that Monday, around March 10th or so, I don't remember the exact date, a bunch of people started getting notifications that Fordham

University was closed for a couple days because a student had tested positive for Coronavirus. And then, there were reports that, I think, people were getting it at Columbia University. So, I think, by Tuesday, Columbia had shut down for a few days. And then it had gotten so bad in the city, and everything that NYU said on Wednesday we're going to do online classes.

Wait, when did the online classes start? I think I'm off slightly. We heard everything happen with other schools on Monday and then on Tuesday were going to start doing online classes a little bit. Keep in contact with your professors today, and online classes definitely start on Wednesday. They were telling us all this on Tuesday.

Let me check the date real quick so I have my calendar right in my brain. So, on March 10th, it was a Tuesday, we started getting notifications at NYU that classes would be online starting on Wednesday, March 11th. And the next week was meant to be our Spring Break. So I had class on Tuesday and we were talking about how our classes and labs were going to work kind of thing. And then, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday I did all my classes from my dorm room. And all my labs were just cancelled for that week; I only had one or two left. And we thought it was a temporary kind of thing. Because of COVID, flight prices were really cheap; so I was expecting to stay in New York for Spring Break, but over the previous weekend, on Sunday, a couple days before March 8th, my dad and I decided to fly home to surprise my mom. I was going to fly home for Spring Break because we could afford it this year. I did online classes Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. I believe Friday night I went upstate and spent the night with my family, and then got on a flight Saturday morning.

During the week classes were online NYU said, I think on Friday they said, "Okay, cases are really bad. We're going to do the week after Spring Break is also going to be online classes. If you're going home for Spring Break bring enough stuff for two weeks just to be safe, and bring anything valuable or important with you just in case, so you have it for the two weeks and in case this lasts a little bit longer."

I went home the day spring break was starting, expecting to have a second week of online classes. But, I knew that this may last a little longer than it was seeming. There were places already talking about schools being closed for the rest of the year. People were very concerned because it was seeming like everything may shut down, but no one wanted that to happen. That seemed like the extreme end of things.

So, I went home, I flew home Friday or Saturday. And then I got an email on Monday of Spring Break, I believe, from NYU saying, "Nope, this has all gotten too bad. We're closing for the rest of the semester."

So, I had been home for like two days, had my suitcase with a couple of weeks' worth of clothes, my laptop, my school papers, a couple of important papers, just to be safe, and was told, "You're not coming back this semester, figure out what to do with your stuff." So, I had a dorm room full of stuff, having to figure out— they told us— at first they told us, "You have forty-eight hours to get your stuff out of your dorm. You have to do it

yourself.” I was like, “I can’t get a flight, there aren’t flights into New York within forty-eight hours of right now, that I can get on.” They were like, “Forty-eight hours is preferable. You have until,” the email was sent out on Monday, and they said, “you have like a week to actually get all your stuff moved out.” I was like, “I guess I’m flying into New York in like two days, getting all my stuff, and getting back somehow. I have to figure this out.”

I booked my flight, had a twenty-four-hour refund policy. I was like, I did this quickly. I made sure I had a twenty-four-hour policy. Then, eight hours later or something like that, I think it was still Monday, I got an email that said, “You know what, never mind. Not enough people, so many people were having trouble, we’re changing how we are doing this. You don’t have to come back, if you live out of state please don’t fly back to New York, it is too dangerous. Only come back if you can drive. If you are in the Tristate area, if you can drive, please come get your stuff so it is not in dorms. If you can’t drive, don’t come because everything’s too bad.” I was like, “Okay,” cancelled my flight, and then they started sending out all this stuff about how, what to do with our stuff and what was happening.

There were no in-person classes for the rest of the semester. Professors were trying to figure out how to do labs online. People got mad at NYU because schools like Columbia, I think, and even Fordham, I think, made all their classes pass-fail. They said, “This is ridiculous, everything is pass-fail.” NYU did not; they left all classes like normal, but said, “You had the option to make the class pass fail. Pass-fail doesn’t look good on your transcripts, and everything. But if the class is hard, we understand this is a trying time, you can do pass-fail.” Which was really annoying, that it was just an option, because it made it our choice if it was pass-fail. So, it seemed really bad if we choose pass-fail because we couldn’t hold up to the standards that we normally would’ve. It wasn’t the school that took initiative because everything was so bad. So, they gave us the option to make a class pass-fail up until the day before finals started. Everyone was super annoyed because you couldn’t get your final grade. It was, you’ve seen now for like, it would have been like a month and a half or so, you’ve seen how you’ve done in the class and then you can decide if you’re going to do pass-fail. But you don’t get to know your final grade before you do pass-fail. Which, myself and a lot of other NYU students, most of us, found very annoying, because everything was so insane.

And that— and we started doing online classes around the time of midterms. So, there were classes that we had already done our midterm, so we didn’t know how we were going to be testing in this environment; we didn’t know how we were going to test in exams. And we weren’t going to be able to know how well we did on our final exams before we got to choose if a class was pass-fail. Which was very annoying, because we’re like, okay, if we know the material really well and online classes didn’t really affect us maybe we get an A. But it was such a weird situation on online classes that we weren’t sure if we thought we grasped the material or if we actually did, so we weren’t sure if we were going to get that A on the final. And we didn’t want to do pass-fail and end up with an A in the class, and we did it for no reason, and didn’t get that grade added on to our GPA. You know?

SG: Yeah.

JG: Then there was the issue of how exams were going to be administered, people getting mad about professors being like, “Oh, no cheating policy, you can’t use your textbooks, you can’t use the Internet, you just have to answer the exam without any outside resources.” Everyone was realizing that there was no way they could enforce; we are going on– we’re trusting you to do what we say. And a lot of professors said we are going to do a closed-book exam. There were students like me, and I talked to other students, I wasn’t the only one thinking this, that I’m like I don’t have it in me to cheat on an exam knowingly. If you tell me it’s closed-book, that means I am going to be doing this exam closed-book. But I also know that there are plenty of students who aren’t doing this exam closed-book, even though you [the professor] say it. That’s going to mess up the curve.

You’re going to see and be like, “Oh, the exam wasn’t that hard, people did learn [in] quarantine, because all these students got A.” But those are going to be the students that opened the textbook and [were] googling the answers during the exam. Meanwhile, maybe I failed the exam because online classes did affect me, but I followed your rule, which is super annoying. So, there were some professors who were like, “You know what, I understand I can’t stop you from doing it.” So, I had one professor that was like, you can use all your notes, you can use your textbook, please don’t google the answers though. But you can use your resources, but the exam is going to be timed. Professors started doing super strictly timed exams, in hopes that if you learned the material you could answer the questions quickly, but if you had to look it up you wouldn’t have enough time to answer it. Which then ran into the problem of students who just take longer on exams and the students who managed to look up the answers super quickly.

SG: Yeah.

JG: And that is what happened in my microbiology exam. While there were students complaining about, “I studied the material and I just couldn’t finish the exam, or I ran really close on time because [of] how it worked for me, because I take a while on exams.” Meanwhile I had been unable to pay attention in the class that was online, so I was looking up most of the exam answers in the textbook or through the professor’s power points. And I was able to finish the exam super early because I could find them quickly. And if I found the answers quickly, I didn’t want to waste time on it. So, it was just a mess trying to figure out how to run exams. NYU is really annoying because they didn’t want to give us a lot of leniency on it. They said, “Figure it out on your own, we know this is challenging, maybe your professors will be nice.” But the professors really weren’t.

SG: Right.

JG: They also wanted us to be working really hard. It was just a really stressful time, and then on top of it, having all the stuff in the dorms. My entire life was still in my dorm. I had

like two weeks' worth of clothes, and my laptop, some school papers, my iPad. I had what I needed, but I had a kitchen full of stuff, I had my bed with all my stuff, had a bunch of clothes, I had a bunch of precious items and items that had a lot of sentimental value to them and everything that was just sitting in my dorm. So then they gave us the option of you can come and pick it up and we'll [NYU] give you set times, just let us know when you're coming. They had done this first like in March, and then were like, "This is what we're going to do." So, they set up times in like June where you could do it, and you had to get a time slot. But they were two-hour time slots to move everything out of your dorm. And at first, they made it sound like that was going to be the only option.

Then they changed it to also include—we'll have movers come in and pack up your stuff, and either they will store it in a facility in New Jersey, just in the storage facility on NYU's dime, thankfully. Or, we'll mail to whatever address you say, also on NYU's dime. Which, the mailing to you seemed like it was all nice and everything, but all my stuff would be in Arizona and I'd have to get everything back to New York the next time I went back, which would have been annoying. And—there was a bunch of stuff that was valuable that I didn't want them mailing back because I didn't trust that these boxes weren't just going to get thrown around and everything, because everything started being online with USPS and was super overloaded and everything. UPS, FedEx, everyone was. So, it didn't seem like the best option, so I just have my stuff stored. But that meant that people were going through my stuff and just storing all of it. Some of my stuff ended up with my roommate. I ended up with some of my roommate's stuff. Some stuff may have just gone missing. My roommate had to file a complaint, because the movers vandalized some of her stuff, and stuff was like stolen and she had all these issues with it and everything. And, now it's November and that roommate isn't the best with communication, so she has a couple items of mine, and one of the things is super valuable to me because it is a gift from a really close friend, and she still won't send it back to me because she keeps forgetting. I have a huge box of dishes that belongs to her.

Everything was just so chaotic, and mismanaged, but everyone was trying their best. I don't blame NYU for the moving stuff because they didn't really know what else to do, and it was fine. I don't entirely blame my roommate right now, like it's fine that I have some of her stuff, it's fine she has some of mine, and I wish we could have worked it out sooner. But also, she didn't come back to classes on campus in the fall because she lived nearby. So, if classes did resume then it wouldn't be that hard for her to come back, she only lived a few states away. And, her classes could be online so she just stayed home. Meanwhile I was in New York City for my classes because I sucked at online classes in the Spring and didn't want to go through that again. Arizona was really high with cases, so I figured it would be better, both case wise—New York was a little better with cases. I knew I could handle—I hoped I could handle in-person and being protective. I wanted to do in-person classes.

So then, figuring out what to do in the fall, both personal and NYU giving all these options was really difficult. Because then they said, "Okay, we'll give these options, we'll try and give you all these options for you to do online classes, completely remote if you want to." They, NYU, was really unique in that NYU has a lot of study away sites

across the world. And so, if you lived near one of those study abroad sites you could just take your normal classes at that study away site. They were coordinating classes all around the world. So, students could do in-person classes even if they were on another continent.

SG: But you weren't lucky enough to live there so you had to go to New York?

JG: Yeah, I either had to do online classes, or I could have done classes in LA [Los Angeles, California], which I wasn't sure it would be super great because it was a study away site. But also, I'm in the school of engineering so I wasn't sure how many classes I could really do there. California was worse than New York at the time [for COVID cases], so I figured I'd be better off going back to New York. And all my stuff had been stored in New Jersey, so I could just get all my stuff back if I went there. But then being in the Engineering school, I couldn't really do online classes. Even though they said we could, because they realized they couldn't in good conscience have us do labs online and say we knew lab procedure.

So, any lab class you had to do had to be in-person. There were some introductory classes where the lab and the lecture were one class, so they separated them. So, intro to bio[logy] had a lab section and a lecture section. So, you could do an online lecture and you just didn't do the lab and you would just make up the lab in another semester. But it meant that you were having to make up these labs in a semester where they weren't usually offered, or in a semester you're not taking the lecture also. And we still don't know how that's all going to work, because we haven't reached those future semesters yet, where these people are trying to make up these labs. So, I knew it was my best option to go back to New York, because that way I could do my labs in-person like I had to. I wouldn't be behind on my labs.

But then, I had changed my major, so I was already behind in some classes that I was having trouble getting into, because they didn't want to offer a ton of classes this semester with everything going on. They said, like, "We're going to offer the minimum amount." So, there were classes I was hoping to take on an off semester, or a small just couple credit weird requirement. I couldn't get these classes done, because they didn't want to add more on to the workload. It's just weird taking these classes, because everything is different, and it's just really hard to go through.

SG: So you touched on how you went back to Arizona. I know this is kind of off topic from NYU and we can get back to that, but how was it different going from New York to Arizona and even back to New York? And, what was your experience like there? And then we can get back to the Fall Semester, and how that's been going.

JG: Yeah, so when I left New York in March, people in New York were concerned about COVID. I was at an Engineering school surrounded by intelligent people, we were like, "Yeah, make sure to wash your hands, maybe don't take the subway if you don't have to. If you're sick, stay home, just limit interaction and everything." But people hadn't really started wearing masks. Some people did, one of my—microbiology professor was talking

about how a lot more students, he also taught at Columbia, and a lot more students seemed to be wearing masks at Columbia. My microbiology professor noticed a lot more of the students who were wearing masks were Asian. Because, he speculated, and I believe this was his speculation and not mine, just that it was related to the previous one or two SARS outbreaks. That when something like this happens, they wear masks, they understood the procedure of it already. So, he noticed that when he taught at Columbia that a lot of students were wearing masks already. But it wasn't a common occurrence to wear masks, it was more of just people thinking it was flu season. Just wash your hands, avoid people who are sick, but also with an added layer of if you don't have to be around people maybe try not to be. So then, the last like three days I was doing online classes, before I left to fly back to Arizona, I didn't leave my dorm for those three days straight, because I just didn't have a need to. And we had realized there was no reason to leave if you didn't have to.

But then when I got back to Arizona, Arizona didn't have as many cases at the time I think, because this was when New York was spiking, I think.

SG: Right.

JG: Arizona had gotten cases early on, but as far as we knew they were isolated, like one family for just a couple of months. And people have speculated that it was a matter of Arizona not testing as much as, say New York was at the time. But Arizona was still pretty open and stuff was happening like normal. I went up on the mountain with my sister when I first got back, and we just went hiking for the fun of it. And there were a lot of people on the mountain. Everything was pretty normal when I first got back to Arizona. People in Arizona were treating the caution around COVID as something ridiculous. I was around people who were intelligent and were like, "Yeah, this is an issue; we should be concerned about it." But it wasn't so bad in Arizona that people weren't too concerned.

So then, eventually by like mid-April, I think, my dad happened to know someone who was making masks. And he was getting a big order of these masks from his friend for his rotary club. So he ordered a few just for our family. So then, because we had a few masks, I would wear it to the grocery store. Because I had the mask and the mask wasn't a bad idea. At the time we still weren't completely aware of— that wearing these fabric masks were helping me not spread it to other people. We weren't 100 percent sure on everything at the time. People were still trying to figure out paper filters and trying to get their hands on N-95 [masks] and everything. By the time April came around, people cared a little bit more. Some restaurants were doing takeout only in Arizona. We were trying to limit going outside— well not going outside, but like leaving the house and doing stuff we didn't have to. Trying to only go grocery shopping.

SG: Right.

JG: And my dad was still working in-person because that's how his business is; he never got to work from home. My mom started working from home, I think in April, because she

worked for the city, and she could, so they decided to get cautious pretty early on.

But while in New York, everyone was wearing masks and having all of these cases and they were like on a total lockdown, Arizona was still open. We didn't even start doing even semi-lockdown until like May, I think, at the earliest, but not even really then.

And so, it was just different because I wasn't in New York when New York was locked down and everything. So then, I went from somewhere [New York] that people were cautious about it but hadn't really started doing anything, to somewhere [Arizona] that people should have been more cautious than they were, and they weren't. And watching where I had been just a month earlier in a total lockdown.

It was weird because Arizona did not take the pandemic as seriously as New York at the beginning. In part because they didn't have as many, at least reported, cases. So, it was weird because I wasn't just watching New York from the outside lens of, "Wow, New York has a lot of cases," and everything. There was also that added layer of I was there a month ago, that's a little concerning. I came back from Arizona— or I came back from New York to Arizona. So, when I first came back [to Arizona], no one was really caring about quarantining or anything. But then we realized, like, "Oh, it's been like two weeks since I got back, now I can go out in public," jokingly. That's maybe when I started grocery shopping, although I had gone to the mountain the first weekend I was back, I'm pretty sure, when I time-stamped the pictures. We didn't actually care, while New York did at the time.

SG: Right.

JG: So, it was weird watching it happen there.

SG: It almost, from what you're saying, sounded like Arizona took it lighter and more as a joke. As you said, "Oh, I can go outside more like now," and you took that more as a joke.

JG: Yeah, Arizona took COVID precautions as a joke really, in March and April. And, because I had left New York before it got too serious, I also was taking them as a joke at the beginning. Or— at least— I felt like I was going above and beyond to take simple precautions that people in New York would have considered less than necessary, but at least doing something. Whereas, in Arizona it was more than most people because I was wearing a mask and only grocery shopping and not just doing whatever I wanted.

SG: So how was it going from a very lax state, because we both kind of know that Arizona never really went into a fully lockdown. So, going from a fully lax state almost, to a place like New York. What was that like and what was the transition like from Arizona to New York like?

JG: Yeah so, Arizona had a little bit of stuff in like June, where, like restaurants were closed and stuff, and still takeout only kind of stuff. But merging to having more open seating in

restaurants. When I went back to New York, so Arizona had already shifted into like getting comfortable with like finer preventative measures, but not a ton. Where New York was still really serious in their preventative measures.

So, I— I had to go to classes, back to New York two weeks early to quarantine because Arizona was a hot state that had a lot of cases.

SG: Right.

JG: Whereas New York numbers had gone down. So, I had to go back early to quarantine. I—

SG: And?

JG: — flew into New York, yeah—

SG: And how was that going from a hot state to a cool state? What was that emotionally like? And then you can go into physically doing it?

JG: Emotionally, I didn't notice much personally. Because I knew that New York was going to take it more seriously. And, as Arizona as a whole hadn't been taking it seriously, Tucson had been taking it a little more seriously, and I had been personally taking it relatively seriously. My family altogether would do take-out and then eat it in my dad's office or something. We wouldn't eat it at the restaurant, even if we could. And my dad had precautions for his drivers for his company. We had been pretty cautious, so there wasn't that much emotional change going from Arizona to New York. It was that a lot of my actions were more forced, so I realized in some aspects that I had been, because now I couldn't be. But it wasn't actually that different, and while I maybe was more concerned being in New York than in Arizona, because New York had been such a hot state at one point and, because New York City was so close together. In Arizona— Arizona is already so spread out, and I lived in the suburbs, so I wasn't around people as much. But in New York City I knew I had no other option than to be really close to people. So I was almost more concerned to be in New York at the time. Even though New York City was doing better than Arizona in percentage-wise.

So, when I went to New York, I went back two weeks early. And when I landed from my flight in New York, New York City tried to get a record of everyone coming in, where they were coming from, how they were quarantining, if they had to and whatnot. And there was a table with forms you were supposed to fill out, but there wasn't anyone at the table making you fill out the forms about quarantining. So I went ahead and filled out the form; where I'd be quarantining, that I was coming from Arizona, and that I was quarantining, with like my email and phone number or something, and put it in the box that I was supposed to. So I was getting calls from New York City Health or something, of how I— making sure I was quarantining and everything. And I was quarantining because NYU made me come back two weeks early. I couldn't leave my dorm except for when I was tested.

So, I had to be tested within twenty-four hours of arriving– which I think, at first they, because there were two days you could arrive, and I arrived on the second day, but I arrived in the evening. So, I arrived after testing had ended for that day, and they didn't have testing open for the next day. So, you had to schedule an appointment. And at first, they didn't have a time for me to get tested twenty-four hours after I had arrived. Which was super annoying and no one would give me a straight answer in an email back. And eventually, the day before I got back, they're like, "Oh, we opened more testing." So I was able to go get tested the next morning. And that was the only reason I was allowed to leave my dorm. I arrived– I think like a Wednesday night, and then Thursday morning I went and got tested. They had it set up in the gym of the building, because I was in the Brooklyn campus, the testing was across the street across from my dorm. I didn't really have to pass like anyone. I went, stood in line, got the nasal swab, went back to my dorm, and I think the next day or so I got an email that said I tested negative. And then I was in my dorm for two weeks.

SG: So, to clarify, even though you were negative you still had to quarantine for those two weeks.

JG: Yes.

SG: Okay.

JG: NYU made us quarantine for two weeks, and in those two weeks we got tested twenty-four hours after [we] arrived and then another ten days later.

SG: Okay.

JG: And, they wanted to see if students were positive when they came, but they were still making us quarantine regardless. So the point of the quarantine was that your– if you had COVID, you're infectious for up to fourteen days; not enough research had been done. And this is coming from– I've talked to my cousin who is a nurse, I did my own research, I was in microbiology, I am a biomolecular science major. So I do have a bit of knowledge on it, and viruses are transmissible, they all have their own range of how long they can be transmissible after you have been infected, and it's up to fourteen days. It's a period of like two to fourteen days, and no one knew how long COVID was transmissible for. Now they think that– now they know that it's ten days.

But the fourteen-day quarantine was, if you had COVID and didn't get tested for it or were a-symptomatic or just didn't know you had it, you could still transmit it for two weeks. So, if there was a chance you came from somewhere where you could have had it, you would quarantine for two weeks so that you couldn't transmit it to anyone unknowingly.

Well NYU had us quarantine for those two week, but still had us tested to see if we had it, both when we first arrived and then ten days later, so that if we got it when we were flying, and we wouldn't have tested positive within twenty-four hours we would have

tested positive the next time.

SG: That makes sense. And–

JG: But we still had to quarantine regardless.

SG: Right. And how did quarantine work for you? How did food work? How was it for you?

JG: Yeah, so we had, in our dorm we weren't allowed to leave our dorm room. We weren't allowed to do our laundry or anything for those two weeks. I was in a suite style dorm that had two bedrooms, and then a kitchen, and then like a living room area. And my roommates, I didn't have roommates but I did have two suite-mates in the other room of the suite, and neither of them had to quarantine. One of them I believe was quarantining, but doing it herself in like a hotel. And the other was from New York so she didn't have to quarantine. So I had the entire suite to myself for the two weeks, so I could move around in the suite however I wanted to.

And, as for food, they would deliver us meals, and if we wanted to order food they gave us hours, that was like two pm to like eight pm or something. That we could have food delivered to us at that time, and they had people who would then bring the food up to our room, if we ordered delivery. We were supposed to get meals delivered, and I believe it was supposed to be if you had a fridge, so if you were in a suite like I was, that had a fridge, that you would get your breakfast and lunch both around nine am, so you could put your lunch in the fridge, and then you would get dinner around five pm. Or, maybe we would get all three meals in the morning, something. It was like if you had a fridge, they would give you meals and you would just put them in the fridge. But the meals didn't tend to come on time. Some days you wouldn't get all the meals. And sometimes, I don't have dietary restrictions, so it was more of just like I'm picky so I wouldn't eat a lot of the food. But there would be people who would get meals that they couldn't physically eat. They had, whether it was personal choice dietary restrictions or physical inability to eat certain food that they would still receive in these foods. When they told NYU in a survey that they could not eat these foods.

There was one day where I didn't get my meals and I was like, I don't know what is happening. So, I emailed the email I was supposed to. Then many hours later my breakfast, lunch, and dinner were all delivered at like seven pm all of a sudden. Which was really weird because like it was later than dinner had ever been delivered. They just like, found my lost meals, or something, I don't know. And I got an apology email saying they were going to send something as an apology, like a fancy dinner or something, that I didn't end up getting. They didn't end up sending this special dinner.

Then a few days into quarantine, they sent every student in NYU housing who was quarantining a fifty-dollar Grub Hub gift card as an apology for everything that had been going wrong. I had gratefully– I had thankfully, basically had received every meal. There was maybe one or two meals I didn't receive it on time, but I don't eat a lot so I was eating snacks I had left over from the other meals, if I didn't have a meal. I was perfectly

fine. But there were some students who really— basically had been starving for these few days until they had sent this fifty-dollar GrubHub gift card as an apology. And you could use it to order food during that afternoon period where they would have people to run food up to you.

And then, I think for the last week of quarantine, they realized this wasn't working well. And they said, "We're going to keep giving you breakfast and lunch, but this has been such a mess we're going to stop giving you guys dinner. Here is a GrubHub gift card valued at," I think was supposed to be thirty dollars for dinner for each of the days left in quarantine. So it was like a \$250 GrubHub gift card or something like that. They're like, "This is how you're going to get dinner for the rest of quarantine. We're not going to handle dinner. You are just going to have to order it yourself. But here's money for it." Which was really weird. GrubHub delivery takes forever. But you could order it and they'd bring it up, and it was nice that they brought it up sort of thing. But it was really weird that they're just like, "We're not going to handle it. We're not handling it well and we're just not going to do anything about it, to fix the problem."

SG: So, how do you think they could have fixed it? If you have any idea.

JG: Yeah, I'm not so sure how they could have fixed it. I'm like, I really feel for the NYU dining workers because I know that they already tend to be overworked. And I know that this would have been super stressful for them. And at the time in New York City, not a lot of people were working in-person jobs, except for healthcare, or like groceries. And now all these people had to come in to cook all of our food and everything. And I knew that the work— that the actual meal workers were probably being way over-worked, because NYU is just notorious for problems in their dining service, when it comes to their workers and everything, and working with really bad companies, bad morally. And so, I felt for the workers. I felt bad for them and figured this was probably an issue in higher-ups just not planning well at all, and not caring to plan any better. So I don't know for a fact how they could have done this better. I just think they needed better communication between parts of the dining services. And I think the people in charge should have tried a lot harder to make all of this work. And I think they started planning it way too late so they didn't have the right services in place.

SG: So, you're talking about how they should have just planned better. So, during those two weeks, how were you emotionally?

JG: I think emotionally, I think I maybe was a little stir-crazy. But— and I was lonely, probably, because I wasn't seeing anyone. So, it wasn't too weird for me because even when I wasn't on quarantine or COVID wasn't going on or anything, if I was at home, I tended to sit in my room and watch Netflix and scroll through social media all day anyways. So there wasn't much new on that front. But it was new that if I walked into the kitchen to get food there wasn't my sister, or my parents, or dog. There was no one there, and that was weird. I do think I got lonely and was on a lot of Snapchat and Instagram messages and texting people, and calling people, just to try and get some sort of social interaction. And I do think the lack of physical social interaction probably played

negatively on my mental health. But it didn't feel weird for me, because I was already kind of a hermit. I wasn't someone who was used to going out and doing stuff. But I was a little lonely.

SG: And did— so it sounds like that social media and the ability to contact helped, do you think it helped throughout this whole thing and stuff?

JG: Yeah, definitely. I do think we're lucky going through this in such an active time of social media. That there are both ways to connect to both friends and family so easily and there are ways to connect to total strangers, and that there are ways to share our stories of what is going on.

So— when I was going through NYU's quarantine and everything was ridiculous with the meal plan, it became— it was trending on TikTok, NYU's quarantine meals, because they were such a mess.

SG: Yeah.

JG: And I think we're lucky that we went through this in a time of socially distance solidarity, that if I opened the TikTok app I saw that there were other people getting terrible meals from NYU. Or I saw other people being super lonely, that they weren't with their friends and family. And there were other people who were angry at people for not wearing masks.

SG: Right.

JG: And I think all these opportunities to connect with people we know and love, as well as share our personal struggles at the time with people who we both knew and didn't know. And seeing others struggling, and we're not alone. But also, just to be entertained with all the TikTok dances and weird Netflix shows. I think the age of technology that we are currently in, and especially in the age of social media, definitely benefited everyone going through all this in the past and right now, because it made it a little easier to survive.

SG: Yeah.

JG: Technology made us less lonely.

SG: Yep.

JG: And less alone. And for that reason, I think we're really lucky that COVID kind of came when it did, technologically speaking.

SG: No, that makes sense. So at the beginning we talked about how NYU did in the Spring, and how the Spring semester was messed up. How have they improved? Have they improved classes now, classes in Fall of 2020?

JG: Yeah so, NYU, in order to enter any NYU building, you have to complete this daily screener they call it, which is on the NYU mobile app they already had. They added this feature that you click on it, say the last time you completed the screener and if it was within fourteen days, then answer these questions, say since the last time you did the screener. If you haven't done the screener within fourteen days, then it will say, "Within the last fourteen days." And it's, have you been around anyone who tested positive, have you tested positive, have you experienced any symptoms, have you had a fever over 100.3 [degrees Fahrenheit], and have you been to a state that is a NYU – or New York State regulated state [a state with lots of cases], or however they phrased it. And you had to fill this out every time you – every day you wanted to enter an NYU building, you could fill it out once in the morning, and it would show the email that said that you had passed the thing so you could get into the building.

SG: So how did classes work then? Like how did– so physically it sounds like they're doing well and they're trying to make sure it is contained. Compared to during the Spring how has classes been? How has the online experience been? How have labs been going? Can you explain that?

JG: Yeah, so they made all classes online or blended, which meant half online, half in-person. Some classes– it was up to you to take the class online, whether you were in New York or not, or if you wanted to go in person. Some classes had few enough students that wanted to go in-person that if you wanted to go to every class in-person you could. And they [NYU] just put the classes in big enough classrooms that you were six feet away from other students from where you were sitting. Sometimes you could only go to one of two classes per week in person. Or some classes students just didn't want to go in person, and so they could, but no one wanted to go in person because it would have been like three students in a giant room with a professor and it felt awkward, so no one ended up going in person.

But there were technological challenges, of teachers uploading classes to Zoom, and trying to record them live, being unable to hear messages or hear students, or just issues with Zoom or professors just learning how to use it. Even though NYU was providing a lot of document cameras, projectors, laptops, all these systems to make it run more smoothly, teachers– professors seemed to have a lot of technological resources, but they didn't necessarily know how to use them well.

SG: So I know here at Dixie [State University], I know they had, if a teacher requests, a person to help them, they'll have like a tech person, a tech TA [teaching assistant]. Was that an option for you guys, do you know of? Or how could they have made it easier for these professors to better understand technology? Because I know for a lot of professors that it is hard to understand technology and stuff, where as maybe you and me understand it as college students, but harder for them.

JG: Yeah, so in the past NYU had students who were like IT and work if the professor is experiencing technological difficulties. I don't think they had that going on during

COVID, to limit the number of people on campus and in these classrooms. Because I never saw it happen or heard of it happening. And so, there was no in-person technological help for the professors. They had to learn how to do this completely on their own, as far as I'm aware. Which was not the best course of action. And so, they tried to have, like, practice runs. They told both students and professors to have practice runs to learn how to manage the material— or use the resources. But I don't think NYU did well about equipping professors with the ability to teach classes online. Even if they had the resources, they didn't necessarily have the know-how. And I think NYU failed in that respect, and just expected people to be smart enough at NYU, especially in the school of engineering, to know how to operate this new technology. Which was not true in cases, because this was new technology to them and they were engineers who were just used to using the same thing and had left the field and were now just teaching sort of thing.

SG: So, do you— is it— was it better than Spring semester then still? Or was it worse, or yeah?

JG: I would say the stress was pretty on par with Spring semester, because figuring out whether you were going to an in-person class, and when you had to go to an in-person class, and the preparations you had to do to go to an in-person class were a lot. But I think it was better in the sense of you could choose to go to an in-person class if you needed that material. I definitely benefited from having labs in-person because I just learn better that way.

SG: Overall though, do you think they figured it out kind of sort of enough, where it's working, or is it not working, how they have it set up right now?

JG: I think they figured out small parts of it, and maybe made it work better than the spring, to a small extent. But I don't think they succeeded completely in making this a viable way for students to get a good, expensive college education.

SG: What do you think would make it better?

JG: I'm not sure that NYU knows how to provide an online or semi-online education. And that isn't something they can figure out overnight or in a few months. So, even personally, I don't know what could have been done to make it better, because it's a matter of improving over time, with learning how to use the technology, and learning what can be done online and what has to be done in person. And I think that it is a slow learning process. And I think NYU's biggest fault is that they expected to be able to be resolved very quickly, and they don't expect there to be a learning curve, and there really is. So it's not that they necessarily could have done more right now because everyone has to adjust, but they shouldn't have expected everyone to have already adjusted, like I think they did.

SG: That makes sense— do you have anything else you want to tell us, or anything about 2020, and your experience in it? Anything we didn't touch on.

JG: I think the only thing to remember with 2020 aside from what we have talked about, while we benefited from social media and technology, we struggled with classes and getting people on the same page about caring for each other and protecting each other. I think people also need to remember that people had personal challenges unrelated to COVID, and that COVID wasn't the only problem for a lot of people this year. Because I think there are a lot of people that are like, "Yeah, 2020 sucked because of COVID." And for a lot of people that is the only reason 2020 sucked, but there are a lot of people who 2020 sucked for many other reasons. And I think people just need to remember that 2020 wasn't only COVID, and that not everything bad was related to COVID. And COVID didn't completely ruin the year, because there were good things to come out of it, like a huge connection across TikTok that really happened during COVID. And hopefully we'll see a little bit of unity amongst people caring for each other because of COVID. But even still in November 2020, I don't think we're there yet. There are plenty of people still only out for themselves. But yeah, I think just 2020 has been defined by COVID in the eyes of many people, and I think that people also need to remember that COVID is not all that happened in 2020. Both on a global scale, a political scale, stuff happening, big and affecting many people, and also just individual problems. Personally, 2020 has sucked and been the worst year ever, but not just because of COVID. And people need to remember that when people say that 2020 sucked, not just to be like, "Oh, yeah COVID sucked." Because there is other stuff that happened in 2020.

SG: Anything else?

JG: I think that's it.

SG: Alright, thank you.

JG: Thank you.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]