

Interview with
MIA ANELLI

April 14, 2021

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

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MIA ANELLI

Content Warning: Contains words that are inherently offensive, insensitive and harmful.

Mia Anelli was interviewed by Mekiella Laws on April 14, 2021 at Mia Anelli's home in St George, Washington County, Utah. She talks about her life as a single mother during COVID, and the challenges that she faced. She also briefly talks about some political issues: the killing of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter protests, and the [U.S.] Capitol siege.

ML: So, your name is Mia Anelli?

MA: Yes.

ML: Can you just spell it for the record?

MA: M-I-A A-N-E-L-L-I.

ML: Okay, and we are doing this on April 14th, 2021. It is taking place at Mia's house. We are doing this interview for the [Utah Tech University] Pandemic Years Oral History project.

Okay, so when did you first hear about COVID?

MA: When?

ML: Yeah, like when?

MA: This time last year, so I think it was July, maybe. Wait no, that can't be right. It was all a blur, dude.

ML: I get it.

MA: When the restaurant closed, that's, when did that happen?

ML: March?

MA: March, it was March.

ML: So, how did you react when you were told that everything would be shut down?

MA: To be honest, kind of excited because I needed a break; I was being overworked. But then fear because, well then, I was out of work.

ML: Did you have a backup plan to earn money?

MA: For the first two weeks, yes. I put together— I didn't know how long it was going to be, so I thought two weeks would last me, but I put together kids' pandemic survival kits, like from the ninety-nine-cent store. Like little toys and stuff, sold them for like twenty bucks each. Made like \$300 profit and I thought that would last me for the whole thing,

'cause I had no clue, right. And then it didn't. But then, the backup plan became unemployment.

ML: What was life during COVID? How was life like?

MA: In the beginning, scary. As a single mom, it was tumultuous, it was stressful. I was providing, like, full time care to my mom who was living here at the time, so that was scary. But I became teacher, provider, protector. And in my mind, the world was ending, so it was very scary.

ML: What precautions did you take to keep your mom and your son safe?

MA: I was the only one that went and did grocery shopping, anything outside the house. We didn't leave the house for a good month. I did, to go get groceries and stuff, and when I would go get groceries, I had my mask, my hoodie, my gloves. I wouldn't wear my shoes in the house. Everything was sprayed with Lysol. Nobody came in the house, very little contact. My son didn't go to school. Grandma wasn't allowed out of the house. Washing everything, I was spraying bleach on the floors every night. That's it.

ML: And how did you keep your son busy?

MA: I turned my living room— Well it's actually been turned back now, but well, there's tons of shit on the floor. I turned the living room into a, basically, like a preschool daycare-looking thing. I had every kind of poster on the wall. I had all of his artwork on the wall. The night before, I would set up all of his stuff that we were gonna do during the day. Walks around the neighborhood. I bought a bounce house. I bought a bounce house to put in the garage. I bought a Thomas the Train set right at the beginning of the quarantine. Hopefully, he would play with that, but yeah. School work, everything that I could possibly teach him, I tried to teach him. The end?

ML: No, there's a lot more. Okay. So, since coming back from quarantine, were you willing to go back to work? Or how did you feel going back to work, with the uncertainty?

MA: I was scared at first, but the restaurant did put a lot of precautions in place, a lot of things were different, so I felt okay. I also felt like we had dodged bullets by that point already, and we were kind of, kind of cruise control. But going back to work was hard. Like, it was hard 'cause, like, I kind of liked chillin' at home. I'm very much an introvert. Like, that was great. My son was losing his mind. But like, it wasn't my favorite thing.

ML: Talk more about your experience going back to work, like what kind of travelers were coming through?

MA: Like oh, it was horrible actually. When we first opened up, 'cause we opened up before [Las] Vegas and California, and we are right off the freeway from their vacation destinations, the restaurant where I work at, which is Cracker Barrel. It's right there, so we'd get, I'd say eighty percent of the customers would be from out of town, escaping a pandemic, coming into, you know, a place that basically we're in a bubble. And it was a little scary. I literally was waiting on people who were like, "Yeah, we got tested in

California and we're just waiting for our results, but we had to escape," and like, no, that's not what we do here. But yeah, that was that.

ML: How has your life changed since COVID? Like, how has your daily life changed since then?

MA: Not as of now. The masks thing, but that's, I don't really, I don't mind that at all. Honestly, it seems to be back to normal. I mean, the restaurant is completely full capacity. Nobody is really being precautious. I've been vaccinated, and now I feel like I'm completely back to normal. Which might be a false sense of security, but whatever.

ML: How do you think the federal, state, and local governments have handled the pandemic?

MA: Federal, state, and local, okay. Federal will be United States or federal, just Utah?

ML: United States.

MA: Okay, federal. Because different states had different laws, which is why people were escaping to our state, which had looser laws, it kind of made it pointless in the beginning. If you're not going to shut everything down, it's, you're just putting a band aid on a machete wound. As far as, like, Utah, it is a very Republican state, and unfortunately Republicans were relying on information coming from somebody who might not have been as informed as he needed to be. And that caused a lot of hesitance in the beginning. Local, I think around here we acted pretty quickly, to wear masks, and to just not act crazy. But yeah, unless everything is shut down in, like, one big landmass, it's not going to do anything.

ML: Did you have to deal with anybody at work refusing to wear masks?

MA: No. I did not.

ML: So, how did you feel about, or how did you feel when you learned about George Floyd?

MA: How did I— well, very upset. I am obviously a Black Lives, well not obviously, I'm a Black Lives Matter advocate. I think that it is just one incident of many. It just happened to be a tipping point. Especially during a pandemic, when people are already feeling shuttered down, and all that stuff.

ML: Did you participate in any BLM protests?

MA: I did.

ML: Tell me about that.

MA: It was next to Iceberg [Drive Inn]. I don't know the street. You know what I'm talkin' about? It's like a restaurant. We chanted, we held signs. I held the sign I made. For the most part, everyone that drove by was pretty friendly, but I'd say about eight or nine, which is kind of a lot, for I was only there for about forty-five minutes maybe, eight or nine people who yelled obscenities. I mean, somebody called me a faggot which was odd, okay. There was only one other person that came up with a sign that said: All Lives

Matter. Unfortunately, instead of, like, informing that person, people use it as a photo-op, which is kind of disheartening. Like, you're not there to just take your picture. But yeah, that's generational, I guess.

ML: How is this movement important to you?

MA: Black Lives Matter?

ML: Yeah.

MA: It's important to me that, you know, when things are not being handled correctly, or injustly, or murderously, they need to be fixed. Wait, what was the question?

ML: How is BLM important to you?

MA: It shines light on a racism problem. And that's important 'cause I have a kid and I need my kid to act right. So yeah, it's important to me because I have a kid and I have to, and I can shape that future.

ML: How was your decision on getting the vaccine? Like, was it an easy decision? Or did you have to think about it for a bit?

MA: For me, personally, I wanted it. I wanted the vaccine very much. But I'm also someone who doesn't even get the flu shot. So, that is just my personal choice. But then, my personal opinion— The greater good trumps my personal opinion, and this. I don't need to be like, I don't need to be a sissy pants. Like, I don't, I need my big girl pants on and get the vaccine. It's not just about me, it's about a herd mentality, and yeah.

ML: Did you ever get tested for COVID?

MA: Yes. Four times.

ML: Explain.

MA: First two times were probably out of paranoia. Second time, I lost smell and taste. My mom had to go get a prescription cough medicine, and my son had a fever that I could not break for about a week, and that was the test that they lost my results. Hundred percent, I was positive. Like, I could not smell anything. My mom had to go to the emergency room to get a breathing treatment and prescription cough medicine. They lo— I'm using quotations— they lost my results. That was kind of weird. Then the last time, I had a coworker test positive, and I had close contact with them.

ML: How scary was it when they lost your test? Was it?

MA: Not scary, I knew. I knew.

ML: You knew?

MA: I mean, as a single mom you can't get 100 percent sick, no matter what, so— Yeah, I was sick. I knew I had COVID, like I'm coughing. I still have a cough to this day, every now and then. But it's like, my kid's got a fever, like every, every symptom that you have. It's

mind over matter and some, it's to some degree, but, like, it wasn't scary for me. It's like, "Okay, well, this is what we're dealing with right now. You soldier on."

ML: Did this quarantine teach you anything that, like, you're gonna take through the rest of your life?

MA: People are assholes. People don't care. Most people, most people, especially in— Are we— is it blue or red? I should know this.

ML: We're a red state.

MA: But yeah, mostly in red states. Republicans, conservatives are the most un-godlike people that could, 'cause you're literally, you're— Not all, not all. And I don't want to make a political thing, but your liberties aren't being taken away. You're trying to protect other people. I think Jesus would 'a liked that. Like, right? Okay, so people who identify as Republican and Christian could care less about other people. I'm sayin' it. Also, like, we're idiots! Why are you buying all the toilet paper? People are dumb! People are dumb. That's what I learned. People are dumb and we're doomed. [Laughter.]

ML: How is it like being back to full capacity at work?

MA: I hate it. I didn't realize— Well, I guess I got used to not being around so many people so close to me all at once, and so noisy. And because I have autism and sensory processing disorders, having that all thrown at me at once during a work shift where I'm tryin' to focus on my job, was kind of debilitating. It was a lot. Because when you opened up, everybody wanted to go out and we still had people from California and Vegas that are not at full capacity. I don't even think they're eating in California, yet, out. So yeah, it was not great.

ML: How did you stay connected with friends and family during this time?

MA: Social media. That's it, like, that's—. Yeah. Yeah. [Laughter.]

ML: Have you noticed any changes in the community or in the environment?

MA: No. Not anymore. Maybe if you would ask six months ago, yes, but no.

ML: Okay, so what do you think about the Capitol siege?

MA: Oh, when they stormed the Capitol?

ML: Yeah.

MA: Another example of dumb. Dumb, people are dumb; people are idiots.

ML: Do you think the government would 'a reacted differently if it was a liberal group instead of a Republican group?

MA: No. I think they didn't care if it was Republican, or liberal, or conservative, or whatever, as long as they had people doing that, they could say that it was for this, that president.

However, if it had been a group of [ethnic] minorities, in any way, yeah, that probably wouldn't have ended as well.

ML: Why do you think that occurred?

MA: Because people are idiots [laughter]! I wish there was a better answer than that, but— [laughter] like, idiots, crybaby idiots.

ML: To sum everything up, is there anything else you would like to tell me about this time or anything come to you that—?

MA: Nothing will change. Nothing will. Nothing will change, or people that say this is the new norm. No, we went back to the old norm. So, nothing is goin' to change. Politics are all the same. Nothing is gonna get done. Police are gonna still be assholes some of the time. Minorities are still gonna be treated the way they are treated. People are still gonna be dumb. But, like, I guess, 500,000 of them are now dead, so there's that. Wait, that's just the U.S. number, right? There's a lot more, right? I don't actually know the numbers for sure, but yeah. That's it.

ML: In ten years, how are you gonna tell your son about this, or what are you gonna tell him about it?

MA: Ten years, he'll still be pretty young. I think I'd say, you know, "There was a time that we stayed home because we needed to protect people who are more at risk. And we needed to look out for everybody. People were dumb and we can't be dumb." Like, that's literally it. I'm gonna hopefully be able to say, "This is not how you act in an emergency. This is how you act in an emergency, and this is what your mom did. Hopefully, it doesn't happen again, but, if it does— keeping yourself safe and free is a community effort. And like, you can't be an ass and stupid." I mean, you can use different words, but just like, "Don't be an idiot! Don't be an idiot." Yeah, there we go. Also, I'm gonna teach him to always have some money saved, because you never know when shit's gonna hit the fan.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]