

## PGTPL COVID-19 Pandemic Oral History Transcript

**Interviewee:** Lauren McPike

**Interviewer:** Jeannine Spurgin

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**Location:** Plainfield, Indiana

*Abstract: Lauren McPike is a librarian at Plainfield Library, and a resident of Plainfield. She talks about her experience with moving during the pandemic. She also talks about her battle with anxiety during this time, and how she managed it.*

JS: Today is July 31, and I'm here with Lauren McPike, who's going to give us her pandemic story. Lauren, you live here in Plainfield?

LM: I do, yes. I've lived in Plainfield for a couple of years; I moved here in 2018. And I was living in an apartment during most of the pandemic, but I also, and I never thought this would happen, but I bought a house during the pandemic, and so we spent a lot of time moving into said house. We're now finally in the house, but it took us a while. Everything was very slow-going in the process because we were still trying to figure out how to safely do everything: how to safely see the house, how to do the closing safely within standards, so none of us got sick. We had to make sure that the moving company was able to safely move our stuff without them possibly being exposed to an infection, or possibly exposing us to an infection. So it was very interesting, this process.

JS: Did you use a moving company?

LM: I did, yes, I used Two Men and a Truck. I'd used them every time that I've had to move for probably the last ten years, and I've always been very satisfied with them, and they had very specific things, like very specific questions to answer, like they had to make sure my partner, Mike Paxton and I both had not been diagnosed with COVID-19, that we had not been experiencing symptoms.

JS: Did you have to take a test?

LM: We didn't have to take the actual test. I will tell you later about how I DID have to take a test. But they did not require us to take a test before they would work with us, so they kind of had to go by word of honor with us. We were fortunate in that neither of us were sick, so we didn't have reschedule, and we certainly were not going to lie about it! But, they did require us to wear masks the entire time the movers were there. The movers were also supposed to wear masks, but the day they were moving us was probably the hottest day on record. It was also extremely humid. And with them having to move so much furniture, they just flat out could not have a mask on, without probably soaking it in sweat, and then not being able to breathe, so I had to remain as distant from them as possible because of that.

JS: Were there any other issues with moving that related to the pandemic?

LM: So, we have wonderful neighbors, the people on either side of us, the families are incredibly friendly, and they've been very welcoming to us, but we have not been able to really get to know them, because we've had to be so careful about distancing. One of our next-door-neighbor's daughter was having a birthday, and we were invited to come over and meet everyone, but we opted to wear masks because these people are in their own little pod, and they're used to each other, but they were not used to our germs, and we weren't used to their germs, so we wanted to try to be as respectful as possible, as far as not spreading anything. We opted to wear masks over to the party, but it was nice to be invited. And the party was outside - everybody had to be outside, there was NO indoor activity at all.

JS: When you first heard about COVID-19, what were your thoughts, and has that changed since then?

LM: Well, my first thoughts about COVID-19, when I first heard about it, it was still only over in the Wuhan area of China. And I know there were some health experts saying, "Hey, if this makes it here, this is going to be pretty rough." But I also in recent years remember, you know, the Ebola virus, and the Zika virus, and so I thought, "Ok, I hope that maybe this can be controlled, kind of the way"... I know a lot of people have suffered from Ebola and Zika, so I'm not trying to downplay their suffering...but it didn't really make it that far into the U.S., and it wasn't nearly the pandemic that we had worried about. So I was kind of hoping that that would be the case with this, but clearly it has not. It has taken over, so my thoughts really have changed in that I have really been wanting to read about the 1918 flu epidemic. That's something that's also been really on my mind lately, just how people survived then, learning about the history and people's thoughts at that time. I mean there were people back then, you know, who were really reticent to wear masks, just like we have today, so things really haven't changed that much in regards to that. But just hearing about all the volunteers and people who barely even knew how to drive volunteering to be ambulance drivers because they had to do something, and that was the one thing that they could do, so they're like "Yeah, I'll do it! I'll do it! I'll be an ambulance driver and I will take people anywhere they need to go. I'll go into whatever area is needed. I don't care about my health that much. I want to make sure these people get to the care that they need." That was really inspiring to me, going back to the past to see where we have been, and then I want to know what happened once things were under control, like where did we go? And really, the 1918 epidemic, it didn't end until about 1920, and then 1920 was just this giant free-for-all! Flappers!

JS: I wonder if that's why the 20s were the "gay 20's"?

LM: I don't know! Yeah, I've wondered, but I've not found...

JS: The "roaring 20's," not the "gay 20's."

LM: I haven't found anyone who has made that connection, but that doesn't mean it's not out there.

JS: That would definitely make sense.

LM: Yeah!

JS: Because if it was anything like today, once this is over, people are gonna...

LM: Yeah, we're going to want to celebrate!

JS: So, what issues most concerned you about the pandemic?

LM: The issues that have most concerned me are the fact that there are people who refuse to wear masks, and also people are so impatient and eager to get everything back to way it was before the pandemic, that we're going too fast, and now more and more people are getting sick. And it seems like areas have the virus under control, and now all of the sudden, we're seeing more outbreaks. Even outside of the country, we are seeing outbreaks in places that they thought they had it under control, because apparently they reopened too soon. And that worries me. If it's going to be a long time before we can scientifically get to herd immunity, and I know a lot of people are very concerned about the vaccines because they don't know what the side effects are, but I still think it's something we need to push. I have two very young nephews, and the idea of one of them getting so sick with this...I know they say that children can bounce back very easily from it...they don't all bounce back. And the idea that something could seriously happen to one of them, and they could have lifelong side effects, even if they survive it, they could have permanently damaged lungs from it. That really, really concerns me.

JS: Are they school-age yet?

LM: One of them is.

JS: Is he going to be going back to school?

LM: I think so. His doctor did clear him, because he, much like his auntie here in this interview, he suffers terribly from allergies. And his doctor wanted to examine him, test him, and whatnot, to see if she thought his immunity could handle him going back to school. So far the answer is yes, but my sister is kind of like, "Ok, but if there is anything, I'm pulling him out and he's doing e-learning."

JS: Has the pandemic affected your job?

LM: In a sense, yes. I was very fortunate to work for the Plainfield-Guilford Township library, and our director, Montie Manning, was wonderful about making sure that everyone was still on the payroll, and that we could be safely in our homes and not have to worry about our employment. But there were still things that I had to do, if at all possible, from home. There were plenty of webinars that I needed to be involved in so that I would know what was happening and what to expect. So, I did have to learn how to work from home. And I really kind of struggled with it for the first week or so. And, then finally... I was still living in the apartment, we hadn't moved into the house yet...I took the walk-in closet I had and turned it into an office. I got a little folding table, and I didn't even have an office chair, just a footstool that I sat on. And I had my work laptop; and I decided to make it pretty, I had a little vase of flowers, and a little picture of my nephew from the day he was born, and a coaster where I could have my mug of coffee. And I did all my webinars, all the Zoom chats; I run a program called "Books on Tap,"

and we would normally meet at Bru Burger in Plainfield to discuss books, and we couldn't do that. So we did it over Zoom and I had to run that out of my closet, which the people who attended were highly amused by, the fact that they could see hangers right by my side! So, I did have to learn that, and also one thing that I noticed was that I really like routine. And prior to the pandemic, I had set up a routine that I was very comfortable and satisfied with...you know, getting up and going to work; afterwards I went to a gym and took some classes there; then I would come home and shower and I would have dinner, and then I would either watch some TV or read or play a game or something, but I had my routine and I really, really liked it. And this WIPED it out completely, so I had to create a fourteen-point to-do list, just to get through the day - I need my routine! One of things I had to do was, you know, "get up." And "take a shower" and I had something like where it's like that I have to mark that "I ate breakfast, and lunch and dinner, and that I read for an hour, and that I worked out for an hour." And I had all these daily tasks for my job like "make sure you check your email..." I purchase fiction for the library, and every day I had to make sure I checked our vendor's website to see if they'd sent me any collection lists to look through, or maybe I had to send something off to be ordered, something like that. So, the way I worked was affected, my actual job status was not. So, I was very fortunate for that, but working from home was not nearly the picnic I thought it would be for me. I know a lot of people actually really ended up enjoying it.

JS: What was the struggle...you said you'd struggled the first week. Was it distraction, or...?

LM: Well, there was some distraction. I was very anxious; I do suffer from anxiety, so there was that going on. The total lack of structure. I catalog books here at the library, so half of my job has to be done in the building - half of it was gone! So, I felt a little directionless; I struggled to figure out what my purpose was.

JS: That was a hard time because there was really nothing...nobody really knew what was going to happen, so it was very directionless and anxiety-inducing. I'm not a super-anxious person, myself, but I was anxious.

LM: And our director did such a great job checking in with all of us, being very hands-on and making sure we were okay; then also suggesting to all of us (managers) that we talk to all of our employees and check in with them to make sure they're okay. I'm not a huge phone talker unless I'm talking with my mom, so I communicated via text with the one person I directly supervised, which I think she appreciated because that meant that she could get back to me when she was available, and not having to interrupt something. I know she spent a lot of time hiking.

JS: What about how you communicate with your friends and family? You said you've got some little nephews. How were you able to see them?

LM: That's a very interesting question. I had a nephew that was born on March 10, and then we shut everything down on March 13.

JS: Was he still in the hospital when everything shut down?

LM: He was in the hospital for quite a while. They'd already shut down the hospitals long before that; none of us could go see him in the hospital; he was early and his lungs hadn't fully

developed yet, so they put him in the NICU, and we couldn't go see him then, and that was hugely scary. I kept thinking, "what if we lose him?" I kept getting told, "It's okay, because this happens often, he's in the best NICU in Central Indiana, he's got great care, he's going to be fine." And then the NICU had a camera set up so we could see him. And the only times we didn't get to see him were when he had to have a diaper change or be fed.

JS: What hospital was that?

LM: Community North, I believe. So, being able to see him on camera was really nice, but it was months before I got to see him in person, and then even longer than that before I was able to hold him...I think he was three months before I held him for the first time. Which is rough! I understood everything, and it was one of those things that it's like if it means that he's going to be healthier, I would totally sacrifice for that, but it was still rough, because I see this tiny, little human who I love so much, and I just want to hold and snuggle him, and I couldn't.

JS: How old is he now?

LM: He's four months old, and doing great. He's a very happy, little guy. He's smiley and laughs a lot, and he's a very big eater.

JS: What have been the biggest challenges that you've faced?

LM: Well, the biggest challenges that I really faced was the fact that I couldn't actually see him. My sister lives with my aunt, she and both her boys, and they all live next door to my parents. So, they were always together. I live in Plainfield, they don't. So, I didn't really get to see them that often, and when this first started my partner and I were both terrified of getting near people for fear of any exposure. Probably sometime near the end of April or the beginning of May, my sister organized what she called a social-distancing visit in her driveway. And I wasn't sure what I was going into, but it's like, I really do want to see my family. And what she had done was, she had staked out quadrants on her driveway for people to sit in, and you weren't allowed to cross each other's quadrants.

JS: How did it go?

LM: Really well! Yeah, and I wore a mask, but I don't think anyone else did, but again they all basically lived in the same house.

JS: You're pretty militant about wearing a mask, aren't you?

LM: For the most part, yeah.

JS: It's because of your own underlying health issues, right?

LM: Yeah, as I mentioned earlier, I really suffer from allergies, so bad that I was actually tested for COVID-19 myself, just to make sure that that wasn't what it was. I had tons and tons of sinus drainage, which was causing me to have horrible coughing fits, I would wheeze when I breathed, I couldn't sleep lying down - I had to sleep sitting up - and I would only get maybe three hours of sleep at night because of it. I was like, "This is wrong." So, they set me up with a

COVID-19 test, and they did both a throat swab and a nasal swab, and I was very, very nervous about how it was going to be. The throat swab made me gag, and I apologized to the guy doing it, and he was like, "Oh, honey, I've seen a lot worse!" And then they did the nasal swab, and I'm gripping the steering wheel as they're doing it. It stung! I figured it would be a sharp, stabbing pain, but it was actually a sting...

JS: And it wouldn't stop!

LM: Yes! And he's even like, "I'm going to have to do this for about 10 seconds"! Like he warned me, it wasn't going to be short! It came back negative, and I was like, "Okay, I'm still miserable." So I had to go to the doctor, and they got me working on an allergy regimen, but my lungs already are kind of damaged from the allergies - I now have allergy induced asthma - and so, I do have to be extra careful. Because even though it might not be an autoimmune disorder or disease, I do have damaged lungs right now. And so, I can't afford to get sick from it. No one can afford to get sick, but I'm in the category of those who really need to be careful.

JS: Everybody wants to know...what did you, your family or friends do while you were locked down?

LM: So, I have a group of friends, there are nine of us, and we would try to do a Zoom meeting once a week just to check in on everybody. One of the women in my group of friends is a nurse, so we were actually really concerned about her. We found out just recently that one of my friends was also pregnant throughout this pandemic, but baby seems to be very healthy, there don't seem to be any issues, so that's good. But, we tried to stay as in-contact as possible, and you know, seeing a person face-to-face is different, but seeing a face and being able to talk - you know, there were no topics that were off-limits, and we could just unleash how we were feeling even if it devolved into all of us crying. It's like we need this emotional release and this support. So, we did that. I keep referring to my partner, Mike - we live together. We have separate bedrooms, which was a huge lifesaver during this, because we were both working from home, and we couldn't really leave your house unless you were going to go out for some exercise. And I think, just to get out of the apartment, Mike decided to run the mini-marathon this year. So, there were many times when Mike would go on a long run and I would have the place to myself. But for the most part, we were just in there together, and having our own separate spaces really helped us. Mike got involved in a virtual racing game. I played the *Sims* (video game) non-stop. I love that game! It allowed me to be in a world where there was no pandemic! So we did a lot of that. I tried to keep up with the exercising. The gym that I went to closed, there were no classes, so I didn't have that. I need fitness classes, really, to just kind of keep me going, keep me motivated. I'm just like "Oh, I'll do it later." But if I have an actual class to go to, it's much easier for me. So, I tried to stay on top of the working out. Didn't really work out so well.

JS: I've heard that a lot.

LM: Plus, also, as my doctor pointed out, (I was) trying to exercise on lungs that weren't operating at full capacity, and I use that as the excuse. I also watched a lot of TV shows over and over again. I re-watched three favorite shows: *The Golden Girls*, *Parks and Rec*, and *Community*, and I just kept watching them over and over. I found out that people with anxiety tend to do that during times of high stress because it's comforting. You know what's going to

happen. So, I really fell deep into that. I think I re-watched *Community* probably seven or eight times.

JS: The whole series?

LM: The whole series! I was way down the anxiety hole at that point.

JS: Well, you've got to do what you've got to do! Ok, so there's been a lot of controversy about how the community is going to address this pandemic. How do you think Plainfield has done, in general?

LM: In general, I think the community itself has responded pretty well. We've had quite a few people that have told us that they miss the library being open, and then once we opened for curbside service, they would thank us so much for even just doing that. And there were a lot of people who wanted to come into the building, and they were very sad that they couldn't. Sometimes people would get very angry, and we were at that point like, "Ok, we understand you want to go into the building, and you can't right now; however, we're more than happy to go in and get whatever you want and bring it out to you. For the most part, that would placate a lot of people. In fact, there was one woman who wanted to come in and browse, and we told her what the situation was, and she was really disappointed. I said, "I will make any book recommendations that you want, and I'll go in and get that stuff for you." She ended up liking what I had suggested so much that she would come back and ask for me to help her, and so I kind of made a new friend with that. We had some people that were just belligerent and were calling for our director to be fired because he wouldn't allow people into the building. It was up there on my list of the most ridiculous things that happened. I, personally, though, really appreciated the community stepping up with our Little Free Pantries. This town has a lot of restaurants and service-based jobs, and a lot of people lost their jobs or were furloughed, and it was difficult for them to feed themselves or their families, and so those who had just a little extra really stepped up their game and made sure that there was food for people. And I had to refill the pantries quite often because there was definitely a need, but then there were other times when I would come in thinking the pantry was really low, and I'd come back and it was just fully stocked because other people in the community had stepped up and said, "Oh, this is empty! Here, let me shove all this food in here for people!" And we're still getting a lot of food!

JS: You know, we have the issue of "do you wear a mask" or "do you not wear a mask," and I know it's a crazy issue. How do you think Plainfield is doing in that sense?

LM: I think, for the most part, the community has responded well. We've had a few incidences with some people being jerks, I'll be honest, they were being jerks about it. There is, unfortunately, a vast conspiracy theory going on right now about how the virus is a hoax, and you don't need to wear a mask, and it's government controlled. I clearly don't agree with that. If I can be frank, I think it's a very dangerous and stupid conspiracy theory. The people that are being so angry about it, I don't understand them, and I find them to be very irresponsible and very selfish.

JS: Yeah. And isn't that something? They don't feel like they're being selfish.

LM: No, they feel like they're standing up for their freedom. But, you know, we are a country

that was raised on the American individual and "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" and so it is in our culture to naturally be defiant. And I think it's to our detriment this time.

JS: Do you know anybody who has gotten COVID?

LM: I know several people who know people who got COVID, and I personally know a few people who have, but it's fortunately been very small, and they have been able to come back from it. But I do know people who know people who have died from it. One person I know, she got it, and then like a month later, her husband got it. It took that long for it to...yeah...I'm not sure what exactly happened.

JS: I wonder if he got it from her or from somewhere else?

LM: I don't know but the interesting thing is, their symptoms were different, but it was still COVID. And she still is feeling the effects, like she has very little energy, and she says she's really dealing with headaches a lot.

JS: What about him?

LM: He's still fighting it, but is doing well. His is a lot of the cough and breathing issues. They had to be on two different treatments, because they had to treat the symptoms.

JS: They say, "oh, it's just the flu," and it's clearly not. More and more you hear it's just simply not just like the flu. It's really damaging.

LM: And it damages the lungs. That's the scariest part.

JS: Long term damage.

LM: Yeah.

JS: There's also been a lot of talk about mental health, you know, since everyone's been locked down. And physical health, I suppose, since they're not getting as much exercise. Do you know any stories of people who have been affected mentally or physically?

LM: Well, Mike and I both have been very...well, I was very anxious. And like I was telling you before about re-watching everything over and over again. Mike's issue was they felt like they'd gotten into a rut, and were trying to break out of it, and that rut was just making them kind of depressed, very anxious, feeling like they weren't contributing anything, that they weren't doing a good job. So, the two of us really both were fighting some demons, in that sense.

JS: Were you able to get comfort from each other, or help each other?

LM: Yes. Absolutely. Fortunately, they hit at different times, so one of us was kind of struggling, and the other one would be like, "I've got you; I'm going to take you and I'm going to point you along and lift you up." We were very lucky as far as that goes.

JS: What has been your primary source of news?



LM: For international and national news, mostly CNN. And then for local news, it's been WRTV 6. Those are the two that I go to for sources. I don't actually go to Channel 6 that often, to be perfectly honest, because their information doesn't seem to change as much. It's been rather stagnant. I mean they update us as much as they can, but because they're only focusing on this area, there aren't going to be as many updates. So, I'm mostly on CNN, and I have also been really following Dr. Fauci; whatever he's saying, I'm paying close attention to.

JS: Have you changed any of your news sources - added any?

LM: Well, I don't call it a news source, but it is something I've done. I've gotten very much AWAY from Facebook. It's not a news source. But you kept seeing "news" popping up, and I'm like "No." So, I guess I've kind of eliminated a non-news source.

JS: If only everybody would do that!

LM: Right?

JS: Do you think there are issues that the media is not covering that need to be covered?

LM: That's kind of a tough question, because I feel like the media is covering a lot. But I really wish that they would focus a little bit more on those who have beaten COVID and where they are today, like what have been their long-term effects? Because, on occasion, if there's someone who's very prominent who's had it and beaten it, you'll see what's going on with them, but we don't really hear a lot of other stories. And I know there's so much going on right now. This year is INSANE. But, I would like to see more of that. I want to hear more from the survivors and how they're doing, and that way people, maybe they'll understand, that, "Hey, you know what, you might actually get this, and it's not just the flu, and you're going to be fine in 7-10 days. This could affect you long, long term." So I feel like if they would focus more on the survivors and their health issues, then maybe people would be more willing to wear the mask.

JS: Do you have any thoughts about how the local, state or federal leaders are responding to the crisis?

LM: I feel like it's been too slow. I feel like the response has been way too slow. There should have been a mask mandate a long time ago. As soon as we discovered that wearing a mask is the best way to prevent it, we should have been like, "everybody needs to wear a mask." And we could have maybe gotten this under control at that point. I'm not going to really say anything about the closing of borders and whatnot, because I know there were travel bans that were eventually put into place. And I know that people say it took too long, but I'm thinking, that's something you can't really guarantee, because even if you put a travel ban in one place, you have people from that area going somewhere else and then possibly coming here, or someone visited that area and then they went back to their home, then ended up visiting the U.S. I feel like travel bans, it's so difficult to criticize; so difficult to predict.

JS: Borders are so porous.

LM: Exactly. We are such a connected world, now. That's something that I really don't feel like

is a proper criticism. So, my biggest thing is just the wearing of the mask. I also am very angry over the fact that our pandemic supplies were depleted and never replenished. And I wish that the administration previous to the one we have, I do wish they had been able to replenish. But at the same time, there was money worked into that administration's budget, and Congress kind of were like, "Nope, we don't need that." And then this current administration comes in and doesn't even bother with it. So, that administration had been in power for three years at that point. They had plenty of time to replenish all of those supplies and they didn't. That makes me angry. I also feel like the organization to fight the virus has not been organized at all. I can tell you what I personally would have done, but I don't know how difficult that actually is. But all these people who had to lose their jobs because their organization shut down, or their company had to close and furlough them, I feel like there could have been a lot of opportunity there to create jobs to make all of the protective equipment, all of the ventilators; there would have been factory jobs, like Rosie the Riveter, and just making hospital equipment or masks and things like that. I think that was a huge missed opportunity to give people pay, give them jobs, while their other job either had disappeared, or they were laid off at the time and not getting paid. It would have been a great way to keep people from having to be on unemployment until their job was available again. But, I don't know what kind of channels, politically, one would have to go through, but I do think it was a missed opportunity, because we are so low on everything. And the normal citizens had to step up and make masks for the public. The library purchased hundreds of dollar's worth of masks for the staff that a woman in Ohio made, because she thought that there weren't enough to go around to be available to people.

JS: I guess we've seen a lot of good things happen; you know, people showing their best sides. So, final question. Knowing what you know now, what do you think individuals, communities or governments should keep in mind for the future?

LM: That this can happen again. That is the big thing. This can happen again. It may be 100 years from now. I mean, we had the 1918 epidemic, one hundred years later, we're dealing with another one. This can very easily happen again, and we cannot ignore the signs. We can't not have disaster relief supplies.

JS: We need a plan that is actually used!

LM: Yes.

JS: Well, is there anything else you want to make note of before we end? Future researchers in a hundred years might want to know?

LM: I do think that something that I really hope does happen is that we remember that washing our hands is incredibly important. I can remember growing up hearing about people in Japan, whenever they would use a pay phone, they would spray it down with an antibacterial spray first before using it. And at the time I was like, "Why would you do that?" And then I was like, "Oh my gosh! Pay phones are dirty! Of course you would do that!" If this is for someone listening a hundred years from now, you probably don't know what a pay phone is, so I'm very sorry if I've confused you. But, just the fact that we for so long didn't really think about germs and keeping ourselves clean, as long as we couldn't see dirt it was fine. No, actually, you need to be careful. Spreading germs is so easy and we need to do better. And I sincerely hope that from this we also learn that we are all in this together, even if you don't think you are. We really are.

JS: Right. We are really one organism. And this really does make it hit home. Well, thank you, Lauren! That was an amazing story, and I'm so glad that you participated!

LM: I'm so glad you did this!

JS: Thank you very much.

LM: You're welcome!