

PGTPL COVID-19 Pandemic Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Terra Summers

Interviewer: Jeannine Spurgin

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Abstract: Terra Summers is a 28 year-old Plainfield High School graduate and a resident of Danville, Indiana. She works at the Indianapolis Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium. She tells us about her struggles with obtaining housing during the pandemic, as well as unemployment issues. She has a friend who was married during the pandemic and tells us about how the friend navigated those problems. She also elaborates on how she dealt with depression and anxiety during this time.

JS: This is Jeannine Spurgin. Today is October 8, 2020, and I'm with Terra Summers. She is a former Plainfield resident, she graduated from Plainfield High School, and she's now a resident in Danville. She also works in Indianapolis, and she's got lots of information and stories to talk about the pandemic, being that she is 28, and she is of the "super-spreader" cohort. Also, she had some difficult issues with her employment, and as well, she was looking for housing and had some significant struggles there. So, we're going to talk to her about all of that. Hello, Terra! Let's just dive in. When you first heard about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

TS: When I first heard about it, I didn't think it was as bad as it truly is, so it didn't really scare me at first. And then, once I did hear how bad it was, I was extremely nervous for my job.

JS: What was your job?

TS: I am a bar supervisor at Lucas Oil Stadium and the Convention Center. What I do is solely based off of events with thousands of people.

JS: I'd also mentioned your housing. What was your housing situation as the pandemic started?

TS: I was a month away from my lease being up for my apartment. I had a roommate at the time, and I had planned on moving into a house in Plainfield on my own.

JS: The pandemic started, and everything just kind of went crazy.

TS: Yes.

JS: Ok. First of all, did you have any other issues?

TS: No, it was strictly the job and housing.

JS: So, we'll talk about your job. What happened when the pandemic came down and everything shut down? What did they tell you?

TS: So, they immediately shut us down. We were not allowed back in the building, and I was told that I could go on unemployment.

JS: And, how did unemployment go?

TS: Unemployment worked out well until there towards the end, once they took the extra \$600 away. It was a little scary, because I wasn't sure what I was going to do because the buildings were still not open. So, I went out and actually got another part-time job, was not much of a fan of it, but shortly after that, the buildings opened back up. But that was seven months after the pandemic had originally started.

JS: Ok, so you were officially on unemployment, then, for seven months? More broadly, do you have friends or other people that had serious economic issues when everything shut down?

TS: I did. I actually had a best friend that was getting married, she was planning a wedding.

JS: Oh, that's right! A wedding during the pandemic!

TS: Yes, she had been planning for about two years, and it was at a venue. And we had actually just went and looked at the venue, and basically set everything in stone for the day of, right before the pandemic happened. So, she kind of had to go month to month, not knowing if the venue was going to open back up. About a month before her wedding in June, she had to make the decision that either she postpones it or she has it in her backyard. So, she decided to have it in her backyard, but with that being said, she had to do her whole wedding in 30 days.

JS: Did she do it on the same date that she had planned?

TS: She did.

JS: How was that, expense-wise, for her to deal with?

TS: Unfortunately, the venue at that time, they were allowing weddings, but they were only allowing a certain occupancy, which was extremely low. I think at that point, it was only maybe like 50 people. And so, between her bridal party and her side of the family, and her husband and his side of the family, that would have been over 50 people, easily. So, she had decided, obviously, to have it in her backyard. But the venue did not give her a full refund; actually, I'm not sure if they gave her any of her money back. So, it was a lot of money out of their pocket, considering that they, again, had to flip it to their backyard, so they had to get tents, a dance floor, chairs, all of that. And that wasn't including decorations, because the venue was going to allow them to use theirs. So, she had to go out and buy her own.

JS: Did she consider postponing it, or was that not even an option?

TS: It was not an option. At that time, they had been engaged for over two years, and she had an original day, and they moved it, and then she was set on that, and she was just afraid to get

married. They even thought about going to the courthouse, but at that time, they couldn't even go and do it there.

JS: Did they require masks at her wedding? How did you guys do the whole social distancing?

TS: They did not require a mask. If you wanted to, you could, but that was not something they required. Since they were outdoors, they didn't really worry about it, and they have a lot of land, so stuff was pretty spread out, for the most part.

JS: Do you know if any infections happened after that? If anyone got sick?

TS: I do not believe so.

JS: In relation to your job, you're back at work, now?

TS: Yes.

JS: How have things changed? Has anything changed?

TS: Yes, actually, quite a bit has changed. The stadium is the only thing that's open right now. Indianapolis Convention Center (ICC) is not scheduled to open, technically, until 2021. There is stuff scheduled for January, possibly for November. We just had an event scheduled, and it's still on the books; hopefully, we'll keep that. But as far as the stadium goes, they have limited the amount of occupancy. I think right now, we're at 25%. Not every suite is open. There are 61 suites open right now, I believe. Everyone has to wear a mask, including workers. Also, for workers, they have not brought many of us back, it's mainly the people in the main office during the week. And then, on game days, they'll bring in the bare minimum of what they need as far as concessions and suite attendants.

JS: Do you know about what those people that haven't been able to come back are doing?

TS: I do not. All I know is that they are still on furlough. I don't know if any of them had went and got other jobs. I don't really talk to a lot of them, because there are so many of them.

JS: How many people are there that you work with?

TS: Between ICC and the stadium, over a hundred, easily, if you add in all the banquet, and people who are over across the street. We use the same people, but depending how big the event, there is more.

JS: Did you have to take a pay cut or anything?

TS: I did not.

JS: Have they said anything about being worried about maybe being laid off in the future?

TS: No, my boss, actually, when I came back, she's been awesome. The work has cut back, but on our end of it, since there was really nobody in the buildings for seven months, there's a

lot of cleaning and updating that needs to be done. So, on off-weeks, if we don't have a game at home, then we clean a lot. And we've had to get rid of a lot of product that sat over time. I actually was just at the convention center, and probably threw away thousands of dollars worth of beer that was expired because it sat there for months.

JS: Let's go into your house, your family, and that kind of thing. I like to ask everybody, what did you do for recreation during the lockdown.

TS: Well, I was locked in my house for the first three months, maybe. Unfortunately, I watched a lot of TV, and spent some time with my roommate before we split ways. And then I eventually actually got into fitness. The gyms still weren't open, but I would run a lot outside, download apps on my phone, do different workouts inside.

JS: I wonder how many other people got fit?

TS: I don't know. Because I've heard more about how a lot of people were drinking and eating! And don't get me wrong, I did a lot of that too! But, it came to a point where I was like, "Ok, enough is enough. I need to do something else." So, I chose the fitness side of it.

JS: There was an interview with P!nk, you know, and she said, "I don't know about you guys, but I've been making a sport of drinking!" (laughter) Has the outbreak affected how you associate and communicate with friends and family.

TS: No. I would say that it did a little at first, only because I wasn't going and hanging out with my friends as much, but like I said, probably about three months into it, I honestly was over it, and needed to see people. I can't stay inside. I'm not a homebody, it's not my thing; I'm always on the go. So, I eventually started to branch out and I would hang out with my friends.

JS: Do you think that might explain the super-spreader cohort?

TS: I guess! I mean, they blame us for that, so that's probably why! (laughter)

JS: Bars aren't open at all, are they?

TS: Around here, they are.

JS: Have you been out to any?

TS: I have, in the last couple months. I don't even think that around here, Danville, Avon and Plainfield areas, the occupancy, I don't think is a thing. I know that downtown, bars were not open. Mass. Ave. was open, but I believe it was just restaurants, and I know their occupancy was down. They might now be at full occupancy, but I think even maybe two or three weeks ago, like Kilroy's and that main strip, I don't think they're open, yet.

JS: I heard that Dick's Last Resort closed for good. (It didn't)

TS: It wouldn't surprise me because there are several places downtown that are now shut down or they're a new bar or restaurant from what was there before COVID.

JS: What have been the biggest challenges that you've faced during this outbreak? I think that would be a good segue into your housing challenge.

TS: That was awful.

JS: Ok, let's start from the beginning. The pandemic came down and you were just about to move out?

TS: Yes. So, I was a month away from my lease being up, and I was actually about ready to sign papers on renting a house. And I had gotten the call that we were shut down, so I immediately backed out of it, because I didn't know what was going to happen with unemployment. I wasn't aware that we were going to get that extra \$600. So, I backed out of that, and I ended up, once my apartment lease was up, I moved in with my best friend, who lived out in Martinsville. I went out there, and the extra \$600 kicked in, so I realized I would still be okay on my own. So I started continuously looking again for housing in Plainfield. I found several houses for rent, and kept getting denied because nobody would accept unemployment. So, about the sixth time I got denied, I eventually decided that was it, and I came back to my apartment complex and they let me back in. They did take unemployment, and I moved in about two or three weeks after that.

JS: Have you decided to wait until your lease is up to look for a house again?

TS: Yes, I signed a one-year lease, and I actually really like it! I think with as much as I do work once things start to kick back in, it's kind of nice having to not deal with maintenance. So, I really don't know what's going to happen once my lease is up, because I was so gung-ho on having a house in Plainfield. But I may stay one more year. But maybe not, because my whole goal in going back to Plainfield was honestly to get closer to work, because I'm kind of far from work. But we'll see. This isn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. And I think I'm just honestly glad it worked out because after getting denied six times - it was just awful! I understand on the renter's side of it because they didn't know me from Adam. And at that time, I could have moved and said, "Oh, I can't pay my rent right now," and they can't kick me out. So, I see their side of it, but it was just all so awful for me because I wasn't going to not pay my bills, and I just continuously kept getting denied.

JS: At least it worked out. And you saved some money in the process, probably, right?

TS: Actually a lot! It's kind of nice!

JS: Self isolation and flattening the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. How have you responded to these requests? That's so long ago. Nobody talks about flattening the curve anymore.

TS: No, they don't. You mean, just being in your house and self-isolating? Well, I don't do well with it. (laughter) And I didn't do well with it! I did, you know, like I said, the first couple of months, I drank a lot. I mean, that was my way of coping with self-isolation! Because I have to be around people. I like to be around people, I'm a social butterfly. And, I love my job, and I love my work, so it was extremely hard.

JS: Did you have to deal with any issues of depression or anxiety?

TS: I did. I've always struggled with anxiety and depression, so once my job shut down, and then I had to move in with my best friend, who I love and I was very grateful for that, I don't want to take that away, because a lot of people don't have that, and it was nice to be able to have somewhere to go. But it was hard for me, because for probably four or five years now, I've been waiting on that day to be able to go out on my own. And it was a major, major letdown. In a way, I blamed myself, but at the end of the day, it wasn't my fault. But it was hard for me to see that because I didn't have my job. And that is one thing that I take a lot of pride in. So, I didn't really feel like myself for months.

JS: So, how did you deal with depression and anxiety?

TS: I became a gym rat. Going to the gym helped so much. And putting myself with friends and family. I have great friends that were very understanding and very positive about everything, and were there to help me, and it did. It helped quite a bit.

JS: Do you know anybody who has gotten sick?

TS: I do. A couple of my very close friends have gotten it, and my mom and grandma actually got it.

JS: Really? Your grandmother got it? How did it go?

TS: She was very sick, she was in the hospital for just a couple days. And then she ended up coming home. She has emphysema, so she's on oxygen. My grandma lives with my mother, so I believe it was whomever got it, spread it. My mom was very sick for about a month.

JS: What were her symptoms?

TS: Sore throat. I think it was mainly her throat. Every time I would talk to her on the phone, it almost sounded like she had bronchitis. Loss of voice, I think she had temperatures, too. And then my grandma, I think it was the same thing - mainly her throat and she was coughing constantly.

JS: That is just wild. Honestly, it's like a crap shoot, this thing. You can get it, and you might get sick, or you might not get sick. You might get it, you might not, you might die, you might not.

TS: On the other side of it, I've had several people who have gotten it and had no symptoms. But they tested positive. Or, they tested positive, and the only thing that happened is they lost their sense of taste or their sense of smell. But, that could be a cold, too, you know! That's what's so crazy about it!

JS: I know that twice, I've gotten tested, and each time, you know, you go into this frenzy of, "Oh, my gosh! What do I do? Do I quarantine? Do I go to work? Do I tell anybody? I don't know what to do!" Nobody ever knows what to do!

TS: Right.

JS: What have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

TS: Family and friends. I don't watch the news on TV, so it's just been word of mouth.

JS: Really? You don't watch ANY news?

TS: I do not. I don't have cable, and all I have is Hulu and Netflix.

JS: That must be blissful!

TS: Yeah, it's depressing to me. Especially in times like this, I feel like I should know things, but I know I'm going to find them out by word of mouth, I mean everybody's talking about it - during a pandemic, that's all they talk about. So, I'm going through it and I don't need to watch the depressingness. I've said this through it all. I don't want to say it's not serious, because I know that it is serious and people have died from it, and I don't want to take that away from it. But also, there's a side to me that I question it. Have we blown it up too much? But again, I know that people have died from it, young and old, and that's awful. And, I'm on Facebook and social media, so I see it on there, too.

JS: Has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends and community?

TS: It has. It's kind of one of those things where you don't realize what you have until you've lost it.

JS: I've heard that.

TS: So, it's made me more grateful for the things that I do have. I mean, now that I'm back at work, I pray every day that we don't get shut down again. Because you don't know from day to day. We are one of six stadiums that are open right now, so it does make me nervous, especially going into flu season, that having the amount of people in the building that we do, that they could just turn around and shut us down again. It's scary. But, it has made me more blessed.

JS: Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities or governments should keep in mind for the future? What's your big takeaway from this?

TS: How much everything has changed. Like everything is so much different now, as far as just...if you're just at a store, just how everybody has masks on, or you have to stand so far behind somebody. Wearing a mask all the time, I constantly just want to take it down. I mean, I have the worst time. And especially, when I can't hear someone, it's kind of funny, because if somebody is talking to me and I can't hear them, I'll take my mask down like that's going to do anything for me. It's just hard to get used to. And as far as communication, it kind of puts a muffle on you.

JS: Well, is there anything else you wanted to...maybe a little nugget of wisdom to give the future generations?

TS: Try and stay as positive through what craziness this life brings you, because that's honestly all you can do. That's something that I've had to realize. Because it was very hard to stay positive during all this, especially when you're truly affected by it. You know, I look at it as, I'm a single person, so I'm just taking care of myself. I can't even imagine what the people who have kids and families were doing during this time, financially, and not working. So, just stay as positive as you can, have a good outlook on life, and believe that eventually it will end and the world will go back to normal.

JS: Well, thank you, Terra, very much for participating!