

Cassie Wilson

Dec. 2020 • 19:23

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

pandemic, disabled, feel, home, precaution, care, accessibility, personal care attendants, people, restrictions, affects, work, concerts, ableism, share, live, christmas, frustrating, oregon, mom

SPEAKERS

Cassie Wilson, Max Soh, Priya Ray

Priya Ray 00:00

Oh, it is December of 2020. Max Soh is going to be talking to Cassie Wilson. For the COVID disability archive. We are recording these oral histories as a way to document the lived experiences of disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent individuals during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Max Soh 00:27

Cool. Well, thank you so much for speaking with us. And I was wondering if you could start by just sharing your name age pronouns. And currently where you live?

Cassie Wilson 00:41

Yeah, I'm Cassie Wilson. I'm 22 years old, I use she her pronouns. And I live in Boring Oregon.

Max Soh 00:51

Cool. So we're going to see if you can share how you identify whether it's disabled, chronically ill, neurodivergent, etc, along with any other identifiers you would like to share?

Cassie Wilson 01:04

Yeah, I identify as disabled, I have a form of dwarfism. And I'm an ambulatory wheelchair user.

Max Soh 01:16

Great. So, um, with the pandemic, I was wondering if you could share, kind of, if you remember when you first heard about the pandemic, whether specifically where you were or was one of the first conversations you had about the pandemic?

Cassie Wilson 01:36

Yeah, I think when it was first starting to unravel, I was realizing, Oh, this is like a very big thing. Because pre COVID I went to a lot of concerts, and so I was watching the gathering capacities, dropped from like, you know, 1000 to 500 to 250 to 100, and just kept dropping. And so I think that was one of the first moments and then the, like, closeness Oh, good now.

Max Soh 02:14

Yeah. Yeah, I think you were at you were saying about the used to go to concerts, and you saw the the numbers drop.

Cassie Wilson 02:26

Yeah. And then. And then it really started to feel close to home when my friend was telling me that him and his wife had to quarantine because she worked at the hospital where the first case in Oregon was. So that's when I felt really close to home. But it was kind of weird, because at that time, back in February, my mom had broken her leg. And so we were pretty much already at home. And so not a lot changed for us at first, but, um, but yeah, that's yeah, that's kind of the first thing is we're just Yeah, seeing concerts get canceled, and then seeing friends have to start quarantining right at the beginning.

Max Soh 03:11

How has your experience with the pandemic changed over the past year? And specifically, what is your experience as a disabled person? Been throughout throughout the pandemic?

Cassie Wilson 03:31

Yeah, I mean, I think at first it was a lot of just survival focus. We were really focused on like, making sure we had access to hand sanitizer and making sure we have access to food because so many people were, you know, doing these huge grocery shopping trips, and, you know, it was harder to find food and. And then like, I feel like kind of my second wave of the experience with it was like, I drive my mom to all of her doctor's appointments, and at a lot of them, like, I'm not allowed in, and I only have my permit, so like, having to sit in the car in the middle of summer was pretty terrible. And now I'm kind of experiencing that in winter. And then I feel like to like throughout the whole pandemic, like, sometimes it's just been really frustrating to see some of the accessibility that came to fruition as a result of non disabled people needing it. Whereas it's like things that disabled people have been wanting for years. While simultaneously disabled people are kind of being sacrificed, like, like, you know, like if it's, if hospitals are full and it's between like me and somebody who's in perfectly good health and fully able, like, they're gonna be the one who gets the bed. And so just like knowing that the world is still like that is like, been really frustrating and and it like kind of feels like, if you don't provide economic value to the world, then your life doesn't matter. But I mean, I also think overall, like on a day to day basis, that because I'm disabled, I feel like I'm really good at adapting to new situations, because I've had so many different situations throughout life based on my health. And so I feel like I'm really good at adapting and, and like, also, I just really appreciate that I can actually access the world because everything's online. And like, I know that it's a privilege to be able to do so. But it's just like, for once like the world is at my fingertips, like, I don't have to go anywhere. So that's definitely like, been what's getting me through the day to day but like, overall, just kind of this like big looming, feeling good, like, people are very easily willing to give up disabled lives if they have to. And I hate that.

Max Soh 06:21

Yeah, definitely. How has your relationships with people been like throughout this? Or have they changed at all? If so how? If you have had to distance yourself from people, because of safety

precautions, if any other reasons, how's this gone? The decision making processes that went through the motions that went into et cetera?

Cassie Wilson 06:58

For sure, yeah, unfortunately. Part of my family, my aunt and uncle and cousins. think that COVID is a hoax, and they don't believe in masks, and they opted out of our like virtual Christmas and stuff like that, and kind of laugh at all of us for being extremely cautious. And it's just kind of one of those things where it's like, if you don't care about us, when we're at our most vulnerable, like, when will you care? And just like how do you talk to people who like, when you don't even have like a shared set of like, facts or like basic truths or like, like, finding that common ground is really difficult, difficult. And so it's just kind of this big moment of like, I thought you cared about me, but but then your your actions show otherwise, by not believing in something that affects me, it affects my mom and affects my grandparents. And they just think that we're all the ones like falling for lies or something while we're just trying to keep each other safe. So

Max Soh 08:24

that the You said they they rejected your you folks will plan to have a virtual Christmas and then they

Cassie Wilson 08:32

Yeah, they said that if it wasn't in person, they didn't want it. And it's like, well, sorry, the rest of us are trying to live to see next Christmas. So

Max Soh 08:44

yeah, that's how did they end up? I would imagine they had their own thing. And then

Cassie Wilson 08:51

yeah, yeah, they gathered with my aunt's side of the family in person instead. While the rest of us had zoom Christmas, and it was wonderful.

09:02

Definitely. So you said you mentioned you're currently in Oregon? Yes. Where do you work currently in Oregon, are you and do you live with anyone if so, who and if you have any personal care assistance, to start personal care attendants, as has been affected by the pandemic

Cassie Wilson 09:26

so I live in boring Oregon. And I live with my parents, which has been pretty nice because my mom and I, we the only places we go are doctor's appointments and then my dad works but he doesn't really see anyone. The beginning of the pandemic was different though because my brother and his girlfriend were still living here from March through July. And that was really stressful because we had like a shared bathroom, shared kitchen all that and so it's like I was constantly having to disinfect after them because they were always coming and going. And then another interesting aspect, in terms of living situations during all of this is that back in September, my mom and I actually evacuated from the wildfires in the area. And so we felt safe enough fit, because we take such precaution and don't go anywhere. And that my grandparents do the same that we ended up evacuating to their house. But still,

that was such like a risk that we were taking during all of this, but and then like in terms of like, extra care, like, we don't have any, like, personal care attendants. But back at the beginning of the pandemic, when my mom's leg was broken, and my dad was at work, like I am not able enough to help take care of her too. And so we had to have like, my aunt who doesn't really believe in a pandemic, as well as my aunt who does occasionally, like take turns coming in to help throughout the day. And it was definitely a big risk. And thankfully, nothing bad came of it. But like back then it was like, so necessary just to get by. But yeah,

Max Soh 11:20

um, how long? You said you had to go to your grandparents house? How long did you folks stay there?

Cassie Wilson 11:30

Um, I think it was three or four days.

11:34

And then you folks moved back after that?

Cassie Wilson 11:40

Yeah, we yeah, we came back home once the evacuation orders were lifted.

Max Soh 11:47

Do you feel like your relationship with different social institutions such as health care, school work, government, media, etc. has changed during this time? If so, how

Cassie Wilson 12:02

I feel like maybe kind of in general, that like, it's kind of really unveiled, like, some deep rooted ableism in every institution, like, I think like, even like, health care facilities, like I know, they're obviously doing the most to protect everyone. But some of like the restrictions that have come about, like as a result, and some of these apply other places, too, like, lack of seating and lobbies, and like no access to bathrooms, or like restrictions on how many people can go to doctor's appointments, like those restrictions. Like, I feel like they mostly affect disabled people at the end of the day, and so that's like, kind of a frustrating part. And like, another frustrating thing for me throughout this year was that I was supposed to get my license right before the pandemic started. But then my test got canceled. And then, when things were a little bit better, like towards the end of summer, I think it was they were like, well, you can go take your test at like a third party, driving test company, and then just take the paperwork to the state office. But as a disabled person, I can't do that, because I can't take my test through a third party. Because I use driving modifications, and only the DMV can test me so that was just like another one of those things where I'm like, yep, like, I mean, I don't think I would do it anyway, probably at the end of the day, cuz like having somebody in my car that close to me would be really stressful, but it's just like, if I really needed to get my license like, I wouldn't have been able to and I think now they open things back up. But again, I'm not gonna I'm not gonna do it right now cuz I'm, like, very scared of the new strain of the virus but, but it was just like a really frustrating moment where I was like, Cool. So the only people who can't like take a driving test right now are people who use private modifications like how is that How is that fair? You know?

Max Soh 14:31

So, he mentioned that you know, quite a number of different challenges and barriers and come up and how x has exposed like ableism and things like that. Would you if you could name like, one or two, like hardest things that have come up, come up with Because of the pandemic, worker to say, there would be

Cassie Wilson 15:04

I think the two hardest things would be like, being reminded that accessibility really doesn't happen until April, people care. That's like, definitely a hard thing. Because it's like, disabled people are constantly fighting for it and nobody cares. But then when the rest of the population needs something like work from home, it happens overnight. And then the other thing, for me that's been really hard is not feeling comfortable asking my friends who care about disabled people who care about me, why they're not quarantining as much as they can, and taking as many precautions as they can, because it feels like a direct like, what like, it feels like a direct way of showing with your actions that you don't really care if you're, you know, hanging out with people and doing things beyond what's necessary still even. I mean, I guess at the end of the day, though, the state restrictions allow that because they allow small gatherings but but I guess like, for me, it's like, I've had to take every possible precaution in the past year. And it's like, I know that I mean, COVID, obviously, still spreading. And it's happening through these small interactions. And I'm just like, if you understand that, then why aren't you doing the most, I don't know. And like, knowing that, they know that it disproportionately affects disabled people and other marginalized people, like, get just being frustrated, but like, not feeling comfortable, like this point in the pandemic, because like, people know all of these things, but they're still choosing to not be safe, and it's just like, I don't feel like I can like police other people's actions, but it's like, it still hurts to see it, you know?

Max Soh 17:01

Definitely. Um, have there been any quote unquote, Silver Linings or anything positive that you have, have, unexpectedly or expect will come come about? Because of the pandemic?

Cassie Wilson 17:17

Yeah, actually, I feel really lucky. And sometimes it feels Yeah, kind of funny to be like, yeah, a lot of good actually has come up this even though it's such a terrible, terrible thing, but I mean, I think the accessibility, they were seeing the general population experience sets a precedent for after the pandemic, but work from home as possible curbside pickup, and curbside services are possible. Live streams are possible. And also just the way that the world is more accessible than ever. Being able to do anything from home and not having to commute having more time to take care of myself, because I'm not commuting. And, yeah, just like I don't I think that precedent set for accessibility is going to be really huge, though, after all of this.

Max Soh 18:11

Is, is there anything else you would like to share that I haven't asked? They would like to.

Cassie Wilson 18:20

I guess just generally, like, I hope to see more people fighting for Disability Justice and including disabled people in conversations and, and talking about accessibility more. Because I feel like the people I've related to the most and like really, like connected with over the past year have been other disabled people who feel like society is continuing to not value disabled lives. And so I hope that you know, I hope that some awareness comes out of what disabled people have experienced in the past year.

Max Soh 19:06

That's great. Well, if there's nothing else I go ahead and does all the questions I had, if there's nothing else you'd like to share, I can go ahead and stop the recording. Sounds good.