

Arya Galgano

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SPEAKERS

Arya Galgano, Hannah Soyer

Hannah Soyer 00:00

Today is December 7 2020. My name is Hannah Soyer. And I am going to be talking with Arya for the COVID disability archive. These oral histories are being recorded as a way to document the web experiences of disabled chronically ill, and neurodivergent individuals during the COVID 19 pandemic across the world. Okay, so thank you so much for being with me today. If you could start out by just giving me your name, age pronouns and where you live.

Arya Galgona 00:38

My name is Arya, I'm 22. My pronouns are they them, and I live in Melbourne, Australia.

Hannah Soyer 00:46

Thanks, Arya. And could you next just give me your identity description?

Arya Galgona 00:57

Awesome. I am a non binary autistic person. So I was diagnosed around 2016. So they originally said I was high functioning, but I don't identify with that. I just say I'm autistic, and neuro divergent.

Hannah Soyer 01:17

Got it, Thank you. So we're just going to go ahead and get into the more meatier questions. So when did you first learn about the pandemic? And what was your experience with that? So if you have any specific memories of that emotions that went around with that,

Arya Galgona 01:37

I think I heard about it in like late December, early January. I can't remember exactly. But I remember here in Australia, anyway, there's a huge panic buying thing right at the start. And I remember my family and I sitting in the kitchen one day, and we were just kind of laughing about how ridiculous some people would be not really taking in the severity of it, or how big it was going to get like we had no idea. So we were just like, why people buying toilet paper all of a sudden, or just, you know, completely

desolating this shelves at the store? Yeah, I did not expect it to become this huge thing. Yeah, that's pretty much what I can mostly remember.

Hannah Soyer 02:22

So how is that? How is your experience with the pandemic changed? Since that initial learning? Oh,

Arya Galgona 02:33

I did not cope with it that well, in the beginning, especially I mean, at first, I was like, Okay, so maybe a month of, you know, isolation or something. And I was okay with that. Because I love being harmed. You know, but the huge blur, I think was changed to everyday life, or like routine, because that's huge for us in the community. And also, specifically for me, I need routine, I need the same thing every day, basically, to kind of function. So yeah, it was a huge change and a blur. As the months went on. We're in it for about seven months. Luckily, our government did act quickly. But it was definitely a huge thing. So I think I think I definitely went from being positive about it to really, really negative about it. And seeing how it quickly spread as well and just also took out a lot of the plans I had throughout the year is everyone's and stuff I was really looking forward to doing go ahead and it was really it was really crushing. But yeah, that's mainly the gist of it, I guess.

Hannah Soyer 03:48

Sorry, I was huh. I haven't cough as Turkey. So, and you see I'm crying from the coughing not from It's Okay. Oh, good. I get it. Um, so it could you elaborate a bit on sort of how your day to day routine was impacted by all of this? Um, well, I mean,

Arya Galgona 04:17

I wasn't really doing much. At the start of it. I had just graduated from an acting course I did all last year and it was full time so it was kind of adjusting to a lot. I also had some other things going on in my personal life that were really hard. The one I don't know if you heard about the White Island volcano eruption that happened in New Zealand. In December, my friend and her family were actually on the island when it happened. She lost her brother and her sister. And she was really badly been and I met her through the acting course I did and we got really close, sir. That was a huge shock to say the At least she was in hospital for about seven months or something as well. So it was right at the time that the pandemic actually started. And so I think coping with that, as well as a lot of change, like the cost, I lived out of harm in apartment, so I was also moving back harm, I was adjusting to a lot of shift in my everyday activity. And the only thing I was going to do this year was work because I wanted to save up to go and see my fiancée now. And yeah, a lot of that at the same time, it really did hit, you know, all those personal things as well definitely did impact my well being starboard pandemic and kind of wanting to brush away how intense it would be, or how severe this whole thing was going to be in the world. Yeah, that's pretty much it. I think. I don't know if I answered your question.

Hannah Soyer 05:52

Yeah, that makes that makes a lot of sense. So, what is your experience been, specifically as an artistic or neurodivergent individual throughout all of this,

Arya Galgona 06:07

um, like I said, the change to routine was really hard. I mean, that's always scary going into some different routine. As an autistic person, I thought I would thrive in isolation, because I love being at home I love, you know, learn time. It got to the point where that was all there was, there wasn't really that shift. And I'm not, I'm not a social person, really. But I do love going out with friends. I do love going to the movies, for example, like I said, seeing, you know, the opportunity to go visit my girlfriend at the time now fiance. So I think my autism definitely impacted me a lot with the mental health side stuff. So yeah, isolation didn't help. I felt extremely lonely the whole time. And I had pretty bad lows, I had really high highs and really bad lows. I had my therapist with me like throughout the whole time, but same time, you know, it can only do so much. So I really think the mental health side of things was affected. And also just I kind of felt like I was losing the ability to be social. And you know, that changing routine and whatever. And I just found myself kind of becoming recluse from everybody. Except for like, the people I'm really close with. But even my family I spend a lot of time in my bedroom just like moping or just feeling really bad. You know, so that was that. I think that was like it three months kind of rut that I was in. And it just did not seem like it would end. And then we went into the second lockdown. Because that's what my state anyway Victoria did. We went into second lockdown, because our cases were the highest in the country. And like, I got a new tattoo and stuff, and I was really excited. But then immediately after that, we went back to shut down. So it was like, you know, great, everything happy again, just went away. And it was really hard the second time really hard. And that ended like, oh, three months ago now or something like that. So yeah, it's it was a lot to be thrown at me one at once. And it felt like the hardest thing I've ever done. Yeah.

Hannah Soyer 08:23

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. So what is what is sort of our I guess, how is Australia currently handling this?

Arya Galgona 08:38

We're doing really well. I believe it's almost been a month and a half since we've had in our cases, at least in Victoria. South Australia, which is our neighbor states, or I don't know if you know, the map very well, were kind of next to them at the bottom. And they've got a few cases, there's also been a couple of loopholes that the country has kind of made slip past which is a bit infuriating, because that's exactly how the second lockdown started. You know, and those that were refused slip ups that happened and that made us go into second lockdown, especially with a cruise ship that went into Sydney and then had a load of infected passengers on it in the beginning of the pandemic. I think that was the cause of the second wave but also her tail quarantine mishap and just the government not really jumping action quick enough not to say that our premier has not done a great job I think he has and we've definitely I think were on the horizon of abolishing the virus but then I get angry anyway because there are other slip ups. And there was one just recently again with German passengers going on a domestic flight. And that just came from overseas. So it was like, why wouldn't they be screened for Like how ridiculous when we just found second lockdown because of a similar mishap. So there's that kind of thing. And I do get really affected like I got really affected by people not wearing masks. I couldn't walk by people, I, my germophobia went insane. So I barely left the house as well. So it's that sort of thing and purchasing things out of my control for a while as well did not help. And yeah, that was the main thing. But I think as a whole, our country has done a great job compared to others. So I think where we're

kind of on the verge of not having the virus, at least here in Melbourne, when once it was the epicenter of the country. So that's a really, sort of.

Hannah Soyer 10:49

Um, so since the last lockdown has ended, heavy, you sort of like, Have you been able to go out more and be more social,

Arya Galgona 11:03

I definitely have, I think it was really great, because when I look, when it ended, I was still really, I'm still nervous about going out to stores and stuff, I will still wear my mask if I go into a shop or something. And that's also against a little rules at the moment. But I've seen friends, I've gone to a couple dinner parties at homes like not with a lot of people don't worry, because we're all we're all the same. We're all anxious, and, you know, are still not wanting to take it for granted. But we've gotten together and had little social gatherings or just visit a family again that we hadn't seen in a while, which was nice. But I've definitely gone out to eat, which the first couple times I was really scared. But they definitely doing a lot to at least assist people are cleaned up really thoroughly as well. So the other thing as well as my I'm addicted to coffee. And my dad and I usually would always go get a coffee in the morning before work yada yada. So it was nice to start that up again felt like a little bit of a routine coming back. So yeah, that's been the main thing. I think I've definitely doing better mentally because we don't have many restrictions anymore. Doesn't go to say that I don't get annoyed with people still.

Hannah Soyer 12:25

Yeah, for sure. That's, that's, I mean, just amazing to hear. I'm in Iowa, in the US. And it's more like a second highest state. In the US.

Arya Galgona 12:38

I feel for you guys.

12:40

Yeah, it's it's very rough over here. Yeah, um, you know, is there absolutely is hope. Yeah. So you might have already answered this. But how has your disability impacted or informed how you have dealt with a pandemic?

Arya Galgona 13:06

I think the main takeaway of my struggles with this is how important routine is. Well, just familiarity in general, like I'm happy to, you know, conform to new routines, whatever, but especially really hard at first. Getting better. I used to be horrible. But I think like, yeah, just coming out of lockdown is taking a bit to regulate. And also I did do studies over the lockdowns and stuff, just keep myself sane. So it was also, I'm still kind of reeling from that because it was stressful. It was certainly different. And it was it was kind of isolating, you know, not being able to go on campus or something like that and be able to socialize with other people. We had our exam on campus, but we're all social distancing, more masks. And it was really funny. It was really weird seeing everyone when we just know each other's voices. But yeah, so I mean, things like that. Were okay. So it's Mark mainly, yeah, the takeaway is, how important my routine is and how much Sunday it gives me really? Yeah, that's a learning curve, I guess.

Hannah Soyer 14:20

Yeah. Do you feel that people who are not autistic sort of understood that or did not really understand that?

Arya Galgona 14:33

I'm gonna be real. I don't think anyone who's not autistic will ever get what it's like. It's hard enough on a daily basis without the pandemic and stuff like that. At times. It can be really overwhelming. It can be just like you have really high highs you have really low lows. You know, but I think for me, it's mainly the social stuff. And for a while I was really really bad. Just I was pretty really sensitive, I was really emotional and my family, like they get it. But there are certainly times where, you know, they thought I was overreacting or you know, that sort of thing. And it was really hard to get out of that mindset for a little while and everything, everything was setting me off. Even the littlest like things, and they'll look back, and it's like, well, you need to take a deep breath and chill out. But yeah, it was really hard for a little while. So I definitely, you know, to not being understood, I'm used now I've had so many people telling me like, I'm overreacting, or you know, they're starting want to understand. So I guess, sadly, it's something that we just cope with. But or say doesn't feel nice. But you know, I'm grateful that I have the family. I have just we definitely were getting on each other's nerves for sure. Yeah, like, you know, for the most part, I did feel safe. Right. But yeah.

Hannah Soyer 16:01

So that's sort of related to my next question, which is, what are your relationships with people? And like, throughout all of this, and have they changed?

Arya Galgona 16:14

I think, yeah, I think I'm just mostly socializing with people I trust and who I feel comfortable with the most, I'm not really reaching out to many other people at the moment, just in that same way. I don't have the energy to eat though. And I feel like that carries over a little bit from all the stuff that's happened, you know, as taking care of myself. That's the most important thing for me. Otherwise, I don't know how I function. So yeah, mostly just hanging with family or, yeah, my close friends or talking to Sam over WhatsApp, which we do all the time. So really, just, um, yeah, it's kind of like that the moment I feel like it will be that for a little while, I'm reaching out to the friend that was in the eruption incident, every now and again, just to see how she is and how she's coping and, you know, through a recovery, but other than that, I'm not really talking to many people outside my inner circle. And also, I feel like my people skills aren't really great anymore. Yeah, and it's just that kind of thing where I'm trying to rehabilitate that and become like, less anxious when I'm, you know, in a social situation. Yeah, that's about it. Really?

Hannah Soyer 17:34

Yeah. So it sounds like there's definitely been lasting effects from Yeah. So has your living situation, change at all? Do use the pandemic?

Arya Galgona 17:50

No, I am still living with my family. Through the first lockdown, my brother and his fiancée moved out, but they just live down the road. But other than that, we haven't really changed much. We just, yeah, it's similar. And we're all gang on each other's nerves, like I said, but now we're able to work or at least go out more. I think everyone's more chill. Yeah, I think just, and we've gotten somewhat closer as well. So there's that kind of thing. That's good. But yeah, that was times where I didn't even want to leave my room, or something like that. But yeah, for the most part, were trying to do more family stuff now. Now that we can like going out walking the dog, yada, yada, and watching things together as well. So we're just trying to make the most of it. You know, I'm being grateful that we can go out again and go to dinner again stuff, because that's certainly been missed. But yeah, nothing else has really changed.

Hannah Soyer 18:53

Okay, um, and do you feel like your relationships with different institutions, such as health care government, or the media has changed throughout all this, I

Arya Galgona 19:09

think, with modern government, honestly don't understand politics enough to really feel strongly about our government here. I mean, for the most part, they've done a good job from what I see anyway, at least our what local Prime Minister I'm not really big fan of but el premio, who's, you know, basically governing the state, you know, has done a really good job protecting his fellow Victorians and, you know, just looking out for us, so I think in that respect, they've done a good job. I think with other I think health organizations have done really well I really admire in our healthcare workers as well obviously, they've been a massive, massive role. I've I've many friends actually who are in the nursing and like hospital industry, so I got to give it up to them, you know who, you know, put their lives on the line for people who was suffering, you know, once our hospitals were over capacity as well. Um, but I think that nothing really has changed that marginally. But I look over a year guys, I'm just like, I can't believe how out of control that got because some people didn't get. And that angers me a lot. But I hope now that things change and for the better. Yeah.

Hannah Soyer 20:29

Yeah, I hope so. I think that I think that we're on the right path, maybe?

Arya Galgona 20:36

By like you. Yeah, I feel like that is the case. Yeah.

Hannah Soyer 20:41

It's definitely very, very hard. Okay, so speaking of very, very hard, what has been the hardest thing about living throughout all of this?

Arya Galgona 20:53

I think it's the mental health side of things. Yeah. Just like I keep saying, I will emphasize just how hard it got mental health, you know, being in one place for too long, or just that feeling of isolation was really, really hard and just like, feeling like, normalcy will never return like, and it still kind of feels that way. And it does for our depth for you guys. And, you know, that sort of thing, sir. It's just Yeah, it was a massive change for everybody. I think we all feel that way. Cuz, yeah, we're not used to this sort of

living, you know, and the restrictions as well, it was just a huge like, will we ever get out of this? Will we ever be able to do things again, like will mourning the littlest things like going to cinema or, or, you know, even just going down the street, and feeling like we're able to even just live properly? And it was the hardest part, despite not being an extroverted person? You know, I found myself wishing that I could go to a party or something, you know, usually I hate them. Yeah.

Hannah Soyer 21:58

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. So, have there been any silver linings?

Arya Galgona 22:06

Um, look, I mean, I try my best to look at the positives. And there have been some, like, you know, I did get engaged over the internet, but still, it was really nice to have that kind of thing. I, you know, never expected that to happen, and didn't see it coming. Although people around me did. And that's just story my life. Um, I think you are finding her, your close true friends are as well, like, you know, the people who do, you know, ask how you are or you know, and also just feeling gratitude for my family. Like, gratitude is such an iffy thing for me. I tried to, I felt like going back to square one when my therapists like, in our opinion, gratitude journal, write down as much as you can to think of so I think Little things like that. certainly helps. And I think the biggest silver lining is definitely just seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Again, even our a lot of you guys and a lot of other countries are still in it. You know, that is that hope? You know, we're not completely out of it, either. I think there's still cases popping up every now and again, but um, you know, it the, there will be an end to it. That's why I keep trying to tell myself anyway.

Hannah Soyer 23:27

Yeah. Um, where does your fiance live? Ah,

Arya Galgona 23:33

they live in Massachusetts. Oh, wow. Okay. Yes. Yes.

Hannah Soyer 23:41

So I know you mentioned near the very beginning of this, that you originally had a lot of plans for this year that you sort of put on hold? Can you talk about some of them briefly as well?

Arya Galgona 23:57

Yeah. So in January, me and my fiance did discuss travel plans. So we made a whole itinerary and everything for me to come to mass and, you know, just that we're going to take me around Boston, and we're going to take me around where they live in yada yada because I've only been to New York. So I was really looking forward to it. It was gonna be you know, a nice little thing after a year of not seeing each other. And as the pandemic worsened because I was supposed to get on May I was like, I really hope I get to go and then we'll be able to quarantine or whatever and when I get back as well, it will hopefully but yeah, it was like if led up the most just before elsewhere cigar and then it shut down everything. So yeah, it was a really huge blur for both of us. And that yeah, it was that incorporated for sure into the hottest struggles during the whole thing. But yeah, it was mostly that and just all the little

things I decided to study just to take my mind off things So yeah, but it was the travel plans for sure. Yeah.

Hannah Soyer 25:06

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I can imagine that would be to each other for a year. And then

Arya Galgona 25:12

distance is hard. Yeah, it is. Beginner, we get through it. Little thing that we hope in the next year or two, we can see each other again or so it's that sort of thing.

Hannah Soyer 25:26

Okay. Well, I don't have any other questions. Do you have anything else that you would like to add? before? I don't know. I

Arya Galgona 25:38

think I've set it all really, I don't really know how to articulate myself that well at the moment. But I think I said the gist of what I need to, but also I'm just really happy to help out or at least give some insight, or at least some help to people who are feeling this way. Cuz I know it's a lot of us and I, personally in my circle of friends who are autistic or, you know, mentally ill, you know, we're all feeling this in some way or another. But for me, personally, I'm just really passionate about educating the welds on you know what it's like to be one of us. So, yeah, that's sort of the thing that, you know, I was really excited to do this. For sure.

Hannah Soyer 26:20

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for Yeah. Really? Yeah, absolutely. I'm gonna go ahead and stop recording