

Transcript – Finch Collins, Class of 2021

Narrator: Finch Collins

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

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Location: Zoom

Length: 52:12

Amanda Knox: All right, good afternoon. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the Pembroke Center's Assistant Archivist. It is Thursday, April 16, 2020, at 2:30 in the afternoon, and I am here today with Finch Collins, a member of – or a third year student here at Brown. And we are conducting this interview via Zoom today because we are in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic which has brought us together for this interview. So, good afternoon Finch. How are you?

Finch Collins: I'm doing okay. How are you?

AK: We're hanging in there.

FC: Hanging in there. Yeah, that's, that's been the mood for the last month or so.

AK: Yeah, right. So I would like to kick off this interview, not even at the beginning of COVID-19, but if we could jump to the beginning of your time at Brown. If you wouldn't mind just briefly telling me what made you interested in Brown, what brought you to Brown? [1:00]

FC: It's something where I feel like I, at this point have a very easy answer that I can give. I mean, it's the sort of thing that I wrote on my college apps. I was like, I'm interested in Brown because of the open curriculum, and I still was very interesting Brown because the open curriculum. My mom went to Brown so she was putting in a good word.

AK: Okay. What year was she?

FC: She was '88.5.

AK: Oh, okay.

FC: I believe. '89.5? '88.5.

AK: Okay.

FC: But I still remember being on the tour and she's like, "It's raining, but it's really beautiful when it's not raining." I was like, "I trust you."

AK: And where are you from, if I may?

FC: I'm from Arlington, Virginia, so right outside Washington, DC.

AK: Okay.

FC: Yeah, so it's there was the, my mom put a good word for it, but there was not this sort of understanding that I'd go to Brown. It was like Brown's a school that I think you might enjoy, that I think you would fit in well at, but like, no pressure. [2:00] And I ended up deciding to go to Brown because of the, I think the open curriculum was big. I just really enjoyed the feel of the campus. It's a beautiful campus. And the size was just right where I had a lot of options for taking classes, but still was not at one of these huge state schools. And I appreciated the way that I did not have to take any more like science and math courses. Because I went to a, context, I went to a STEM high school.

AK: Okay.

FC: I'd taken, by the time I finished senior year, I'd taken through multivariable calculus, organic chemistry, and was like, I don't want to do this anymore.

AK: Yeah. You're covered.

FC: Like, I'm covered. Like, I know enough math to hold me for the rest of my life. I just want to study history now.

AK: Is that what you're concentrating in now?

FC: Oh, I'm not actually in history. I'm in American Studies and Modern Culture and Media.

AK: Very cool.

FC: So, yeah. Doubling along with everyone else.

AK: Right. Brown is full of overachievers, as you know. [3:00]

FC: Yeah, maybe that's one word people would use to describe me. Sorry, coffee.

AK: You, share with me, Mary, who you know, Mary Murphy, the Nancy L. Buc Pembroke Center Archivist, likes to ask our interviewees for Polaroid memories or snapshot memories of their first times, or some of their earliest memories on campus. Do you have any, any really high moments, any really low moments, anything that has really stuck with you from like the first moments that you were at, a student at Brown?

FC: What stuck, well, I think what still sticks with me is that I went from a really intense schedule to my freshman year having four courses and having like, I took some more introductory level courses, I mean, I was a freshman. I wasn't going to jump into the senior seminars and I also didn't know that I was allowed to jump into the senior seminars. I found that out more sophomore year and started taking a lot of higher level courses. [4:00] But it was such a different workload and work structure, and I hadn't committed myself to extracurriculars yet. So I would wake up and go to class and then do my work and be like, "Okay, and now what am I supposed to do? Like, I have the whole afternoon in front of me. What am I supposed to do with myself?" And I ended up just like napping a lot and sleeping a lot, which was such a break from high school, which was like, up at 7:30 or like 8:00 at the latest, leave the house at 8:10, classes

start at 8:40, school until 4:00, three hours of extracurriculars, get home, six hours of homework, go to bed at to wash, rinse, repeat. And I got to Brown and was just, I mean, I still have memories of just walking back to my, I lived actually up on Pembroke my freshman year in Morris. I'd walk up to my room, be like alright, cool. I don't have anything else to do. And by the end of freshman year, I'd of course over committed myself again. And I'm now just off the wall busy, but. [5:00] Yeah, and I think what's, something else that stands out to me from very early on, was so, I'm currently really actively involved in student theatre. I'm on the board of Production Workshop, aka PW, which was getting ready to celebrate its 60th anniversary. Still, will, just not in person. But I remember going to my first, we have these little things called Schmoozes where it's a, it's a schmooze, that people that are interested in either applying to the board, or in applying to direct for us –

AK: I love that. That name is so perfect! I wish more people were transparent like that.

FC: Yes, it's a schmooze. And they are still held at like 11:15 at night because just that's the time when everyone's free because standard theater rehearsals go until 11pm.

AK: Wow.

FC: So 11:15 is when everyone's free. Yeah, back on to the ridiculous high school schedule I was talking about. [6:00] But we used to, there used to be, like alcohol at those. Like, there'd be some wine that people could have. We stopped doing that since then. We're like, pressure, weird environment. A lot of change has made there and sort of making the board, making PWC more open and more accepting. But I remember going to my first schmooze in the upspace, just being like, this is really cool. And like, this is what college feels like. I was like, "I'm actually in college now!"

AK: What are some of the other extracurricular activities you've participated in or are participating in?

FC: So it's mostly, mostly PW at this point, which is, I'd actually been saying to myself for

months now I was like, I need to just take a break from the board because there's like structures in place that people will take, we call it taking leave, for a couple weeks or a month or two, or a semester, and then come back on the board when they're ready, because it's a huge time commitment, and it's a huge it's a lot of pressure, and I was always sort of in the background. [7:00] And I'd been telling myself for months, I was like, oh, I should take leave during my junior spring because I'm tired and I need to have a break and sort of need to reorient myself. And I kept at the start of the semester being like, oh, I just want to stick around for this one thing. Like I signed up to do this, so like I should carry through. Like, I don't want to put pressure on other people. And then of course, we're now shut down, the rest of the season is canceled. So you know, the universe finally forced me to take a break.

But outside of PW and being on the board, I've done a lot of sort of varied student theatre processes. I was in *Urine Town*, which was through what was then Brown University Gilbert Sullivan bugs, is now Ensemble, they just renamed. That was my first time being in a show since freshman year. But since then, I've done a lot of lighting design, I've done a lot of technical design, technical direction, which is the Brown theatre word for basically like the master carpenter. I build the sets. [8:00] Dipped my toes into production management, managing the budget, publicity. A lot of stuff. And that's my main sort of, like thing that I consider an extracurricular, like, organized extracurricular, that I'm involved in. It just eats up so much time. I don't really have much time for anything else.

AK: Sure. Do you have snapshot memories of moments in your first five semesters that were not significant in the moment, but now that so much of it has been taken away, you're really missing them? And it's okay to say no.

FC: I think that's a really interesting question, though. I think I'm definitely missing the casual sense of community in my classes. [9:00] I take a lot of seminars. And one thing I've been missing is that the sort of protocol for how you use Zoom where if you're not talking you mute your microphone. One thing I really enjoy about seminars is sort of like, there's a 10 minute break in the middle and you like, say hi to people and you chat. The little opportunities for making like side comments, or just sort of affirming someone else and being like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah I feel that." Or when someone's like, "I've had a really busy week," and you're just

like, “Yeah, I get that.” And just sort of missing that very casual, the sort of casual opportunities for, like, social interaction.

I’m also just really missing the library. I really miss the library. I keep being like, “Oh, I’m going to do my final project using this collection at the Hay, and I can’t access the Hay. Okay.” Yeah, I think it’s really just the sort of social, and the way that being on campus [10:00] together forces you to interact with other people in a way that I don’t often have the motivation for when it’s like texting someone.

AK: Right.

FC: It’s different to like wave hi to someone on the green and stop to chat with them for five minutes.

AK: So I want to pick up on some of those points again, but before we do that, can you tell me a little bit about the first few moments when you were hearing the word “Coronavirus” and “COVID-19?” How was the word of this happening over in China, or maybe you didn’t hear about it until after it was coming here – What were your thoughts when this news started kind of circulating?

FC: Yeah, I mean, I remember it was right around, Christmas was when they first identified it and isolated it and it became a sort of news phenomena. And I, I’ve since turned off a lot of my news alerts [11:00] on my phone just for my own, like mental stability. But I used to get a lot of news alerts. And I would get a lot of alerts about this. And I remember sort of keeping an eye on it in the way that one keeps an eye on distant international events that you don’t feel personally connected to, in the sense that there were a lot of names and a lot of places and it just became too much effort to sort of keep track of everything. But it was in the back of my mind, especially when it, when it hit Italy and like really quickly accelerated. I remember that being kind of a something that was talked about, I think, because it felt closer to home in a lot of ways for people in the United States, which is a really interesting sort of reflection on like, United States national identity as it relates to other parts of the world and how we conceptualize ourselves in relation. Anyways, I won’t get too into that.

AK: I agree completely and if you'd like to elaborate on that I – [12:00]

FC: No. I don't think it's like a fully formed, I don't think it's a fully formed thought. I, but yeah, I mean, it's, when it's China, it's a distant foreign virus. But I remember sort of the tone of the news reports that I remember – and it's also, it's interesting because I feel like a lot of my reflection on this has been in retrospect. I mean, I think a lot about how like the memory, I'm a lot of classes on memory. And one of the sort of major things we talked about is how people form their own narratives, but also how I mean, especially for oral histories, there's a certain way that I will draw on memories that I've already drawn on to the past and like, I just literally don't have memories from a lot of things because that's how your brain works. And a lot of my sense of what the early days of COVID looked like are, I feel like originates from March, because that's what I was thinking about January. So I'm sort of going through this [13:00] filter.

But I remember the early reports being about, weird new virus, Wuhan, Wuhan lockdown, I mean all filtered through this tone of the mainstream media being like, you know, the Chinese government's brutal crackdown, you know, they're an authoritarian menace and the United States is not, you know, bald eagle screeches background. You know the tone.

AK: Yup. No, I agree with that.

FC: I mean, it's, it's, like CNN I saw, sorry, tangent. I – my brain works via little sort of branches.

AK: I love it.

FC: This conversation is not necessarily the most straightforward. I remember seeing a tweet of the lines for in person voting when they weren't doing absentee voting in some states. There was like a camera flyover shot of this long line of people, not six feet apart, waiting to vote. Someone on Twitter said, "Imagine how the US would be covering this if this was happening in [14:00] Venezuela. Like, imagine the headlines and how the language that they would use to describe, you know, the like impoverished conditions and how the government is doing nothing."

So I think that, in part because China seems so distant, it didn't really feel like something

that would eventually impact me. And because a lot of the news reports were about how quickly they shut things down and how quickly things, things seemed to be getting under control, it felt like something that would go away. And then it didn't.

AK: Were you, were there conversations among the students while you were on campus? Were your professors making comments about it?

FC: Not until things started to get really intense. I will say though, that like students and professors were talking about it a lot earlier than the university was in official communications. There was a really stressful few days right before – [15:00] I'm sorry, notifications – when Harvard had shut down, and right before Harvard shutdown, I think, I can't read the exact dates. It was like mid-March, early March, where there was this question of what Brown was going to do. And every day going to class, I mean, I could not focus on my work at all. And every day going to class, I would, we would show up to seminar and I'd be like, alright, here's the reading. I'd like, pull a few quotes, talk about it. And then we sort of sit there, like, alright, let's take a break, go on break. Everyone kind of sits there for a second and someone says, "So my friend's on Student Government, and he heard that the university is going to be doing XYZ like why aren't they telling us anything? Like, why aren't they telling us anything? Like, they're clearly talking about this, like we just need to know." It was this uncertainty and [16:00] it escalated very quickly. I remember even a week before Harvard shut down, like PW was operating as if we would be continuing for the rest of the semester. Everything was business according to normal. It's just once it, I can't remember exactly where that coincided with the spread, I think it was when it got to like Boston, it suddenly seemed a lot more real. And I think it was when it became clear that Seattle had not been contained at all was when things really started to sort of seem present. But the suddenness was, I think what stands out to me the most is like I can't remember exact dates because it just sounds, it was just in the background and then it was not.

AK: So were you, the action was so sudden, but in the back of your mind, where you kind of thinking of preparing for potentially having to be quarantined, were your professors [17:00] kind of preparing you for that moment, or was that was quarantine, or thoughts about kind of preparedness not really at the forefront of your mind at that point?

FC: When you say quarantine, are you talking about –

AK: Or, I'm sorry. I don't know why I keep –

FC: There's just a lot of words –

AK: Self isolation.

FC: Yeah, like people being apart and not having organized.

AK: Correct. Yes, I don't – I'm sorry. I do not mean to –

FC: No, no, no, no.

AK: Imply that you are ill or, no. What I mean is, were you preparing for self-isolation in any way or was it occurring to you that the university might potentially close?

FC: Yeah.

AK: Or go virtual.

FC: I think as soon as Harvard shut down, it became, the writing the sort of on the wall at that point that Brown, which it wasn't a question of if it was a question of when. But I think that because it came on so suddenly, there was a period where it was like, I don't really need to prepare for anything. Like, nothing's going to happen. And then a week [18:00] later, it was like, why haven't I been preparing? I feel like, especially compared to my parents, I was sort of on the earlier end of that, which is interesting because my dad is very – anxiety runs in our family. Hi. And my dad tends to be –

AK: You're in good company here.

FC: Very. Yes. My dad tends to be very worried about potential disasters. I mean, even if he's not like a prepper you know, it's very much like you know, we need to be well stocked in case anything happens. Like okay, that's a good impulse. But when I was, there was a period of time where I had plane tickets to fly home for spring break and back up again. And I was like, I'm going to cancel these tickets. My dad's like, well just wait, see how it is. And like, No, I'm canceling these tickets. Like I'm like, I should not be traveling. Like I, a few days before my dad and my mom had internalized [19:00] the message of sort of public health and putting the health of the community before my health. I was like, even if I won't get sick, like, I have asthma, every time I get a cold, it moves into my lungs like I am at risk. It was interesting to me to see the sort of difference in our reactions, and justification for those reactions. Where I a lot earlier than that was like, I'm not flying anywhere, like I'm staying here, if not for my own health for the health of the people around me. And I attribute that in large part to sort of like what I was seeing on Twitter, where the message very quickly became like, the government is not telling us everything we need to start taking precautions. Not in the sort of like, it's a very fine line between the sort of distrust of the government versus like, honest disbelief or just like not taking everything exactly at face value. [20:00] And I sort of got the message pretty early on that, like, things are going to get worse than what Trump is saying. And public health is more important and like, here's how you can help public health. Did that answer your question? I'm forgetting what the original one was.

AK: Yes, yes. No, that was helpful. Can you tell me about your last, the, your last day on campus slash, the last class you had? What kind of memories do you have about that moment?

FC: Well, it was weird. So I am, I think we got, I mean, that whole week – so we finally got the news that Brown was going to close on Friday morning. March. Do you know the date?

AK: Something-teen I think?

FC: Yeah, it was like, you know, 18 something like that. I'm sorry. I need to check my Google Calendar now. I will get this date correct. [21:00] I guess it would have been the morning of March the 13. Where that whole week I, you know, I'm lying in bed, alarm goes off, wake up,

email. Like wake up, pick up my phone, open my email and like I'd get an email that's like, you know, "update on the COVID situation" and the email would basically just be like, "we're working on it." I was like, but what I really wanted to hear from the university was if x happens then we will do y, if y, if a happens then we will do b, and instead we're just getting, "we're working on it." It was like but what are you even considering?

AK: It's like it, for me it was kind of like the snow day that you know is coming.

FC: Yes, exactly.

AK: But nobody is pulling the trigger to make it happen. The anticipation of it was like, yeah.

FC: It was overwhelming. But, so I only had one class on the Friday, [22:00] which was Introduction to Technical Theater, which is a hands on theater, like construction class. We've moved into doing like hand drafting, it's actually really fun. I really enjoy it. But when the university is closed down and people are spread out, we don't all have access to the same scene shop, and the power tools, and all the, the seasons canceled, we can't build the sets for the TAP Department. But it was very strange because we all sort of met there on Friday. We're just like, "Alright, we'll keep you posted. Here's an intro to hand drafting while we're still here in person. Please stay safe. If you need anything reach out." I think that was sort of the tone from a lot of professors was like if you need anything, please reach out. And a lot of flexibility, at least for me, but that's not a universal experience from what I've been hearing. Because professors are people [23:00] too and they're trying to deal with all the craziness on their own. But it was a very strange atmosphere.

And then, of course, on Friday, Saturday, and into Sunday, I, we still, people were still going out in a lot of ways. Like people were still congregating and gathering with friends because there was a sense that it was the last time to do it. So, you know, I went out, I got drunk on Friday. I mean, it was, it was Friday afternoon and it was like, "day drinking time!" Everyone's like, everyone like just got to the house. Like, say hi to some friends, just like, stopped in. It's like here, have a beer. And like everyone's sort of drinking. We're sort of sitting there we're like, "Fuck." And I'm not, I mean, I'm very cautious and restricted on like, alcohol.

And I'm also not a huge party person, but it just sort of became a like, everyone just sort of sat there and was like, "Fuck." [24:00] There was this sort of, so I live off campus which is why I'm still at Brown, but there was a sort of neighborhood sense of like everything is just so weird right now it was good to have the resolve and like to know what was the next month or two was going to look like. But I mean I don't deal well with uncertainty I don't know many people who do. It was just very, very strange.

But yeah, there was a lot more talk between students and, and then also immediately as soon as the university shut down PW started, like the board started thinking of like ways we could help people, and like offering people storage options. The University was like, "You can't do that." "Right fine." We have we have a big black box down space. They were like, "You're not qualified to like store stuff. Like there's liability stuff." We were, we were about ready to like start renting out, we were going to like tape [25:00] out boxes on the floor be like, "Listen, we are not a storage facility. Like, we cannot guarantee your stuff will be fine, like the building will be locked and people won't have access to it. Like we'll put, just put a cover on top of it. But like, we can't guarantee everything will be okay. And like we are not liable for this. We're not qualified to do this. But like, we don't want you paying \$500 for college storage, like just come store your stuff with us for 30 bucks." The University was like, "Please don't." We're like, alright, fine. We don't want to get banned. Like we don't want to get kicked out. We don't want to lose our space, what, whatever, we'll listen to you. But there was this immediate mobilization on part of students. Project LETS has a huge mutual aid thing going and there was just a sense of, I'm still in some Facebook groups where people were just like, if you need transportation, call me like we have space to store stuff like I have their sub, boxes from several friends in our storage room. And it became very apparent that the students were going to support each other even when the University was not. And the students were very quick to come and sort of fill the gaps [26:00] and answer the questions that the University was not answering.

AK: So that is kind of another question I have. It's kind of a broad question, but in those terms where you didn't necessarily have to move out of a space, but is the general tone that students were feeling supported by the University in having to make these quick transitions or can you tell me a little bit of a story about that?

FC: Yeah, it's more of a, as you alluded to, I mean, I didn't have to move anywhere. And I'm lucky to be in a position where like, I'm not, I'm not relying on income from a job at Brown. My parents are very well off and they're supporting me and like, it's fine. I will be okay. So it's more of like reading the room and like, what my impression was of other students, and I think the general sense that I got and what I would agree with is that [27:00] the University's response was a lot better than some ones that we had seen. For example, Harvard was just an abysmal response with no consideration for like the students. And there was a sense that like, Brown did a lot better than that, and did lay out a lot more things. But the constant question was just like these very small, like, I need help moving x that the University didn't really have structure setup for. And there was also a lot of uncertainty about long term stuff, but I don't know how it's been resolved since then. I've not been keeping an eye on it. But students being like, "Alright, great. We're glad you answered these questions. But like, here's a list of more things that we're curious about." And like, I think they were running a, like the SAO was running like a hotline to answer questions from parents and students. But there were, there was a lot of a sense that, like the University, sure they'll provide you \$150 [28:00] to, like help defray travel costs. But where am I supposed to get a plane ticket on such short notice? And that University did a lot better than, for example, Harvard is sort of the standout example. But there was a lot of sort of free floating uncertainty, especially from students that are, like rely on the University for housing rely on the university for like, stable support away from home, and the University for income. People being like, well, like, "Sure, great. I can stay here, but like, am I going to work? Are you going to pay student workers?" I don't think they are. "Like, what are you doing here? Like, what are, how am I going to survive in the next couple of months?" And the University's like, "We're here for you," and students are like, "No, I'm asking how I can specifically, like I want the specific." And the University's like, "We are committed to making sure the Brown community stays safe," and we're like, "No, give us the details." [29:00]

With that said, though, I mean, I think I was relatively impressed, especially at this, like level of detail that went into that first email, and I can appreciate why they weren't providing like daily updates on their thought process because it felt pretty well thought out. But, I guess another good example of sort of student sentiment is that like, when C-Pax announced that like she and other, I guess the Executive Board, I don't even know the name for it, you know, higher ups in the Corporation would be taking like a 25% salary cut, the sort of consensus among the students

that I'm friends with at least which is, you know, the theater kids and the leftist kids and not the, you know, College Republicans, they're like, "Alright, great. 25%. Is that all you can afford? Like, seriously, only 25%?" Like, it felt more like a token gesture than an actual commitment to making sure that, like, we appreciate, you know, the, like, people won't be laid off and they're trying to avoid that as much as possible. But [30:00] this sort of, "We'll try and avoid it" versus, "We are committed to not doing this. And we promise that we won't do it." People were sort of hoping for more even though they knew that probably wouldn't come. Yeah, all in all, just sort of a like, the University was okay, but students were the ones that were filling in the sort of, the gaps and the more radical work that needed to be done that the university was just not necessarily providing or interested in providing.

AK: How, how has been the transition to strictly online, are they calling it online learning or?

FC: I guess online learning?

AK: Is that an old lady term?

FC: No. Online learning is, I mean, it's clear, It describes well what is happening which is online learning. It's been okay for me. I've had to sort of re – Well, I guess the first thing is that we had sort of two weeks off and those two weeks I just did nothing. Well, [31:00] no actually, first thing was that I made a whole list of things to do around the house and finally did all of them because I had time and my brain was – it was an avoidance thing. It was, it was really an avoidance thing was what it came down to. Like, I'm looking at a nice bookcase I installed in my wall, and I like fixed the light bulb, and like cleaned the drain, and did all this stuff around the house that I've been meaning to do. Oh, clean the patio out, which is, you know, a coping mechanism for anxiety that my roommates do appreciate, though. I'm just like vacuuming the carpet for the third time. And they're like, "Great. Cool. Thanks for doing that." Like, "Yeah, I'm not avoiding an essay." But to go from that sort of, because the tone was, especially the week leading up to the announcement, and right after the announcement, the tone was like, please don't worry about work. Like, do not worry about school, don't think about school, focus on yourself. And I think I'm appreciating it in retrospect, because my reaction at the time was like, I'm glad that the

University is providing this for other people. Because like even if I [32:00] don't need it personally, and like I could probably go right into online classes, like, I'm glad that they're providing this. But in retrospect, like I really needed two weeks to just not do anything and to sort of process and in a way to grieve, or to mourn, and to just sort of work through what things would be like. But I played, so I got a Nintendo Switch for my birthday, which was in February, you know, 21st birthday and I get a, you know, kids gaming system. My mom expects it at this point.

AK: My partner is still weighing the decision on purchasing one and he's 31 so it's cool.

FC: Yeah, it's cool. It's a, it's a, it's really fun and a lot of my, you know, friends on the internet, were, in fandoms I'm in were playing. We're getting ready to play Animal Crossing. I was like, this sounds like fun. I played Animal Crossing once when I was much younger, on the Wii. I was like, didn't love it. It was fun. But you know, maybe I'll see what the fuss is about. Get Animal Crossing. I think I'm now at 130 hours [33:00] played on animal crossing. A lot, which was those two weeks because it came out on March 20. You know, perfect time. The world crashes, everyone's stuck at home. And Nintendo is like, here's a fun relaxing game about making an island town with your animal villagers. So I played a lot of that, and I think that really helped me cope and like is still helping me cope.

But the transition back from that, like, wake up at noon, in my pajamas until 4pm, and just sort of letting my brain process and trying to be gentle to myself. The transition back from that to like, alright, now we're in online classes. It's like, ah! Especially because I have seminars on Tuesday and Wednesday and usually do their reading on Thursday and Friday of the previous week because I need to do a Canvas post by Sunday night and another by Monday night. And so it sort of hit on Sunday. Oh, classes are starting tomorrow and all this work that I usually do at the end of one week I need to do now. And it's been just a very strange shift, in part because I rely on being able to go to physical [34:00] places to sort of keep my schedule, and I rely on if I can't focus at home being like, alright, pack it up. Let's go to the Rock. And if I can't focus here, it's just like, oops. I think that's been the biggest thing. I both feel like I have less work and more work. And I'm working all day, yet also doing nothing. It's this very weird thing where it's like, I'll do stuff, but I feel like it takes all day. And then it's just, it's very weird being in one place.

But I'm fortunate that like, I really enjoy our apartment. We have a very nice apartment, we kind of got lucky with like a really good price and a really good location, and a lot of room so we can all kind of spread out, do our own thing. And there's a cat. My roommate has a cat.

AK: That's awesome.

FC: Yes, she's been very helpful.

AK: The cat is welcome to make an appearance.

FC: I believe that she is currently on my roommates lap.

AK: Okay, unavailable at the moment.

FC: Unavailable, and it also means that he hasn't eaten lunch, yet, but [35:00] screw that because the first priority for Jasper, my roommate, is to be Macchi's assistant. Macchi, Macchiato the cat.

AK: Perfect!

FC: She's been, she's been great to have. She knows when people are upset, she'll come up and like sit on your lap, you know, like a baby.

AK: So may I ask, is your apartment, are you leasing it like for the school year, slash, my real question is what played into your decision to not go home to Virginia?

FC: To not go home. Yeah, so it's, our lease, we actually just renewed for another year because, you know, hopefully, we'll be around. And for both my roommates, I don't think it would be unfair for me to say that like they both, we all appreciate it in our own ways, and they both appreciate, as do I, having a place to come that's not your parents' home. Like even if they could, like physically go home, they really appreciate just being here and not being home with their parents. [36:00] Not to imply that it's like, you know, awful family situations for either of

them. It's just nice to have your own space in a lot of ways. But so our lease went from, like, the start of May to the end of April. So we just renewed for another year. I think my decision was because I know that when I get home, like, you know, I have a great room at home, like family's at home, but I really appreciate, I really enjoy for myself, the sort of routines that I've made here and the like, just, you know, like, budding adulthood in a way where it's like, I go to the grocery store, I buy my own food, I cook my own food, I, you know, clean the house, I do all these sort of things that I've like, it's my own room and like the space that I've made that is for me in college and not for me in high school, or me in middle school, or me in elementary school. And I really just enjoy Providence. It's much more I mean, I can walk to things. [37:00] Arlington, Virginia, at least the part where I'm from, is very much suburbia. And it's like you drive everywhere. Which, I mean, it's like, it's nice to be home, but I don't want to be home for a while. And I knew that if, if I went home, there was a very good chance I'd get stuck there. There was talk in late March about like, state borders closing. And I just knew that as soon as I get home for a break, I immediately fall back into high school routines, and high school, like mindsets, I guess I'd say, and just really appreciate having the space here because I know that I can do, be more productive here, and like focus more here, and just feel better up here. Even though I do miss my parents, and my sister, and the dogs. Yeah. I'll provide supplement to the interview which is photos of the dogs. Photos of the cat. [38:00]

AK: I'm definitely open to any pet photos you have to share.

FC: I demand daily updates from my mom.

AK: I just have a couple of more questions that are totally, I'm going to ask you to speculate on the future of the universe.

FC: I've been doing a lot of that, so.

AK: Looking ahead to the summer, to the start of the fall semester, what do you think, what – are you expecting kind of changes as you look ahead or what, what when you think of COVID-19 and the future, what, what does that image kind of look like for you? Do you see a normal fall

semester? Or do you see your whole senior year being completely different than what you had imagined?

FC: I mean, I definitely see a fall semester. [39:00] And I don't know how much of that is wishful thinking.

AK: Right?

FC: I think a lot about "normal," and this rhetoric of "return to normal," especially with Biden as the assumed Democratic nominee, which I'm just heartbroken about. That was hard news to process when Bernie dropped out.

AK: Tell me a little bit about that. If, I don't want to take up too much of your time.

FC: No, I mean, I'm not I was never an ardent Bernie supporter, in the sense where like, I think also my mom did a very good job at turning me off from Bernie, because she had that, she very much has internalized this rhetoric of Bernie bros, like toxic masculinity, telling women what to think. And for me, Bernie was less about, like her impression of the sort of liberal, she's a big like Hillary Clinton fan. You know, we don't really talk about politics that much because talking about politics usually turns into me being like, [40:00] "Hillary Clinton represents a neoliberal, imperialistic war machine that you're complicit in." And like, you know, like, you know, "Rich white feminism is not feminism at all. Feminism should derive from the working classes." You know, it's like that scene in Monty Python, "Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony." You know, we're – sorry, we're big Monty Python fans, family. And it sort of devolves into that kind of like, which I think is very much a generational divide. But for me, I think Bernie Sanders represented a lot of hope for the fact that this crisis could wake the world up to how much, how capitalism is not inevitable.

AK: A new normal.

FC: And you know, the way that the current healthcare system is not inevitable and like that we

can change these things. And to me, it was less about like, Bernie Sanders as some sort of Jesus figure, which is what the media likes to be like, “oh, all the Bernie Sanders bros like are devoted to him and don’t believe in anything else.” [41:00] That’s not the case at all. It was this sense that maybe finally there was someone who would do something different. And so I think that the question of like, a return to normal after COVID-19 where I think that things will return to normal. And that that might not be the best thing. I’m, I’m hopeful that the fall semester will happen because I’m very attached to it. Senior year. Thesis plans. But I think it’s a question of how much things will go back to normal without a, without acknowledgement or the will to change a lot of the factors that made it into the crisis that it is. I think it’s a, is it a Marx quote, like, “the crisis is capitalism.” I’ve seen that floating around a lot on Twitter. [42:00] But like, I am confident that things will return to normal eventually, even if that normal is just back to a crappy healthcare system, and no acknowledgement of like continuing lasting effects, and like no changes to politics or to – I think healthcare, healthcare is the big one that I was hoping would, like people would wake up to it. And I don’t think people are. Just a sort of pessimistic view. And I hope that people will, but I, you know, I feel jaded at 21. I’m like, I don’t think we can ever change the world that much. The power is just too powerful.

But I think on a more sort of individual level, like I applied to a lot of summer internships. I got an interview at RISD, they turned me down, whatever. I’m not a little bit heartbroken about that. I mean, it’s competitive. I was going into like archives and museum work, and it’s competitive. But I don’t think that those are going to be happening, [43:00] you know, it’s going to be kind of interesting to explain a hole on my resume. The sentence I came up with was, “oh, all the opportunities I applied for were canceled because of the pandemic,” with no, with no mention of the fact that I did not actually get those opportunities.

AK: It’s probably, it’s probably not a lie, though.

FC: No, it’s not, it’s not a lie. It’s just a slight admission to the truth. But I think the question of like, will things return to normal? Like, yeah, probably. But it’s a question of like, what things will change because of this? I mean, one very small detail, my roommate and I went to the grocery store a couple days ago. And we were like, I think this is going to really normalize people wearing masks in public when they’re sick; people washing their hands. Like, I mean, I,

I'll admit that I was not the best at washing my hands before this. I was like, oh, I'll just like run some water, like maybe a little soap, just like one, two. All right, cool. Run. And now it's like I'm singing happy birthday twice.

AK: I was just going to say, now we're all singing songs.

FC: Now we're all singing happy birthday. [44:00] But was there another part to your question that I'm sort of missing?

AK: I have another question for when you're done with the last one.

FC: I mean, I think so it's just, one quote that I've seen floating around, I wish I knew who it, who to attribute it to, but the like, phrasing like, let this, like, do not let this lead you to despair, like, let this radicalize you, do not let it lead you to despair. And I've been thinking a lot about that, like, how can we shift this into something that like, shows people what's wrong?

AK: Sure. So my, my last question. If somebody listened to this interview tomorrow, what would you want them to know? And if they're listening to it 50 years from now, what do you want them to know?

FC: It's a weird consideration. Like, I know it's going into an archive, but it's still [45:00] strange to think about something so far away. I think tomorrow, and maybe 50 years from now, is that like all my answers to this have been based on how lucky I am and how shielded I am by a huge amount of privilege. I alluded to it earlier, but like I can stay here and not be reliant on income from a job that has been canceled or lost because like my parents are both wealthy, wealthy, even if they don't come from wealthy backgrounds like I, I'm fine. And that I think I will be coming out of this fine. Like I will be okay. I just am worried about the other people and I'm worried about everyone else. And – I think especially in the first couple of weeks I had [46:00] this, my roommate, and I were talking about, other roommate and I, were talking about this where we both had this sense that we were witnessing something that should be recorded. We were witnessing something historical, we were witnessing something that we should, like,

generate material for. Like we should diary, we should chronicle this, we should do something. And I, you know, every now and then, will open up my notebook and like write a little note about what, what my day looked like. And I appreciate the sort of drive and the opportunity to like, make artifacts. But I'm also like, this is one snapshot, and there is so much else that I do not think will be captured, or maybe needs to be captured. I'm not quite saying that coherently. But I've been thinking a lot about like, you know, history. Very Brown student answer. It's like, you know, like, "how are you doing?" "Oh, I'm just considering my, my mortality and history." I mean, I think it's [47:00] also sort of woken me up in a lot of ways to how I had not thought about death and like, had not thought about it for myself. Like one thing that's on my to do list is like writing a will because even though I trust that my family would be respectful of my wishes, like, I want to make those wishes clear. I mean, there's a, I read a really interesting statistic about like, percentage of young trans people that have wills versus young cis people that have wills, because there's so many things like you need to write down so your parents or family like don't do gender crap at your funeral.

AK: Would you be comfortable giving me some examples?

FC: Yeah, I mean, there's been like really awful stories about like next of kin is automatically your parents. And like young trans women have died and friends who showed up at the funeral have found them in a suit with their hair cut short. And like, that sort of stuff where like, even if you are estranged from your family, they still have [48:00] sort of rights to that. And like, even if I trust my family would not do that in any way, I think what the pandemic has sort of brought to the forefront is the way that like, that's something that I considered is very distinct from me. But again, like I'm not immediately worried about myself, other than, you know what my anxiety is telling me to worry about, which is everything and nothing at all. I think that's pretty much it.

AK: So that's all I have for you. Is there any last piece that maybe I didn't ask you about that you would like to get into the historical record before we close.

FC: I'm trying to think of, well, I guess the one thing I was thinking about, because I know that the archive is based around like gender and sexuality and like, [49:00] chronicling women's

experiences at Brown, and like trans and non-binary people at Brown, the funniest thing has been that, so I have been binding my chest for, I guess six years at this point. I mean to the, and I very much have like been noticing, especially in the last year, like very physical effects of that. Great posture from years of dance except for my shoulders. And a lot of sort of, like neck tension. My back muscles don't like me, my like, torso muscles don't like me. But now that I'm at home, I've like not been wearing a binder because I don't need to go out in public with that. It's also still cold enough that I can like wear sweaters and be fine. But it's been a very interesting experience for me to like, have the pandemic and be like, oh, it's finally a chance for me to like play around with clothing that I don't normally wear out. Like, play around with like hair and makeup that I don't normally wear out. Just because of like how I want to be seen [50:00] and how I want people to address me. And it's been a very strange experience to be like, oh, all those problems that I was hoping weren't caused by binding were caused by binding. Great. I mean, it's usually kind of a running joke that several times a day I just like turn and like my entire back just goes from, like, I mean everything, when everything compresses in. So I guess that's the, because I was thinking about, like, what I would be talking about, very much through the lens of like transness and gender. And that's like the one kind of funny thing that I've been keeping in mind as I live through this strange and, you know, "unprecedented" is the word everyone's stirring around – Unprecedented time.

AK: Is there anything else you'd like to add to that? Or maybe even, again, I don't – we're running up on an hour here almost, so I don't want to take up too much of your time, but more generally of [51:00] your experience as a trans person at Brown that you want to throw in? You don't have to.

FC: No. I can't really think too much about – I haven't like, I'm also not incredibly involved in like, like Queer Alliance or activism and that sort. I was much more in high school like involved with the school's GSA. But yeah, I think that's really, that's really most of it. Yeah, it's sort of thing where, you know, I could write an essay on it, but at the top of my head –

AK: Yeah.

FC: I don't have much to add. I've definitely, you know, written class essays about that before.

AK: Well, Finch this afternoon has been absolutely amazing.

FC: Thank you for reaching out to me.

AK: Of course. Thank you so much for donating an oral history today. I'm so excited to make it available for researchers. I think it's going to be really valuable. [52:00]

FC: If it's not clear, I love talking about myself.

AK: Well, that's that's one of the wonderful things of oral histories. I think everybody does. And so once you get people going it all just kind of flows.

FC: Exactly.

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