

Ian Davis-Huie 0:12

Hey there! Today is June 9th, 2020. I'm interviewing Anuja Palacharla, a rising senior at Wake Forest University, about her experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and she is currently in Atlanta, Georgia. We're talking today over Zoom. How are you today?

Anuja Palacharla 0:39

I'm doing good. It's been a good day so far, so...

Ian Davis-Huie 0:44

Good to hear! One second, I have to...My audio isn't quite working right now.

Anuja Palacharla 0:58

I didn't catch the first part of that.

Ian Davis-Huie 1:00

All right, there you go. Gotcha! I needed you to say something, so...

Anuja Palacharla 1:05

Oh.

Ian Davis-Huie 1:05

All right, I think we're good. Okay. All right. So um, here we go! Um, would you please talk about the first time you heard about COVID-19?

Anuja Palacharla 1:20

Um, you know, I can't really remember the first time I heard about it. I think I heard that there was like a virus going on and that it was kind of spreading from China. But I wasn't really like I don't actually remember like reading any articles about it, or like, caring about it really. One of my professors like, briefly mentioned it a couple times before we left for spring break, but I don't think there was like, I was like, "it's not really here, it's not a big deal." I wasn't paying attention a lot, so I don't quite remember.

Ian Davis-Huie 1:55

Do you remember the first time you realized it was going to affect your life?

Anuja Palacharla 2:00

Um, yes, that I do remember. It was, I think, the day before I left for spring break, and I had a professor who told me that we might not reconvene after spring break because of COVID. And I was like, "oh, this is like, not gonna happen." So then I think it was the Monday of spring break. I was at home and me and my sister had a huge argument about how serious we thought COVID was going to be. I was on the stance of, that, "oh, it's not as serious" and then my sister was like, "you've got to be kidding. Like, it's definitely gonna be a big thing." And I was like, "it's definitely a thing but it's not as serious as everything as like everyone's making out to be. Like,

no need to hoard toilet paper and all that nonsense." But that still happened. But I think the, the biggest thing that made me realize it was going to affect me was when Wake closed and like, told us we were going to do online. That probably had to be the moment I realized where it was actually a big deal, like, a super big deal and it was affecting us and affecting me a lot as well.

Ian Davis-Huie 3:06

Yeah. Do you personally know anyone who contracted COVID-19?

Anuja Palacharla 3:12

Um, me? Not really. My sister had a friend whose dad got COVID, but other than that, I don't know anyone who has personally gotten it.

Ian Davis-Huie 3:26

I know you live with your parents, a younger sister and your grandparents. Is that right?

Anuja Palacharla 3:31

Mm-hm. Yes.

Ian Davis-Huie 3:33

How has COVID-19 affected your relationships with them?

Anuja Palacharla 3:38

Um, well, I get to spend more time with my sister, which is like, super great. Like, I miss my sister and my sister and I are pretty close. So, me being at school in Wake Forest and my sister being here at home in high school, I don't get to see her very often, and we're not big phone people, (or she's not so she never like picks up the phone whenever I try to call her), so we don't really talk much. So it's nice, because I get to spend time with her. So I think that like, it's helped us get closer because we do spend so much time together. And then, it's the same thing. Like, I get to see my family, I get to see my grandparents, which is nice because they're also getting older. So there's always that like, little fear in the back of my mind that I'm not gonna be here when something like, serious happens. And like, it's kind of terrifying, but at least I'm home now, I get to see them, I get to spend time with them, which is nice.

Ian Davis-Huie 4:31

That's great. Um, how has COVID-19 impacted your relationships with other people, maybe outside of your family?

Anuja Palacharla 4:42

Um, well, I don't get to see my friends anymore, which kind of sucks. And then my, some of my high school friends who are in Atlanta, they live kind of far from my house, so I haven't had a chance to see them yet. So it's like, a lot of just talking on text or I don't know, Facebook, or even Zoom like me and my friends have started Zooming sometimes. It's, it's fun, we can Zoom and then we'll play games online. And then, I don't know. I don't have a ton of like, changed things. It's just it's different. Because we have to keep in touch in different ways than what we

used to do. Or like my friends from Wake; I used to see them every day, and then now I like talk to them every once in a while. I text them a lot, but it's just not the same because I don't get to see them. There's not physical human interaction anymore, which kind of sucks.

Ian Davis-Huie 5:40

Yeah. Has COVID-19 had an impact on your values at all?

Anuja Palacharla 5:48

Um, on my values? I don't think so. I think my values are pretty much the same. If anything, it's made me realize that some of my values are different from my parents, which, when I'm away from home, it's not as big of a deal, but like, at home, I feel it a lot more. I don't really know if it's a value, but like, our stance on drinking. I am 21, full disclosure. So, when I drink, it is legally. But at school, I do drink occasionally and safely. But my parents are big non-drinkers. So my mom doesn't drink at all, and my dad used to drink, but he doesn't drink either. And they kind of, I think, expect me not to drink either. So when I'm at home, that's something like, I have to keep from them. I think it's also just a consequence of having stricter brown parents. As an Indian, like, it's always like, that stereotype of, oh, parents don't let you do anything. And it's like, not that they don't let me do anything. It's just they're a little bit more strict in some cases. So I like, have to hide. Not "have to hide" things, but I do hide things from them sometimes. That's bad, I shouldn't have said that. Oh my God. It's fine.

Ian Davis-Huie 7:00

No, I completely understand. How do you (this is switching gears a little bit), how do you feel about re-engaging with society? Kind of, kind of the move to reopening that we're moving to?

Anuja Palacharla 7:19

I have mixed feelings because as someone who is interested in the medical field, I do, I am concerned about people's health. And then for me specifically, I live with my grandparents who are at risk because they're older. So I tend to worry more about them than I do about myself when I go out. Like, if in case I do get like, something, it's bad because I have them at home. I don't know. I think with re-opening and everything, it, we have to be careful. We can't just pretend everything is like, go back to the way things were and pretend everything's fine because it's not. We have to, I think measures of like, keeping social distancing, or wearing masks whenever possible, I think those are things that people need to follow more and they have to be like, careful of when they do go out. I think the main thing is like, as we reopen, everyone has to be careful and aware that they have to be safe and like, hygienic kind of thing. But I do think we do have to start reopening because our economy is going to take a hit if we don't, and we have got to or...I don't, I don't know the economy side of it. I don't. I'm not an economist, but it's my opinion.

Ian Davis-Huie 8:40

Do you feel (you obviously live in Atlanta which is one of the biggest cities in the South), do you, do you feel the, the, the urban response has been different from, say, the response in rural Georgia or other parts of the South that are more rural?

Anuja Palacharla 9:04

Um, I, I don't know actually. I couldn't, I couldn't tell you. I, honestly, when Atlanta started reopening, I did not agree with it, especially because one of the things they opened was massage parlors, and I looked at it and I was like, "you can't social distance in a massage parlor, like, you can't get a massage from six feet apart." But I mean, we opened regardless of what my thoughts were. I just, I thought it was too soon but I, it worked out. I don't think, the numbers, I think, have been growing, not "growing" growing, but like, they're a little up but also with riots and everything going on, there's a lot of people out and about, but I don't think there's been like, more hospitalizations, from what I can tell. Don't quote me on that, but my parents are both doctors so they're working around, in hospitals and stuff. Well, my dad works in hospitals, so he says that there's not a lot of new hospitalizations, so there's not, but there are a couple more cases: they're just not bad enough for having to go to the hospital, is what he says.

Ian Davis-Huie 10:16

You briefly mentioned the protests that have been happening across the country and across the world. How do you (such a, I think it's such a strange time to have both protests and a global pandemic), how do you feel about the, the balance between those two things?

Anuja Palacharla 10:38

Um, "the balance." I mean, I think the protests are like, good; they needed to be happening with everything going on and like, what they're protesting is a good cause. Um, and I think as long as like, from the pictures I've seen, a lot of people have been wearing masks and they're like, being safe, which I think is good. As long as like, people keep in mind that there is a pandemic going on, they have got to be safe and they wear masks like, I think it's okay. I don't know if that's the question you were asking. I don't know if I answered it, the way you wanted me, or like, what your...But I think it's, yeah, I don't know.

Ian Davis-Huie 11:17

Yeah, I think you answered it.

Anuja Palacharla 11:18

OK.

Ian Davis-Huie 11:20

Switching gears a little bit, how did you feel about virtual education as it happened in the second semester of your junior year at Wake Forest?

Anuja Palacharla 11:32

Um, I, it was hard. I'm a huge procrastinator, which is kind of bad and I need to fix that. But it's also hard because, with being online, I lost a lot of the motivation I used to have. And a lot of my classes, or most of my classes, they'd send us lectures to watch on our own time. So I'd end up putting them off until like, before an exam, like a week before the exam, when I'd sit and watch like, all of the lectures. Um, but I don't know. It didn't have the same feel as like, in person

classes and like, you don't get that same ability to like, question things when you're watching a recorded lecture as you would if you had questions in the middle of class and you can raise your hand and ask questions. So it was different but I don't know. It was weird. It worked, but it wasn't my favorite.

Ian Davis-Huie 12:33

Yes. I, I know you're a Biochemistry and Molecular Biology double major with a minor in Psychology. Is that right?

Anuja Palacharla 12:42

Yes. It's, it's one major, it's not a double major, it's just, like...

Ian Davis-Huie 12:45

It's not a double major? Oh man!

Anuja Palacharla 12:47

No, it's just one major.

Ian Davis-Huie 12:48

Ah! Shows how much I know about it. Has COVID-19 changed your views or perspective on your studies at Wake Forest with your one major and one minor?

Anuja Palacharla 12:51

Um, I don't know if it's really like, changed my views or perspective on my major. I don't know. That's actually really interesting because a lot of my classes had like, a lecture about COVID because I'm learning about like, different things with Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. So we talked about COVID. And like, the virus itself, because it was kind of in-line with what we were learning in class as well. So I think that was like, really interesting, that my professors like, added a lecture about COVID. And its specific, the specific virus itself, which was, I think, pretty cool. I don't know if it's like, changed my perspective on things, really. But it's interesting.

Ian Davis-Huie 13:45

I may be wrong here: I believe the, Coronavirus is a term for a kind of virus. Is that right? Like, Coronavirus is a kind of virus and COVID-19 is the specific kind of Coronavirus. Is that right?

Anuja Palacharla 14:01

Yes. Yeah.

Ian Davis-Huie 14:03

Had you ever heard of the other kinds of Coronavirus before this had happened?

Anuja Palacharla 14:09

No. I have not actually. So this is interesting because this is the first time I heard about it, but then we like learned about the past COVID kind of, the SARS-CoV-1, which is also, this is,

Corona is also like, the Coronavirus now is also SARS-CoV-2, which is something, I can't remember what SARS count, like, stood for. I think respiratory something something, but like, there was another SARS-CoV-1 apparently, but we learned about that a little bit, which is interesting, but I hadn't heard about it before, before COVID came into our life.

Ian Davis-Huie 14:48

That's really interesting. I want to ask about, uh, there's a term thrown around a lot now: the "new normal". What has been your "new normal" over the past few months?

Anuja Palacharla 15:02

Um, well, my "new normal" really is just staying at home, FaceTiming my friends occasionally, and then when I do go out, wear a mask, and like, hand sanitizer like, the crap out of my hands. But it's mostly just me and my sister at home all day watching a lot of TV, especially now that school is over. But, I think that's really, I don't know, I think that's the "new normal" really, just at home most of the time.

Ian Davis-Huie 15:36

Is TV the biggest hobby or biggest activity you've picked up in this free time?

Anuja Palacharla 15:43

Um, I guess. I do watch more TV than I used to, but that's just because now I have more time, especially with the school out and like, the semester being over and I have a little bit more free time. I have started doing puzzles again, which is like something I used to do way back in high school but I haven't done since then. So I actually finished the puzzle that I started in high school and then have done like, two more, because I have a lot of time on my hands and it was just another way, it's something else to do rather than just watch TV all day. I have also started cooking a little bit more. I've got to, I've got to make lunch for me and my sister, usually, so I started learning a little bit more like, how to cook which is pretty fun. I like cooking in the first place. I used to bake a lot, so that also has come back a little bit.

Ian Davis-Huie 16:41

That's awesome. Um, you said you did puzzles. Do you mean like, jigsaw puzzles, like with little pieces?

Anuja Palacharla 16:49

Yeah, jigsaw puzzles.

Ian Davis-Huie 16:50

Oh, wow. Awesome!

Anuja Palacharla 16:53

Yeah, I'm currently working on one actually. It's downstairs, but let's see, I've gotten a couple, couple done in the last couple months.

Ian Davis-Huie 17:04

That's great! That's cool. How was your transition into this "new normal" of jigsaw puzzles and television and cooking? And what factors of your life affected this process as it happened?

Anuja Palacharla 17:23

Um, well I guess, because I was already at home for spring break, it was pretty easy for me just to stay here and not go anywhere, which is super nice. I don't know. Like, I guess having like, my parents and my sister also doing the same thing, (well, my sister especially because she transitioned from like, regular school to online school as well), it was a little nicer to have someone else in like, the same boat as me, um, 'slash' at home, and then having my parents here for like, support and like, being able to talk to my friends over the phone, so, while we talk about things and talk about school and stuff, it was nice, it was easier, made things a little easier transitioning, I think.

Ian Davis-Huie 18:10

That's great. Did your sister graduate this year or does she have more years in high school left?

Anuja Palacharla 18:15

No, she's got more years. She's a rising sophomore in high school.

Ian Davis-Huie 18:19

Rising sophomore!

Anuja Palacharla 18:20

Yeah, she's a young'un.

Ian Davis-Huie 18:21

That's awesome! That's great. I want to get your thoughts (we touched on this briefly earlier): specifically through the lens of Wake Forest, do you think, how do you think re-opening should, er, reopening or, or not? How do you think that should go down in the fall?

Anuja Palacharla 18:52

I really, really, really want Wake to open again, because I don't, I think I would actually go crazy if I was stuck at home for like another semester, and having to do schoolwork from home for another semester. But I think it's gonna be hard. And we also still have like two, two-and-a-half months, so, depending on like, how this virus plays out kind of thing, we've got to keep an eye on it. But I don't think we can go back to the way we were before. There's definitely going to have to be measures of us being like, cognizant of and like, of others and being aware and like, being safe and not having large group meetings, either and like, trying to social distance as much as possible, wearing masks, maybe, when we go to class kind of thing, if we do reopen and do have on campus regular classes. Um, but I don't know. Like, I really do want Wake to open up again, but I have no idea honestly. And it's definitely, can't go back to like, what we were before Corona like it's, it's going to take a while, I think.

Ian Davis-Huie 20:07

Does the fact that it's your, it's, you're coming into your senior year. Does that affect your opinions on it at all?

Anuja Palacharla 20:15

Probably.

Ian Davis-Huie 20:15

With graduation looming.

Anuja Palacharla 20:17

Probably a little bit because I do, it is my senior year so I just like, I want to be able to spend my senior year on campus. So that's like, another factor of me wanting campus to re-open. I also do study in the library. Like, the library is my favorite place, so I do like, most of my work in the library, so being home and trying to do work is a lot harder, because I'm so used to working in the library. So that's just a, yet another reason I want things to re-open, but I don't know. Unfortunately, my want is not what I always get. But as long as everyone is like, whatever we do, people are still safe, that is like, good, I think.

Ian Davis-Huie 21:00

I will admit, I did not write this question. But I wanted to ask: if you were to talk to yourself from four months ago, what, what would you say to yourself?

Anuja Palacharla 21:12

Um, I would probably tell myself to cherish the time I have with my friends right now and like, being able to hang out with them in person because I don't get to do that now as much. That's probably what I would tell myself. I'd also tell myself to take COVID a lot more seriously than I did four months ago, because it does end up becoming a big deal, a lot bigger than I thought it was originally going to get. So, yeah.

Ian Davis-Huie 21:53

Do you think, do you think, (and you can answer this kind of generally, talking about the world or just through your own experience), do you think COVID-19 will, in the future, once, once we have re-opened, do you think that will lead us to cherish more of the time we spend in the outside world or cherish large events more, or cherish some of the things we've lost the ability to do during this time?

Anuja Palacharla 22:31

Oh, definitely. I definitely think like, things like going to the movie theater, which we can't do right now and things like that are going to be a lot more valuable, like, especially to like, people who used to go to movies a lot, who can't go to movies, or like, people who used to do things a lot that they can't do anymore, those kind of things I feel like, COVID is going to help us like, make us cherish it more, because we know what it's like to not have those things as much. Yeah, I think so.

Ian Davis-Huie 23:05

Well, I would agree with that. And I want to thank you for talking to me today. Uh, great interview, and hope you stay safe. Hope to talk to you soon.

Anuja Palacharla 23:19

Thank you!

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