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## April Torrez Interview 2022

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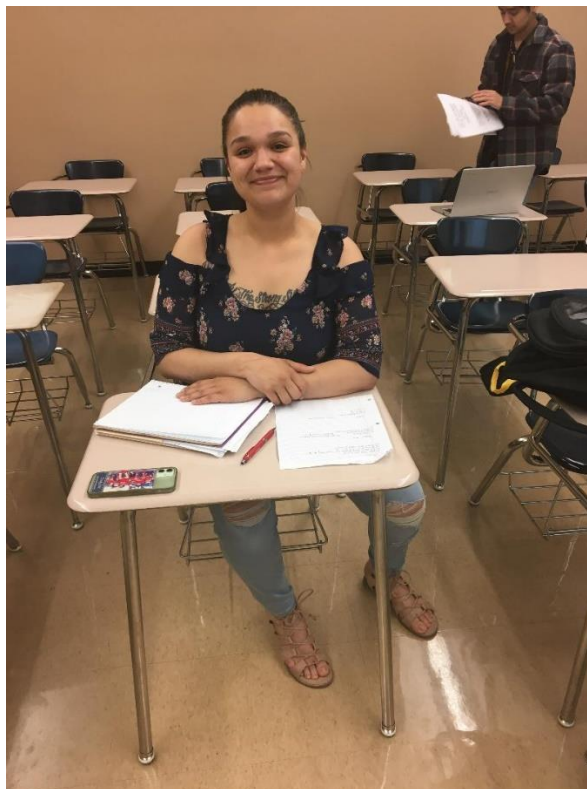
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**Narrator: April Torrez (AT)**

**Interviewer Thomas Sweet (TS)**

**Date: May 23, 2022**

**April Torrez\_OralHistoryAudio\_2022**

*[Transcribed by Thomas Sweet, June 2022; audited and edited by Donna Sinclair, June 10, 2022]*

[Interview begins]

TS: So, hi my name is Thomas Sweet and this is my oral history interview for Covid Stories for public history, and I'll be interviewing April Torrez.

April Torrez: I'm April Torrez. I was born on April 18, 1994 and I'm from Silverton, Oregon. But I've lived in Salem most of my life.

TS: Okay, so start out with some questions. So, tell me about your early experience with covid like where were you, what were you doing in your life before covid?

AT: Um, well I was a stay-at-home mom. I wasn't working at the time. And I was just home with my kids. I had just had a little baby. 'Cause Covid's been like for two years now? Yeah. So,

my son he was one years old and so I was just like at home, I was just home and then I learned that I wouldn't be able to leave home even though I was there all the time. [laughs]

TS: What do you recall, like where were you when you first heard about Covid like being a thing when it was over in China?

AT: Um... I think that my dad actually called me and told me what the virus was and like what was going on because I wasn't really staying that informed like with that news stuff and I think I saw on Facebook but I think what really, when I really learned what it was because my dad called and told me that I really needed to keep my son inside because we're both severely asthmatic. So yeah, I just remember. it's just really blurry because I've done so much through Covid but when I first found out I think my dad told me.

TS: Okay, where were you or what were you doing when you found out the world was, or this state in particular was gonna shut down? That would have been that would have been April 13, 2020 or March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

AT: March 13, 2020? Um.

TS: It was right before spring break:

AT: So, wait sorry what was your question again Can you ask me?

TS: So, like what was your reaction when the state was gonna shut down that would have been hmm March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

AT: Well, I was getting ready for my birthday [laughs]. My birthday's next month, um, honestly, I'm a single mom and I'm like always home with my kids, so at the time I was just like I was home at my house, probably just doing like, everyday normal stuff. I was in Salem, though, like I lived in Salem Oregon, and then after—I remember after I learned that there was a shutdown, I decided I was gonna go to school. Like right when they told me that everything was going to shut down, I was like, "This is it, I'm going to school, and I'm going to do it online."

TS: Did you feel like scared at all or did you feel like anxious about like, how long is this gonna last?

AT: Yeah, a lot of it was like being uncertain because, honestly when the virus first came out, I thought it was more like the government trying to do something, or like what my theory was because I had never really been through something like that before and it made me very um, I felt very, yeah like really uncertain, and not sure who to trust, as in like who I was getting information from like everything that was going on.

TS: Yeah, that was really difficult.

AT: Mm-hm.

TS: What was the general atmosphere like? Like what what did you notice the general atmosphere was like as the covid shutdown ramped up, because at the beginning it was only

minor, just minor restrictions and then over the next month they kept adding more and more restrictions?

AT: Um. I guess for me I felt like, really out of place because it was pretty much like they were telling us not to be close to people, not to hug people, not to like be near people and that's like the kind of person I am. I embrace people, I always shake my friend's hand or give you a hug or talk with you, you know what I mean? Like when I went to the grocery store and people were like looking at me like I was crazy if I was next to them, it was, it was really scary and I really didn't like it.

TS: So how did you, like, respond to a lot of the, so like the mask wearing, when that first happened, how did you respond to that?

AT: So, I wore my mask. Or you know, what? I'm not gonna lie. Actually, when it first started, I wasn't as—I didn't want to wear my mask all the time and then I got sick and, I didn't get covid but I did get covid later on, and I just got sick and then I got really scared that I was gonna get the virus, and then I remember that, and then I always wore the mask. And my son, he actually ended up in the hospital because he has asthma. And then, after being in the hospital, too, and experiencing like the whole covid thing and how they treated us at the hospital, and then after that I always wore my mask because I truly understood how serious it was, especially being like in the hospital environment.

TS: How did you notice the people around you or close to you responding to the virus?

AT: I feel like everyone that was close to me that I loved had high strung anxiety at the time, because we were always having to stay home and then I remember, I didn't even want to take my kids to the park because I was scared that they would get sick there – for the longest. And then my kids got stressed out too because they were just always sitting at home and they didn't like that. That's what I noticed. I noticed the high stress levels for people.

TS: What was your like experience during like quarantine, the like shutdown, did you find that it was like impacting you more positively or negatively?

AT: So, I can say a little bit of both because I have, I have really, I have an anxiety and stuff and I have post-traumatic stress disorder. So being cooped up in the house was really hard for me but I learned to cope through it. And one thing that I did get from covid was just getting some time with my children, like really getting to just spend every moment with them and it made me, really made me appreciate my kids and my time with them a little more. That was one thing I can say that I got from it.

TS: Anything like really negative stand out?

AT: From?

TS: From, from like quarantine.

AT: Well, like are you asking me like from when we got shut down and then just everyone had to stay inside?

TS: Yeah.

AT: I just didn't like it. [chuckles]

TS: In what ways, like work or like school change?

AT: So, like prior to covid I hadn't worked in a while and I had just been at home and I didn't have anyone to help me with my kids at home. But after covid hit and I had my baby and he was 8 months and a year old and I had been telling myself I wanted to start school. Then I saw that, I learned that all classes were gonna be on zoom for like Chemeketa and I was at home with my kids anyway, so I figured why not go, apply for school?

So, I signed up for school and I finished my Associates of Arts transfer degree through the covid pandemic. That's one thing I accomplished. And I'm really proud of that. Honestly, I don't know if I would be here right now if it wasn't for covid, at Western, because I finally got the—I had no help with my kids at all. I was all on my own. I was having a really hard time and then the virus hit and then it was like I could do school from my table, holding my son. And I did it and I finished. Covid sucks but that's one thing that I'm grateful for. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, what was the most challenging or what hardships did you face in terms of, like, as quarantine dragged on?

AT: So, some like some hardships I faced in covid was my friend Debbi died from covid. My son's grandma also passed away, too, and when she passed away, she had covid but they don't know if that's what it was. But yeah, I dealt with losing some people through the virus. I don't know if that's what you're asking, but that's a hardship I faced, I guess.

TS: Were you on campus at all or here at all during when they still had restrictions?

AT: Well, I started here, at WOU in the fall, and when I got here, we had to wear the mask and stuff, but, oh yeah, actually yes. So, that's one thing that I wanted to say in my interview was—I had to get a vaccine because I go to school here and I did not want to, I didn't want to get the vaccine because I wasn't, I don't know, I was just kind of scared of it but now I have it, and I don't really care. But that's one thing, I had to get my vaccine when I moved here.

TS: How did you deal with like so like shopping when when like early on earlier May 2020, how did that change for you?

AT: Shopping?

TS: Yeah.

AT: Well, we were using a lot of wipies in my house because [laughing] nobody had any toilet paper. So, for me it was the same. I would just go by myself to go shopping and I would go once a month to get all my food. But yeah, the thing that changed is going, I would go to the stores and there wouldn't be nothing on the shelves that I needed. [laughs] You know what I mean? I get there and there was no toilet paper, there was not paper towels. There was nothing.

TS: Yeah. That tends to happen. Did you have any like direct experience with covid like getting it?

AT: Yeah, yeah, I got covid. I had it, [and] it was really, really hard and really, really painful. I had it for like, I was sick for like a month and my, my little baby got sick too. I never ended up getting him a covid test 'cause like we just stayed home but he got sick for me. I was actually nursing, like I was breastfeeding him at the time and so he had to be close to me, so it was really hard to have a mask on and try to nurse your baby. Especially 'cause, I mean, my whole body was in pain, like just to hold the little guy was hurting me. But at the same time, the breast milk was, you know, was one thing that would protect him. It was very stressful because, like breast milk you know kind of has antibodies in it and he was getting that stuff that fights off bacteria.

TS: How did like you or your family handle like covid policies, so like restriction on like traveling between states or like personal gatherings?

AT: I didn't travel at all. And then, I remember I felt so weird. I had one birthday party for my kids and only had a few, four people, like a few people there and that is not something that I do because I always give my kids a kick butt party, like a big ole huge thing but yeah, we followed the restriction in my family.

TS: Like okay and then like who did you spend the shutdown period with?

AT: So, with my kids, Ryder, Angie, and Julius, and I had actually. I have, my boyfriend I've been with him for two years now, and we actually met right after covid, and I spent most of the pandemic with him and his children and my kids, like all of us together.

TS: Okay, so when like when summer 2020 happened with all the protests in Portland, how did you feel when all of that started happening? How did you feel when all of that started up?

AT: I felt, like, hurt that I couldn't participate because I have kids that I have to take care of. But the issues that people were pressing are ones that hit home for me, so you know I understood everything that was going on, and like I still do understand why that stuff happened. But at the time I was scared for my friends and my family that's black, yeah.

TS: Were any of your family or friends like impacted by like the protests that were happening in Portland?

AT: Yeah, actually my brother Joey, he actually lived in Portland at the time and he would have to—he was in treatment, so he would have to walk to work, and he would walk to work at like 10:00 o'clock at night. He would get off, and he would walk, actually walk right through a protest/riot thing, and he ended up being caught in it and he actually almost got hurt, but he actually, he left. But yeah, he was telling me that people were breaking things and police were trying to arrest him but he just got caught in the crossfire.

TS: Okay, and then with the weird weather in the fall, going into September with all the smoke, how did that go? Did it, like, complicate things at all?

AT: Well, for me, since I'm severely asthmatic, like I have really bad asthma and so is my son, we were miserable in that time. Do you mean like with all the dust?

TS: Smoke.

AT: The smoke and the dust. Yeah, me and my son, we couldn't leave the house and then I accidentally had left my air conditioner in the window for one day and all that dust particles had come into our house. And it was like no matter what I couldn't get everything out. And it just felt like, we just felt like we couldn't breathe and then it was also like, it also kind of felt like the end of the world or something. I was, like, scared, because every day I would wake up and the sky was different. There would be smoke and, like, yeah, it was just scary.

TS: For a while Portland had the second worst air quality in the world, at one point.

AT: That's crazy. It reminded me of, 'cause in Klamath they don't have really good air there either, in Klamath Falls, and it reminded me of that.

TS: So, what, another weather thing—but, how about the ice storms? It would have been February 2021; how did you feel about that?

AT: Ice storm, ice storm?

TS: When all the power got knocked out.

AT: Oh! Oh, so when all the power got knocked out, I was lucky that I never lost my power. And it was crazy because where I live, right across the street, like just like a regular road where houses are on the other side of the road, that whole side went black, like everybody lost their power but I never did.

TS: Hmm.

AT: I just kept praying and my God saw me right through that. [laughs]

TS: There were a lot of people who lost power for over a week.

AT: I know, my father, my pops, he didn't have power for like three weeks. He was staying in motels and stuff.

TS: Were you, let's see... when stuff started opening back up, like earlier this year, how did you feel about it?

At: How did I feel when everything started opening up?

TS: Yeah.

AT: I felt happy 'cause I felt like you know maybe we are moving towards this like, it's gonna be back to normal, and you know the virus hopefully is gonna hopefully go away. And wait, can you ask me that question again? I'm sorry.

TS: Like how did you feel when stuff started opening back up?

AT: Oh, oh, so I like felt good, but then at the same time I did feel a little bit scared. Because I thought, maybe if everything starts opening up, then we're gonna get sick again or something. So there's always that thought in the back of my mind. But I was happy.

TS: How did you feel during like, during the elections of 2020 and like just immediately afterwards?

AT: You mean like when Trump won?

TS: No, like elections 2020 when Biden won.

AT: When Biden won? Um... I felt happy that Trump wasn't our leader anymore, to be honest. I wasn't following with politics a lot because like I, I just wasn't every time I would turn something like that on when he was the president, I just couldn't even watch it. So, the thought of him being gone and someone new coming made me feel better. But I'm not gonna sit here and say like that I know about everything that they stand for; you know, but I thought that Biden becoming president was something positive.

TS: Yeah, how did you feel about all of the election fraud claims that happened, like immediately afterward?

AT: Like about Biden winning?

TS: Yes, or did you hear about that?

AT: I heard about that kinda, and you know politics are crooked no matter what, but like I think that is wrong, if that's true. What was it again that they were trying, that Trump was supposed to win?

TS: They were saying that stuff was counted after because you have a certain amount of laws about, like you can't count votes or you have to stop counting after a certain time. There's claims that illegal stuff happened behind the scenes. By the Republicans.

AT: Well, that sucks, but honestly it was brought to light in that time that that happens, but that's been happening for years and years and years, the whole way that our elections are set up is kinda, but I will say I don't know, it sucks. I think that its wrong that that happened. [laughs]

TS: It reminds me a lot of um Bush and Gore with the Florida recount. Where they recounted it was it three times. It reminds me of that.

AT: You know it's funny that election happened when I was in kindergarten. I remember I voted for Al Gore with my teacher in my classroom. [laughs] Yeah.

TS: Yeah, so let's see. So, then how did you feel about January 6<sup>th</sup>?

AT: What was January 6<sup>th</sup>?

TS: So, like when there was the big rally that the Republicans did, like the Republican supporters did, and then as they were ratifying the votes, they stormed they stormed the capitol building.



AT: Oh, you mean when he told them to? He told them to go? You mean the Trump supporters, right? I felt like that is bad and everything, but it was definitely a demonstration of loyalty to that man, like you could see that that guy had a lot of loyal followers. I don't really know all of the details of that stuff; you know what I mean?

TS: Did you see the, like, like they were like breaking stuff they were breaking through they were breaking into the building?

AT: I heard about that. Well that comes to show that you know everybody does their own demonstrations when they believe in something, I guess.

TS: Yeah.

AT: I don't think that that's right.

TS: There were Confederate flags in the building for the first time, like that never even happened during the Civil War.

AT: Really, really?

TS: There were never there were never Confederate flags in the capitol ever.

AT: It just shows that the race, it just shows all those people's racism, and like their beliefs and their, like I don't even know what to say about that.

TS: Because nothing like that had ever happened before. So, um is there any like how did you so let's see was there any um so, like you weren't involved with any of the protests at all? Did you know anybody who were involved with the protests?

AT: Some people from my church were in the protests, but I wasn't involved, so like I wasn't out there like marching. But the way that I, like I love someone that's Black, and all my step kids are Black, so when all that stuff is going on, it's really, it really becomes scary, and stuff. Like I wasn't in any protest, but I felt like we were our own protest every day, because when we would go out in public, people would look at us and stuff differently. When people, like something like that is going on in the world, there's some people around that get mad at black people, you know? So, when we'd go out, some people would look at us mad, at my kids. Or like, just they would give them dirty looks. That's one thing that I experienced during the protests and all the demonstrations that were going on.

TS: Okay, how were like institutions that you were connected with affected? So, like you going to school? Like, did you feel did you feel like the changes were positive?

AT: For with covid?

TS: For with going to school and like the way the way the classes changed?

AT: Like with covid and zoom? Honestly, yeah, because I thrived when it was on zoom. I was an alumni at Chemeketa, I got straight A's. For some reason, I can learn better in that environment. I have a learning disability so it's hard for me to remember stuff but when I was at home and I was comfortable, it was easy for me to learn easier.

TS: Wrapping up. So, what has this covid experience meant for you or is there anything you want to add?

AT: Well, I would say that through covid I learned a lot about the world, myself, my family, my kids. One thing that I can definitely say is that I became more optimistic, and I'm closer to my family. And, even though covid was a hard experience, I feel like God gave us all that battle to fight so that we could all be better as a people. Because we're all going to make it through it; you know what I mean?

TS: Yeah.

AT: Yep.

TS: Well, thank you.

AT: Mm-mm.

[Interview Ends]