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## Donna Sinclair Interview 2022

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**Narrator:** Dr. Donna Sinclair

**Interviewer:** Astra Underhill

**Date:** May 24, 2022

**Place:** Dr. Sinclair's office in Bellamy 111, Western Oregon University. Monmouth,  
Oregon.

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[Transcribed by Astra Underhill June, 2022: audited by Astra Underhill May, 2022]

Astra Underhill: My name is Astra Underhill and I'm here interviewing Dr. Donna Sinclair and her office at Bellamy. The date is May 24, 2022. And we are going to be interviewing her about her COVID story.

Dr. Donna Sinclair: Thank you, Astra.

AU: Yeah, thank you. So when it came to the early points of COVID, what was your life like before COVID? And then the point in which it led up- What was your life like before the lead up to COVID? Essentially.

DS: Okay, I was teaching here at WOU in the history department. And it was my first year here, I was traveling back and forth from my home and Washougal, Washington. And fortunately, my son lives in Salem. So I'm able to spend the night at his house while I'm here. So I think I was teaching Tuesday, Thursday, I honestly don't remember for sure. So usually, I drive down one morning spend, I think two nights at their house and then drive back that night, so I could be at home with my dogs. And what I remember about the early part of COVID, was kind of seeing some news reports on the television about what was happening in China. And then my father called me a couple of times, and I don't talk to him all that often and I have a great relationship with him but he's not, we just can't connect very often because he lives in New Hampshire. And I remember him calling me and then even sending me a text and saying, you know, you really need to pay attention to what's going on. And so I was sort of alerted to it and read about it a little bit. And then one of my first memories of realizing that things were just kind of strange, was a student in one of my classes, had a spray bottle of some sort of, you know, antiseptic, and

like wiped her desk off, and everything. And I thought, well, that's interesting that she's doing that. And that was, I think, not even the week that we closed down, but the week before we closed down. The other story I'll share about that week is so I think it was March 13. Right? Of 2020-

AU: Yes.

DS: -that we closed, that everything just shut down. And so it was right before spring break. I didn't remember that till our class was talking about it.

AU: Yeah.

DS: And that's our public history class that we're in, right? And I had completed writing, co-writing a memoir of Gloria Brown, it's called Gloria Brown and the Unmarked Trail to Forest Service Leadership. And it's sitting right over there. There's a copy of it. But we- It had just come out from OSU press in February of 2020, for Black History Month. So Gloria was the first African American female forest supervisor in the country. And she was in the Soyuz law National Forest. I think you've heard about that before.

AU: Yes.

DS: But we think it was March 7, we did a talk together at the Oregon Historical Society. And we did that talk about the book. It was to launch the book. So it was published by OSU press.

And there were a lot of people that I knew who were there, a lot of people that she knew, and we all kind of knew that COVID was around. So people were doing things like bumping elbows.

And-

AU

[laughs] I remember that! All of the various ways that people would greet each other, yeah.

DS: Yeah, that was happening, and which seemed very strange. And the talk went great. And Gloria had cancer. And so we'll come back to that in a moment. So after the talk, she and I and my husband and her partner and her kids and grandkids all went out to eat. And we had a great time. We'd never all been out together before. She and I worked on the book for many years, a lot of it was over FaceTime. So which is kind of funny. But anyway, so we went out to eat, we had a great dinner, and that was March 7, and it was the next week that everything shut down. And I've talked to her a few times, but she had leukemia, and she ultimately died in September. So I didn't see her again after that. I did talk to her a couple of times until she was- Well the day she died. I actually went over to her house. So anyway, that's so that's kind of my- That's all wrapped up. The other thing I was doing at the time, I was doing a lot. The other thing I was doing at the time was I was running for the state legislature.

AU: Wow. I remember that, yeah.

DS: I was on a school board and then I was- Well you can remember me running for school board but I was actually running for state legislature in Washington, Washington State and

southwest Washington. So it was a really crazy busy time and then everything shut down. And I don't know if you have another question. But I can tell you what that was like.

AU: Yeah, let's go straight into that. What was it like with pretty much... I wanna say, were all the aspects of your life, especially with your career kind of shutting down with COVID? Yeah?

DS: Oh, no, no. So it didn't mean that we didn't have spring term right?

AU: [laughs] Yeah.

DS: So the term ended, there's only one week between winter and spring term. During that week, we have to have our grades turned in, I believe, usually by 10am on Tuesday morning, and then school starts back up on Monday. And I was also teaching a class at WSU Vancouver. And so during that week, in between what I had to do was figure out how to use Zoom, which I'd never used before. So because I'm at two different universities, I'm a non-tenure track professor, I went ahead and just purchased Zoom for myself so that I could always use my link instead of- I- All of this software was a lot.

AU: It was, it was!

DS: I went through trainings at- I think I went through training at WSU Vancouver, I went through training at WOU. And I guess I was also working on my syllabi, to teach US history. So teach US history. I think I was in the winter, that winter term I had been teaching Gender and

Public Policy, and then also Pacific Northwest history. So I think I was teaching. It's funny, it seems like years ago, right? The whole concept of COVID time. And then I was getting ready for my classes. And I was supposed to be making 500 phone calls a week for the campaign. So it was so no things did not shut down for me. I was at home and it was nice to not have to drive.

AU: Yeah, I was gonna ask, with you having to drive all the way from Washington to Salem, did commuting stop for you, or was it- It stopped?

DS: Oh, commuting stopped completely. So my husband is 12 years older than I am and I'm in my 50s. And so we were cautious and we stayed home. So after a while, I got my Zoom setup, got my classes set up to function on Zoom. And in fact, even though WOU was out for spring break, WSU Vancouver was not. It's a semester system. So I was teaching, still, during that week.

AU: Oh, gotcha.

DS: But I didn't go anywhere. In fact, I didn't go anywhere for a long time. We ordered our groceries online, mostly. My husband went and did that. I'm wondering if I should shut the window. It's a lot of noise out there.

AU: Possibly.

DS: I think I'm going to do that. We had it open for COVID purposes. For the tape, but this is beyond just hearing some football out there which is what I heard at first.

AU: Yeah, I thought it was just music.

DS: That's much quieter. Yeah. Okay, so we had a little bit of WOU sound on the tape.

AU: [laughs] Yeah.

DS: Anyway, where was I?

AU: Um...

DS: Commuting.

AU: Commuting, yeah.

DS: Right, commuting. So yeah, I was so incredibly busy during that time getting classes set up online. I had- I that was my first year with Moodle.

AU: Oh, okay.



DS: But I did know how to use it, it was the third quarter. But I'd never used Moodle before so there was that too. But luckily, I guess fortunately for me, I was already using Moodle. I know some people really didn't do online kinds of the learning management system stuff. I was already doing that. So that's- I guess that's a good thing. So I was doing that. Yeah, I didn't. I didn't go out very much. I live in a suburban neighborhood though. And as things were kind of crazy around the country. And I was hearing about New York City and how people were shutting their apartments for months at a time. I was feeling really fortunate because I live in a suburb where there's a little park about- It's about two blocks away. And it's not just a little green park, it's literally woods with a creek running through it. And it's across from- Not very far from a wildlife refuge. It's just this little oasis, a friend of mine calls it our pocket woods. I'm right in the middle of the suburbs, and there's a road over on one side and a road on the other side and the school district on the other. So I got to take walks and I started jogging during that time, but I didn't get slimmer. That was- [laughs] I went the other direction during COVID.

AU: [laughs] Um, so like, during this time when you were just staying at home, like how actually how many kids do you have?

DS: So I have three grown children and I have two grandchildren. My daughter had had a baby in August of 2020. And so this was- This was what March? So she was just a little baby. And, um, and there was no vaccine. Remember? In the beginning, there was no vaccine and, and there was a sense of not really knowing how dangerous it was. People were dying, especially older people. And in other countries, we were seeing it. And so we were pretty cautious. I didn't see my- I didn't see my kids for quite a while, I talked to them-

AU: I was gonna ask that yeah, like the separation from your kids. Like, do you remember how long? Like what- How much span of time was it like, the last time, to the time again, that you saw your kids?

DS: I think March until, I believe, I saw them once in August, or September for a birthday outside. And then I really didn't see them again until Christmas. So my daughter- My daughter is the one who has children. And so she had the baby. And then my granddaughter at the time, my granddaughter who's now 16 was almost 14. And she used to live with me and she actually does live with me again. So it was really strange. And I didn't see them until Christmas. And then- And then I got my vaccine in I think March and then I started seeing them a lot more and was able to reconnect. My son who lives in Salem, I think I saw him in the summertime? It's really interesting to reflect on this because there were people who were outdoors, who were spending a lot of time together. And if the CDC hadn't said that being outdoors is mostly okay- And so, you know, I was following the protocols. And in retrospect, I look back and say, well, I could have spent- We started seeing people outside a little bit. But mostly we just stayed home. And my husband- My husband grew a garden. I did not have time to grow a garden I was doing- I couldn't go door knocking during my campaign. I had to make phone calls. So- So I was doing all of those phone calls. I was doing online, um, Zoom discussions with Donna, so I do interviewing. So I did a bunch of that, that was partly how I did outreach was to actually connect with community leaders and interview them. And on Facebook Live, something I'd never done before. I kind of developed a pretty heavy online presence because I'm a Democrat and Democrats, we're not door knocking. Republicans were door knocking. I lost. [laughs] So, you

know, it wasn't a terrible loss considering my district is barely red. But it was, it was interesting. It's interesting in retrospect, to kind of think about that, because there are things I know now that I would do differently. But we were being- The nation was being pretty cautious. Not everyone. There's a lot of political strife going on. So the first time that I went out in public really was for a rally, a BLM rally in, I don't even remember what month it was. I think it might have been August of 2020 in my little town. So I live in Washougal, which has 17,000 people.

AU: Oh, wow.

DS: I live next to Camas which has 22,000 people and so there's a Safeway in each of our towns and they are only a few miles apart. And so a group of young people in our town I think from Camas High School, organized a rally that summer and had people walk from Washougal and from the Camas Safeway, and we joined together in the middle and it was the first time I had actually been out around people. So we made signs and it was really great to get out nationally to see people and Domino's Pizza came out and gave us some pizza.

AU: Nice!

DS: But then we also walked by a gun store where there were people- I mean, there were so many rumors flying around about ANTIFA and BLM and it was just- It was a crazy time. And so there was somebody on the roof of the local gun store and two of them in sniper position. Um, there- Because there were these rumors. So for people who are on the far right that- that Antifa

was coming to town, this was kind of an underground thing. I knew that that wasn't the case but yeah.

AU: So like with COVID and then like political upheavals and discourse, do you think that there is definitely an intermingling of the two when it came to COVID and politics? And then everything else within society, I guess, like, did you? Did you see those overlaps? Quite a bit? Yeah?

DS: I did. And so because I was running for office. So first of all, I'm already on a school board. And I ran in 2017 and I won the election. And I've been on the board for two and a half years at that point. We were doing Zoom board meetings and actually, through that first part of spring and into summer, I don't think we even met at first, which was very strange, because we were a board and part of the government and supposed to meet. But we had a little bit of interaction with our superintendent. I think we must have had a couple of meetings on Zoom and I think the public felt very closed out from that so we were transparent about what we were doing. But the public schools were just responding as quickly as they could. And in Oregon, I think they completely shut down. We didn't completely shut down, we went online in Washington.

AU: Oh, wow.

DS: And we did it pretty quickly. At least in our district, we did. There were a lot of people who were feeling excluded from the process, because not everybody had access to Zoom. So you think about that two years ago, nobody knew what Zoom was. Not nobody, but people weren't

using it. And now even the people who felt shut out, know how to access Zoom, right? People access Zoom all the time. And so there was that first summer was kind of crazy with George Floyd being killed. And as someone who was calling and talking to people, I was inserting myself into people's homes. On a regular basis, I was hearing stories about COVID. I was hearing from maybe April through August, there seemed to be a real shift in the way people responded to me. They wanted me to denounce ANTIFA, they wanted me to denounce what was happening in Seattle and Portland. I was running for office in southwest Washington and I would try to reorient the conversation to, "I'd like to talk about what we're doing here in Clark County." And that didn't go over very well sometimes. I talked to a lot of really nice people, I talked to people who were saying that COVID wasn't a big deal, I talked to people who had had family members die. I talked to a lot of people who were really angry that schools were shutting down in the fall, or had shut down. They weren't completely shut, we opened up kind of slowly. And so there were people who were unhappy that we were in school two days a week, then four days a week wasn't enough, and then opening up and then wearing masks. There were people who started coming to our board meetings, and that's probably maybe what you remember me talking about, who were really angry about a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion and wearing masks. There was a lot of pushback, and then the sort of CRT movement. So all of that kind of butts up against COVID. I don't think it would have been possible to have the kind of anger and dissension as on school boards, that there was without COVID. COVID was the precursor to all of it.

AU: Yeah. Yeah. Well, you mentioned with masks, when that first kind of broke out of like, "Oh, wear a mask to help stop this spread!" Were you completely on board with it? Or were you

hesitant? And then going away from that when the vaccine started to come out, did you wait a while? Or did you get it when you first could?

DS: That's such a great question, Astra. Because, again, I didn't go out very much I was- I might have always been a very cautious person. And so I would journal every morning, and I would look at Worldometer. Do you remember Worldometer?

AU: I think so, yeah.

DS: Worldometer would track all over the world?

AU: Yeah!

DS: The COVID cases, and so I would look at and write down the COVID cases in all of the states where my family lives. I have family in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Washington, Oregon. I would write them down and I would watch and I did it for months. And I don't know, one day I stopped. [laughs]

AU: [laughs]

DS: But I was tracking that. And then with the masks, it made sense to me. I mean, it makes sense to me. I didn't need it to be completely justified by the CDC in the sense that I knew that they'd done it during the Spanish Flu. One of the kind of interesting WOU things is I teach US

History: World War One to the Present and so that first quarter, I had some podcasts and some historical resources for my online course. Now I start my class with looking at the Spanish Flu of 1918 for the discussion post. I don't know if I would have done that before. I didn't do it in winter term, but I did do it in spring term. I was familiar with the Spanish Flu and in fact, I even contributed to an article in our local newspaper about the Spanish Flu. They wore masks then, so that made sense. But I was on board the first time. Another one of the first times I went out of the house was to go to the local hardware store and Home Depot. And I remember being upset that people weren't wearing masks. There was no mandate yet, in our state. And, in fact, I was pretty unhappy about it and I called the hardware store, and I called the Home Depot. That's kind of how I am, I said something, so I was definitely on board with masks. I had no idea that that was going to become a kind of political football. It just didn't make any sense to me. And it was definitely so I was a mask-er. And since we've had the mask mandate lifted, I wasn't wearing a mask in class at first when the numbers were low, but I'm watching the numbers and I've been wearing my mask again.

AU: Yeah. And especially when you weren't feeling well, for that one week.

DS: Right! Right. When I wasn't feeling well, I certainly didn't want to expose other people. So yeah. So that's the mask situation. With the vaccine, I followed it from the beginning. I understood that there had been - for the mRNA vaccine - I understood that there had been 30 years of research done on that type of vaccine and I was surprised by the level of pushback on these things. And I probably shouldn't have been. One of the things, I didn't see my daughter for quite a long time because they were kind of not anti-mask, but they didn't really- They kind of

acted like it wasn't happening. And so that made it really hard, because then I couldn't see them because they weren't being as safe as I thought they needed to be.

AU: Yeah, especially when considering the health of you and of your husband.

DS: Right!

AU: With the fact that the demographic of people that got sick easily, and ended up dying, most of the time we're in your demographic.

DS: And well I have hypertension.

AU: Yeah, I guess with my next question, did you have any positive experiences from COVID?

DS: Well, as I said, my husband grew a garden and I say my husband, because you would think I would have been out there with him. But I was literally- This is why I actually gained weight is because I was at my desk, either teaching, grading or making phone calls or on Zoom meetings all the time. I didn't get to go out and do very much. Another one of my first experiences out of the house was we went up to Stevenson, Washington, and I remember we had ice cream. It was the first time I ordered food, I just remember it was kind of scary to be out in public after not being in public for so long. I have learned that we have to take some – I'm hoping we don't have to – but you're gonna have to balance the risks, right? So I'm more inclined to take risks than some people I know and I'm less inclined to take risks than others. In terms of positive



experiences, that garden was really nice. Starting jogging and just kind of not having to go anywhere was actually really nice. I'm one of those people who liked being at home. I live in Washougal, so even going into Vancouver, which is the main larger town, is a 25 minute drive. And so it was nice to not have to drive places, you know? They're those things you just wear your sweats.

AU: Yep!

DS: It was nice, my husband was home a lot. He likes to go out and have lunch a lot. So it was nice that he was home. And I think that's really it I think. You know because I had Zoom I hosted like Christmas on Zoom.

AU: Aw!

DS: With my mother and her husband. That was the other thing I didn't see my mom very much. That was worse than the kids because she's older. So that was hard. I spend time with her now but because I've been back in school and we're not masked, I'm actually more reluctant to go see her. And then I was for quite a while after getting the vaccination.

AU: It kind of feels like you're back to the beginning of COVID, in a sense.

DS: Yeah but I mean, I just got my booster recently. And so I feel pretty good. But I wouldn't want- Her husband has multiple sclerosis. And she's only 75. But that's definitely a kind of

dangerous age bracket. And she's not in the greatest of health. I wouldn't want to be around students all week and accidentally take that to her. I go see her, but I'm a little bit reluctant.

AU: Definitely, definitely. I guess with going off of that, and what I said about kind of going back to the beginning with how people are treating COVID, how you've been treating COVID within your family. Your concept of time, has that kind of shifted or changed at all because of COVID?

DS: Yeah, I'm finding that and I think we've talked about this right? In our class? So one of the things in this project, we all kind of brainstormed, "What questions should we be asking?" What was going on? It's strange. It feels like, for example, that event that I talked about with Gloria, it feels like it was 10 years ago. Although that is pretty heavily imprinted in my mind but my sense, particularly over the last two years, it's very strange. Something might have been just a few months ago, even here since we've been back on campus in the fall of 2021, right? As we came back, it might have been this year, but my mind feels kind of muddled around time. Does that happen for you?

AU: Yeah! Absolutely, absolutely. I talked about this in my interview with April that there was definitely a clear cut and shift of pre-COVID. Then when COVID hit, and then now it's very much chunked up into a timeline of my life pre and currently. And the time before COVID feels decades away. Whereas now it feels like everything is just flowing into one thing and it's just all surrounded with just COVID. And that's pretty much like my time marker is like this is just COVID.

DS: And it's still here, right?

AU: Yeah!

DS: Yeah, that's a great way to describe it because it does feel like you don't have the linearity of time in the same way. In terms of our concepts of how we feel in relation to time. I was thinking about this this morning, too, because I knew we were going to do this and also just because I think about COVID, especially lately, because the numbers are increasing. Now we're hearing about monkeypox and it's the end of the term and I don't even have time to look up what monkeypox is but I'm going to! So we're hearing about that and we're just in this pandemic mode. Part of what I was thinking about is over the course of COVID, one of the things that I did that I'll tell you about that was great is I have a friend who I've been good friends with since 1999. We started working together at the Center for Columbia River History. And I've referenced her, she's the one I wrote the article with; Dr. Katie Barber at Portland State University. Since 2002, every Sunday, we meet and walk our dogs together.

AU: Aw!

DS: We stopped, we stopped! We stopped walking our dogs together in person, but we maintained that relationship through COVID on the telephone. So I would walk my little woods, and she would walk her neighborhood with her dog and so we continued that. And we've been doing this for 20 years now every Sunday versus Saturdays. That's actually one of my positive

memories is the first time that I got to see her in person again. I stopped by her house to drop something off, and we stood outside on her porch and talked. But coming back to that concept of time and just how this feels. I think through many conversations with her, we sort of jointly realized the level of anxiety that we are feeling as a nation, as communities, in our university communities. So she's part of Portland State and I can feel it here [Note: at WOU], this has been a hard year. And we're all in some ways acting like it's normal? We're trying to normalize it.

AU: The concept of the new normal.

DS: Right whereas last year, for example, when it came to assignments and things like that. I think at least I, and certainly Katie, we talked a lot. I didn't talk as much with people that WOU. But we were probably a little more flexible than we ever had been before and maybe had fewer assignments and things like that. And now we're kind of back on campus with our normal, high standards. And not that we didn't have high standards, I had high standards, but it was just cutting people slack. Because it was just such a hard time dealing with family members being sick, students had that, dealing with job issues, people were out of work. I had one student and, because there's no names associated, I had one student during the year when we were completely online, who had a heart attack, and didn't have COVID. But the doctors were pretty sure it was COVID related, even though this person didn't test positive for COVID. This was a young, healthy person who lifts weights. So there were things like that happening. And so I think that, at least for me, I have both come to recognize that there's this anxiety and this sort of [unsure of what word is being said] that's hanging over all of us. I've done that in collaboration with Katie, which is how she came up. But the other part of it is that, I think that a lot of professors have

developed more compassion for students. I mean, it's not that I didn't have compassion for students, I always have. But recognizing that there are stressors, even beyond the typical stressors. You all have stressors, you have jobs, and there's always relationships, especially for young people. And you're trying to manage financially and do your homework-

AU: Taking care of yourself.

DS: Taking care of yourself, right! Dealing with your family dynamics, all of those things that you add COVID on top of that, and it adds a level of stress that I think we have to remind ourselves, we still have. That's the part that I was thinking about today. That was a long winded way of saying it.

AU: [laughs]

DS: [laughs] I'm sorry, Astra.

AU: [laughs] It's okay!

DS: But the fact that it's still there, and in some ways, it's even worse, because it doesn't seem to end is [laughs] demoralizing! Well then there's the politics, which we don't have to talk about.

AU: Yeah, I was kind of thinking about when it came to COVID. And especially that feeling of anxiety that everyone's gotten, it's almost like a COVID related PTSD that the whole world has

gotten. And that definitely kind of spills into the compassion that you were talking about of this stranger who's just, you know, a student of mine, but we're going through the same exact thing. And that pretty much collective anxiety has definitely been what's holding us the past two and a half years. And it's something that years from now [when you] reconnect with people. It's like, man, you remember when COVID was starting, and all of these different things that went along with it. I guess if you have any more thoughts on that of this new mental health the world now has, or like mental illness [laughs], new anxiety that the world now has?

DS: Yeah, I don't know where we're gonna go with it, Astra. Because it's not just how we're feeling in our community. It's like the nation is in crisis right now. And add to that the election of 2016 and the election of 2020. So we go from 2016, which was already a very contested, like, created a lot of strife between people within families and communities that was already in place before.

AU: That was the first time that I ever voted, personally.

DS: Was it?

AU: Yeah, that was my first ever election that I ever got to vote in.

DS: [laughs] Wow, yeah. Well, you'll never forget that.

AU: [laughs] Oh, absolutely.

DS: And so that was one thing, and then to go from that to having COVID. And having a national context where it felt like the administration was taking it really lightly to the insurrection on January 6 of 2021. Which I just discovered, the book that I use for my history class, actually talks about that. So that's going to be, well, it's going to be fun in my class, because I think there's some people who don't believe that that's true. Because we have this sort of underground, dark internet right now, that is sending people messages that aren't true. So this questioning of reality, right?

AU: It's a whole new wave of propaganda that's popped up.

DS: And it's happening, like in relation to the anxiety and the crisis of mental health of COVID is connecting and really colliding with this ability to defuse reality and muddy it. It's almost like McCarthyism. So all of that's happening at the same time, and then to have a new administration that, I don't know about other people, but I know as I watch, I'm not thrilled about the messaging. I [laughs] I really feel like the government could have done a better job at every level. For example, you want to talk about propaganda, World War One, World War Two, even in the 70s, there were like TV commercials about Coca-Cola that were like peace and love. And there's nothing like that that is really aimed at the widespread population to actually tell people. For example, if you got COVID today, what are you supposed to do? Should you call a health department? I'm asking you, what do you think? Probably right?

AU: Probably, yeah!

DS: Has anybody told you you should do that?

AU: No, not really.

DS: That's what I'm thinking about. The messaging at every level has just been terrible. Some of the responses might have been good within the bureaucracies, I don't know for sure. I've looked at different things and I'm not even pointing fingers directly at anybody. But we actually have examples in the past of how this sort of thing has been handled and could have been handled. And so in the early days, I was like, well, obviously, we're going to do these things because history shows us how and then we didn't. And so I kind of feel like we're still there, even with the Biden administration, which, you know, they rolled out the vaccine. And then there's the end of the mask mandate. And now it's just kind of like a, I don't know, there's a free for all.

AU: Like a COVID limbo.

DS: Yeah! And nobody trusts the government. So the government is just throwing up its hands and saying, "Well, there's nothing we can do anyway because either you believe us or you don't believe us." But I don't even know what the message is. I know what my common sense tells me, "If I get COVID, I should contact the health department." But the numbers are clearly not too reflective of what's happening right now because people are testing at home. So great, we can get tests from the government but we're not even reporting it. Anyway, it's kind of a mess still.



AU: It is definitely and you know, everybody is so concerned, I feel, with the me versus the world mentality that it's like, "Hey, this is all about the collective safety." So when it comes to community, did you find yourself being more involved with your community when it came to COVID? Kind of going from there?

DS: Well I've been involved with my community at a pretty deep level for quite a while and since I was running for office, I was certainly like connecting with labor unions and connecting with – so I'm a Democrat, for the tape – and so I was connecting with those communities. In my community, because of my work on the school board, I have connected with a lot of people. And one of the things I did during COVID that's kind of funny is because I couldn't go knock on doors and I was running in a district that was really big - it's been redistricted and it's actually more cohesive now, it was literally six different towns - I was, I don't know how much this helped, but I was friending people on Facebook. I would sit down in the morning and identify friends of friends. So now I'm one of those people who has two accounts that have like 900 people each.

AU: And that's kind of what led you to doing your Facebook Lives?

DS: Well I did it so that when I did my Facebook Lives, people would see it and I can get them to follow me in the community. So I have a community page that has about 800 followers, it's not that much, because there's half a million people in the county but my online presence is bigger and my voice is louder. I'm not sure that everyone thinks that's [laughs] a great thing.

AU: [laughs]

DS: But I haven't shut those things down. And I have been told that I played a role in the community, particularly when we had pushback about masks and it wasn't just about masks. And I don't know how much time do we have left? I don't want to make you transcribe too much here, but...

AU: 40 minutes.

DS: Okay, I'll just briefly say that there is a far right group in our town that came to a school board meeting and essentially shut it down because they wouldn't put masks on. And then we shut the meeting down, then they took chalk and drew all over our windows and drew 'tyrant' and 'commie' on my car. And so there was this incident that got written up in the paper and that was a year ago in May. There has been continued tension in our community, at least around the schools, which has now become kind of a national political, again, a political football, say, with critical race theory, which is not taught in schools. All of that has kind of bubbled up. So I became a voice on the school board of someone who talked about what critical race theory is, and isn't, or I talked about the need for certain policies. And then I lost my election, my re-election, in part because of that, and not by that much, but I still have that voice. And I've had people say that I should continue to use it. And I'm using it right now when it comes to the potential for overturning *Roe v. Wade*. So yes, I use my voice in my community. And there are people who don't like it. I mean, there's a telegram account from this group that they are pretty hateful. And it's pretty ongoing. And they still mentioned me, so that's fine. Don't worry about it.

AU: I guess we could definitely wrap up from there. Overall, what is your COVID experience meant to you?

DS: You know, it's funny, because we developed these questions together. And I think about it, and I'm not sure yet. I think that we're still figuring out what it means. I know there's a before and I hope that soon there will be an after. I hope that the tension that is associated with- I realized with the rising numbers, that my level of anxiety is also increasing. I don't know if that's happening for you, maybe it's just that it's the end of the term! Those things are all colliding!

AU: A little bit of both!

DS: Right, right so maybe it means that I'm really looking forward to summer a little bit more. But I think it means now, it means that we have to be a little more careful in public spaces. That's something I've been thinking about with traveling. That we need to be more compassionate and understanding of other people. We don't know what they've been through and that includes even the people who are kind of hateful and politically divisive. I think that a lot of those people are really just mired in these massive changes. And it's not just COVID, right? It's a sudden understanding and recognition that the demographics of the nation are changing. There's racial tensions, there's gender tensions, we've talked about that in gender issues in history quite a bit, right? Those things, that's something I see on that telegram account a lot. That's really hitting people. All of those things are coming together and COVID is kind of the last straw. I just hope that we get to throw that straw away. At some point in the near rather than further future. So I

don't know what it's going to leave, it's definitely a time that will mark a lot of changes and who who I am personally and who everyone around me is. So you know what I have to tell you? Let me end on a good note. Okay, something that has been really awesome to watch. This is my third year here at WOU. And I have a student who, actually the year that we went online, contacted me recently and asked me to write a letter of recommendation for a job, and she got a job. I have another student who contacted me who just got a scholarship to study for LSATs for next year. So even in the midst of all of this, you all are continuing to persevere. You are really learning resilience and you're moving forward into the world in your lives. And I'm excited to see what your generation does. So that's what I'm going to end on.

AU: I think I definitely agree. The biggest skill and trait that I think my generation has kind of adopted is the skill of adaptability and being able to just, I guess, roll with the punches. And utilize that with compassion and understanding for people and to adapt to their situations. So, absolutely.

DS: Well we're taking a lot of the things that work positively. And when you say what's positive, I was thinking more personally, but there's things like being able to have a Zoom meeting, right? Being able to say, you know, this class would work better if we actually did it on Zoom, and we're in breakout rooms than it does in person. Being able to maintain that flexibility and then the compassion that we bring for one another as human beings. So our future is bright, we just have to make it that way.

AU: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for this interview.

DS: Well, thank you, Astra! And I really appreciate you doing this and good job keeping me under an hour. [laughs]

AU: [laughs] Thank you!