



ShaneMickelson__OralHistoryTranscript__2022

Narrator: Shane Mickelson: SM

Interviewer: Dawn Mc Namee: DM

Date: May 25, 2022

Place of Interview: Western University Library, Monmouth, Oregon

Media: ShaneMickelson_OralHistoryAudio__2022.mp3

Overview:

Shane Mickelson was born on January 25, 2001, in Salem, Oregon. Shane discusses what he went through while Oregon was dealing with the Covid pandemic. He also talks about life in retail and how he spent his life in a disastrous world for two years. He recalls fire spreading in southern Oregon, an ice storm that caught many without power in the state from for three days up to a week. His personal experiences help expand understanding of an average day and experiences in a modern world during a pandemic.

[Transcribed by DJ Mc Namee; audited and edited by Donna Sinclair, June 12, 2022]

[Interview begins]

DM: This is Dawn McNamee interviewing Shane Mickelson on May 25th, 2022. Alrighty, start out with, tell us about your early covid period?

SM: Okay, I was here at Western, and it was my freshman year, and the term was starting to wind down, finals were near the corner, and I was a little stressed. Then we find out that there has been an uptake of covid cases in State of Oregon kind of around the same time. So, we were all like, oh, sheesh. And then the week before—at the start of dead week—we find out that Oregon state decided to close for like the remainder of the semester and for the fall term. And I remember sitting in my Discrete Mathematics class and our professor was saying, talking about how all the universities were supposed to announce this at the same time, but OSU jumped the gun. And so, we basically spent, since the cat was out of the bag we were going to close down, we all just sat around in the class waiting for the email from the [administration] saying what was going on...

And so, we got the notice saying we're going to be closing everything, and we all kind of thought, ha-ha, it's going to be an extra week of spring break! Woo! And then, you know the panic button started and then [frustration sound] the panic buying. I am admitting this, my mom was a bit of a panic buyer at the start she basically went to every store in west Salem and got as much toilet paper as she could [chuckling] without like taking all of it. Where she would go to a store and get two bundles and then another store and buy two more bundles.

DM: You said you were at Oregon State University?

SM: Nope, I was going to Western.

DM: Oh, okay.

SM: I was just saying that Oregon University had jumped the gun on the announcement. I was going here to Western.

DM: I just wanted to double check on that. [short clarification conversation]

DM: During Covid how did you spend the shut down?

SM: Well, prior to covid I was a very indoorsy person. I just sat at my desk, you know on my computer, playing games during my free time. So, when covid rolled around and we were all, yep basically you're going to stay inside, wait this out, I was not affected much, really. It was just basically my normal routine. Both my parents were essential workers, they weren't at home much, so it was pretty much, nothing changed for me. I just kept doing my regular – what I had been doing before, being all indoorsy. [pause]

DM: At any point did you come back to westerns campus? And if so, how was that like for you?

SM: So, during my freshman year, I actually was a DJ at the radio station KWOU, and I had a radio show at the time, so I drove onto campus once a week on Thursdays to do my show. And it was really weird, because you know the fall and winter terms, I had gotten use to Western being alive as a campus, you'd see people walking around, especially since the weather was nice at that point since it was spring term. Yeah, it was spring term when the online classes started. My memory is a little foggy...

DM: You're good.

SM: So, it was weird driving down the main street and just not seeing anybody. I think even the construction crews in front of the Computer Science building, it was just empty. And so it was quite unsettling, especially where the radio station was at, because prior to lockdown there would usually be, at the time I was there, someone, one or multiple people working on the *Western Howl*, the newspaper. But, nope it was just me in that building. And it's just basically a house that's pretty old, and it would creak and croak occasionally. And I would be playing a song over the radio, and I just would be like "what was that?" I guess I—it was uncanny being, visiting campus during lockdown.

DM: During the year covid was like the big thing. So, last year, did anything in your work, personal, school life change? And how did it affect you?

SM: I guess the big change for me was my, well, there's two changes. Number one, I became a lot more connected to people online, like social media and stuff. I'm talking about people that I would not normally be able to meet, and that kind of kept my sanity while I was, you know, doing school from home. But also, because I was doing school from home, I kind of fell off almost, with my work, because I was at home, and I'm very distractable, so the professor would be doing a lecture about something, and I would be like: "What was that?" and look out my window. I feel like, I think, I'm still recovering from that slip off of, you know, lacking in my work to this day. [pause]

DM: Did you know of anyone in your family or family or friends, who got covid and how did you deal with that? If you did know someone?

SM: I guess the kind of big scary one in my family was my grandma, she got covid. A year prior, my grandpa, her husband died. So, we all kind of thinking, "oh there she goes," because she's not exactly in the best of health because she's 80, she'd diabetic. Basically, when the CDC was like here are the people most likely to be affected by covid, she ticked nearly every single box. We were all like [expels air], "Grandma gonna die!" But guess what—she somehow survived. And then, the grandparents on my mom's side, they both got covid. They fared a lot better. And, also my aunt got covid as well. All this family was up in Montana, where things were a lot looser restriction wise. Of my friends that got covid, only one and he's going to college down in California. No one close to me like physically close to me got it, but I do know of people who got it. no one died from it, but it was scary every time. Oh, also since both of my parents were essential workers, they both had to go into work because they were both state employees, and my dad was IT. A month wouldn't go by where my dad would come in and say, "Alright, so I've got bad news. I'm going to be quarantining in the camper for a week. Turns out one of the people who came in tested positive.

DM: When that happened how did it affect the family dynamic was everyone chill or was there some chaos in the family?

SM: Things were pretty chill, honestly, because the camper was in our driveway; you know, when mealtime would come around, I would just go out to the camper, knock on the door, hand

him his food. Our family, I'm trying to think of ways to put this without it sounding depressing, but like our family doesn't do much. So, like my dad my dad is just usually in his recliner with a beer after work. And so, you know my mom's usually shopping or something, like shopping online. So, really? It wasn't like, you know you were worried for your family, for my parents if one of them got exposed, but it wasn't like, "Ah, this house feels so off without them."

DM: With also that, how did you and your family respond to outdoor activities like the covid policy, so like no traveling, how did they respond to that?

SM: We followed the restrictions like, to a t, basically. That meant for example, like me and my dad, we go fishing quite a bit off the coast. We called that off, we called off our annual visit to family in Montana because we didn't want to risk giving Grandma covid. We didn't want to be the people that brought covid to little old, Superior, Montana. You know, isolated town of a thousand people. So we personally didn't go out much. We followed everything. We didn't eat out, we'd just like order something like grab and go. So, like when we saw people out doing stuff my dad would be like, "See those pieces of shit over there?"

I was like, "Go off, Dad!"

DM: Alright, and then towards the end of covid, when things started opening back up, how did your family respond to that? Was there anything that you were excited to do?

SM: It was generally like a vibe of, yeah, we can visit family again. But we really weren't able to do things that summer, because that is when I got my summer job in retail. [sighs] Do you mind if I go off on a tangent about that?

DM: You are totally fine.

SM: Okay, good, because I was working at the Bi-Mart, the one in Monmouth, and when I was working there it was basically the last week of like the first week of the first mask mandate, like when it got lifted in July. And so, when we got there, people were like, "Oh, yeah, the word from the governor..." from management was, they were going to be taking down the dividers and

then, we wouldn't have to wear masks anymore. And generally the vibe was pretty good, you know. A lot of customers were like, "Woo!" We don't have to do this anymore."

Then, a month later, when the mask mandates came back, ay-yi-yi, so, oh one other thing—I was working as a cashier, and when the mask mandates were lifted, management had all us cashiers gather up in a room, and they explained to us how we had to maintain certain ethics that may have been lost when we were wearing masks. For example, when you're wearing a mask, you can grit your teeth at those annoying piece of shit customers. You can mouth all kinds of vulgarities. You can stick your tongue out. You can just do everything you've ever wanted, like when you have a mask on because they can't see you doing any of that. Now since the masks are gone, we had to return to our big smile on our face composure. So, when the mask mandates came back, the initial reaction from me and my fellow cashier was, yes! Because a lot of them were kind of in the same boat I was because, you know, very tired, exhausted twenty year olds, so we were more than happy to be like, being able to mouth vulgarities at customers who were giving us trouble and stuff. It's a good way of venting out a little frustration.

But some of the customers were not very happy with the fact that the mask mandate came back, and we were like, "Hey, you know, for state policy, we don't want to get fined. Can you wear a mask? We had multiple people actually, like flip out on various employees. There was one particular case that I am always going to remember because, so this guy came into the store and the greeter person at the front desk, the person at the front desk was like, "Hi, welcome to Bi-Mart. Would you like a mask?"

And this guy goes, "No, I don't want a f***** mask!" And basically like, barges in, basically, we hear stomping around trying to get his stuff, and then he comes over to my checkout line.

And I was like, "Hi, did you find everything you're looking for?"

"Yeah, I wish I didn't have to get the mask [indistinguishable]."

And I said, "Speaking of masks, could you please put on your mask, because, you know, I am at a checkout line. A lot of people come through here. I do not want someone with covid putting covid on this checkout line, and creating a super spreader event."

And the guy's response to me making this request, you know this very reasonable request, was to throw his stuff at me. And so, yeah, I had a box of coffee cups, like Keurig, thrown at my face, and then he just storms out. At which point, the manager who was in that day, who was very much like a mama bear for us, heard what was happening, came storming down, and it looked like she was to kill. [chuckles] Lucky for him, already, lucky for the guy who threw the box at me, he already drove out of the parking lot. Because [jokingly] I am pretty sure that my manager was going to, like, kill him. So yeah. [chuckles]

DM: Since that was technically a negative experience during covid, what were some positive things that you experienced when covid starting dialing down and the world started opening back up again?

SM: My big thing was being able to, like, see my friends again because we had made plans before the covid lockdowns had initially hit, we had made some plans, me and my friends, we were planning to all this stuff and then covid came, and so when things finally let up last year, and we things were finally opening back up, we all agreed, we'd finally do all the stuff we were supposed to do last summer. So, that was nice.

DM: And, as you mentioned when things were being put on hold, you had to put a lot of things to the side until after everything opened back up, did you have a sense of time concept? Like losing time, gaining time, not knowing really what day it was or anything like that?

SM: This was especially bad during the summer because I, like during the summer I lost track of all concept of time. Like during that first summer I would basically get up at, like nine in the morning, to do some little stuff, like normal chores around the house, you know, eat. Then I'd plop in front of my computer to keep my self-entertained; you know, pretty normal stuff. But during that, five days out of the week, you know, weekends were pretty much the same because you couldn't go anywhere. The only difference is that there were parents in the house. But, I, basically within three week, was unable to tell you what day it was. And then when school, when online classes started, I no longer really like associated a day with the day of the week. Instead I associated it with, what time am I getting up at? Because my classes either started at eight or ten [o'clock], with classes on Monday and Wednesdays starting at ten and classes on Tuesday and

Thursdays starting at eight. So, that was like, my way of keeping track of time for about the entire school year.

DM: We know a lot of crazy things happened during the time of covid, the fires, the winter storm. How did those impact you, with either school or your personal life or your sanity?

SM: [chuckles] So, first I want to talk about the fires. So, the day before the fires had started, one of my friends was in town and I was at his place, and he lives out at the airport in Independence. And we had gone out like flying in his bi-plane and things were pretty good. And when we landed and were moving his little bi-plane back into the hangar, things were nice, and then we got a call from his parents who were like, “Hey, while you’re out there could you help tie down the planes? There’s supposed to be a bad windstorm tonight.” And I thought, oh yeah, a windstorm, better help tie stuff down. So we got stuff anchored down on the runways and stuff. Then I thought that was the end of it. The next day, I was up at about eight in the morning, and you know like—I don’t know how to describe it, but the moment I woke up I knew, it was like something was wrong, because in my room there’s like a big window that lets in a lot of natural light in the morning. And even though I had the big, light blocking curtains, the little bit of light that went through didn’t look right. I thought the sun it might be the sun shining at a weird angle. So I got up, went upstairs, and then I glanced outside. At this point, there was still some blue in the sky off to the west. But above me and to the east, the sky was just like dark gray, like faintly red. I was like, oh! So then, for most of the morning I just sat there pretty much watching the sky, like watching the last of the blue skies go away, watching the gray smoky area turn the sky red. And pardon my language but that was f***** creepy because was like, it looked like something out of a movie. The sky turned like a bright, hellish red. What was weird was that because of all the smoke in the air, it was cold, because there wasn’t a lot of sunlight getting through. So you had this, like, deep red skies. You step outside and it was like, “Brr!” And then later on, the ash as falling. I was genuinely really scared, as well because I live in a very rural place, even though it was on the other side of the Willamette River where the fires were at. I’m surrounded by grass fields, and I’m up out on the highway, so it take just one dumbass smoking a cigarette, and like flicking the sparks out his window [would] cause this whole area to go up in flames. So I had a whole, I had [bug off?] kits ready. I had, like pet carriers on hand, just in case, just in case something happened. Luckily nothing ever did. Luckily, the fires never came close

enough to our house, but it was pretty freaky. Plus, it was kind of annoying that it caused the first week of school to be delayed.

And then the ice storm we had. Now that, that really put a damper on things education-wise! Because, we had a new term start, like that week, or was it the week before? Either way. Spring term had just begun and I had a sizeable amount of assignments already due, so I figured, this weekend I'm going to hammer out this work, it's going to be good. And then we had the big ice storm and surprise, surprise. The power at my house gets knocked out for three days. Luckily, I have family who lived in town who had power, so I basically stayed at their house for like three days, working on class work. But what was freaky was, on the first day of the ice storm, I step outside just to like, just kind of look at everything. And basically, like thirty seconds didn't go by that you didn't hear, where you didn't hear something snap and fall. I watched a huge, like growth willow trees, that grow along the creek down by my house, just topple like dominoes. It was freaky. I was like, hmm! Then there was like a huge tree in front of my window that fell over that I somehow slept through. [chuckles]

DM: During the fires and everything, was there anybody you knew that lived near the big impactful parts? And were you staying in touch with people, making sure everyone was safe?

SM: The closest we had was, we have some family friends who lived on the east side, kind of like, a little bit outside of Salem to the east. And yeah, they were on high alert the entire time. We already agreed that if, to have the horses ready, because they had horses, and that if the fires get close they can evacuate to our place. We have plenty of open, we have a big field we can put the horses at that has like, electric fence already. So that was like, like the only people we knew who were affected. I do have a friend whose family has a vacation house up by Detroit, well the former town of Detroit—because that all burnt down in the fires. And so yeah, so after the fires went away, I got a call from a friend that was like, “You know that cabin we have at Lake Detroit?”

And I was like, “Yeah.”

He said, “It's gone.” Basically, aside from the little bits of foundation you would have never thought there was a cabin there.

DM: And then, do you remember when the vaccines came out? How did that impact you? Were you really eager or hesitant?

SM: For me, it was kind of complicated, because I was so glad that there was finally a vaccine because, like, things were [worse?] through Zoom. However, I have a crippling fear of needles. And so, I got the vaccine and the boosters, but I was like kind of freaked out as well. I was happy, you know I'm vaccinated, I can go enter society again. Hopefully things will finally be normal. Things have not gone back to normal. But it was, complicated for me would be the best way to put it, I guess, because I have, I am like very afraid of needles, so, yeah. [pause]

DM: And then, wrapping up, what has this covid experience meant for you?

SM: I think what this whole, what covid has meant for me, probably in the long term, is that I am definitely a lot more germophobic. I am still wearing, you know, almost every day, because I'm a little paranoid. Also, I realized I look good in a mask. And some of the things that can happened along with, I realized I am nonbinary. I became more adjusted to working from long distance. And, yeah those are like my big take aways from my experience with covid. And I guess, tangentially related because of my job working as a cashier, but I have found a newfound respect for retail workers, because, I saw probably the worst of humanity during that time.

DM: And, there is something else I would like to add. I forgot to ask it earlier. But when you were working at Bi-Mart, was there any like, additional things, like when the vaccines came out. I know at Fred Meyer, they were doing this bonus thing if you had gotten the vaccine? Was Bi-Mart doing anything like that, or?

SM: They basically, they were giving vaccines, but they weren't doing anything special with it. Mainly because, due to some weird structure of Bi-Mart, the pharmacy is a different entity than the store, even though they are in the same building. And so, yeah, there was like not a really good way to coordinate because like both systems have different bureaucracies. Aside from like having the same manager, it's basically two different stores. So, there wasn't really like anything, they weren't doing anything special if you got a shot.

DM: Is there anything that you would like to add that I haven't asked about? [pause]

SM: I'm trying to think. [pause] I guess the one thing that I would say is that—I am so sorry, I'm blanking right now. I guess another thing about covid is that because we were locked down for so long, I've kind of regressed on social skills-wise. I am, like, still recovering. Like I used to be able to talk very smoothly. I had a very smooth radio voice for a while. That's pretty much just been lost. I'm kind of like an awkward, stuttering mess now, as you've all probably already heard, including people listening to this later on. So, yeah, that's just about everything.

DM: Do you think there is anything that I didn't ask that I should have?

SM: I would say, like, what was I doing during the Black Lives Matter protests? But because I was so afraid of the germs, like covid and stuff, I really didn't go to any protests or anything. I just kind of stayed all cozied up at home, all scared of germs.

DM: Well, thank you for the interview.

SM: of course. Thank you for interviewing me.

DM: No problem.

[Interview ends, 29:52]