

COVID Faith Tonne

Cara: Today is December 4, 2020, and we are talking with Faith Tonne, who is 26 and works as a librarian at the Ashland High School Library. Faith, when did you first hear about the coronavirus?

Faith: Well, I guess it's been about a year when this all started. Gosh, probably we heard about it, you know, before Christmas was done with and everyone was like, "Oh, Trump is shutting stuff down and blah, blah, blah," but then it didn't really set in until more like March, April. And then it was like, "Oh, this is a real thing. It's actually spreading across the whole world and it's a bit more than just a fad thing to be worried about."

Cara: What was your reaction? Were you afraid of it at first, then?

Faith: Initially, I thought, like I said, it was just something for the media to be obsessed about. For a while, I thought people wanted to attack Trump a little bit and be upset about something. And I was like, "Oh, well, it'll be like swine flu or bird flu and it'll blow over before it really affects us at all." But that did change later on.

Cara: And what is your family situation? Who lives in your home?

Faith: I live alone, so it didn't really jeopardize my family immediately. I just live by myself. Sometimes I'll visit them, but whenever we were worried that we would mutually infect each other, we just stay away from each other just to be safe.

Cara: When did the virus first become real to you or when did it affect your life personally?

Faith: The first time it became real to me was when I thought I had caught COVID at one time, and I was really afraid that I had possibly infected my grandmother in Salina who lives in the nursing home. And then I also got COVID. And so that was pretty hard to argue with.

Cara: Do you kind of remember when you caught it?

Faith: Gosh, the end of September, I believe, getting into October. And I really didn't think I had it. Actually, I got tested because I just felt really tired and kind of gross. So I went to the doctor and got tested and they said, "OK, well, it might take a while for your test to turn up your results."

So I was like, OK, but then it turned out that I had Flu B and I was like, "Oh, I just have the flu, I'll be fine." And then I was getting ready to go back to work on that Monday, and they were like, "Oh, and you also have COVID." And I was very surprised because I didn't really feel that poorly until I lost my taste. That was weird. But yeah.

Cara: What is it like to have COVID?

Faith: Well, I didn't have any cough and I only had congestion a little bit at the very beginning, which easily could have been a part of the flu, but I really didn't think I had it. But then suddenly I lost one hundred percent of smell and taste.

Faith: I wasn't congested at all. I could breathe just fine, but I could hold rubbing alcohol to my nose and there was nothing. I could hold straight, like white vinegar up to my nose and it didn't even make my eyes water. That was the strangest part. If I wouldn't have had that, I wouldn't have believed that I had it at all.

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Cara: Do you remember about how long you were sick, being actually sick?

Faith: I felt the worst on the first two days that I was sick with the flu, which would have been I felt sick on Wednesday in the last last full week of September. And I felt really bad on Thursday. And then Friday I was feeling better. I didn't really have a fever or anything. I thought I was better. But then I lost my taste about Tuesday afternoon and I couldn't smell anything; that lasted about a week.

Faith: And by the time I got to go back to school, it was still kind of... I don't want to say damaged because I don't really know, but it seemed to take a while for for my full tasting ability to come back. Things tasted strange to me for a long time. But in that, I didn't feel too bad.

Cara: OK, going back to February and March, what things changed in your life right away due to COVID?

Faith: Well, not very much. I mean, everyone was talking about it, and I saw a couple of people wear masks and we all sort of labeled them as maybe a little bit panicky and like, "Oh, wow. You're just really overly concerned about the news; don't believe everything you hear," sort of. But things didn't change for a while until the schools closed.

Faith: And then it was like, "Oh, OK. So this is more of a problem than even just, 'I might infect people that are close to me that are older and at risk.'" It was suddenly something that was stopping the whole nation. We couldn't go to school. We couldn't go shopping without masks. It was starting to be a little bit like, "Oh!" I at first thought it was more than it should have been, like I thought it was, an overcorrection, overly, overly careful. But, I don't know.

Cara: You're still a little bit hesitant.

Faith: Hesitant, but my grandfather passed from COVID and seeing how it affected someone that doesn't have a strong immune system. It will change you, watching someone die from a disease that a lot of people are scared of. And while I'm not scared of it, for myself, it is more scary now.

Cara: Are there changes that were so gradual that at first you didn't realize your life was changing?

Faith: I feel like the attitude of everyone was a little bit on fire because at that point they were going through the BLM protests and stuff and that everyone was a little bit turned up, a little bit agitated.

But the thing that sort of it seemed to sneak up on me was how rude people were about masks. People were rude about wearing them or not wearing them. But both sides were just belligerent about it. And I was like, "Well, did this just happen?" But, you look at how everyone has just slowly been getting more and more set in their ways about what is really going on with this whole COVID thing, that it's like suddenly we have to fight to make our opinion worthwhile. I guess that sort of changed pretty slowly and sort of surprised me when I finally took a good look at it.

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Cara: This is off script, but how do you think people feel about the masks now compared to nine months ago?

Faith: Oh, well, at the schools when they do events, I know a lot of the parents will begrudgingly wear them. I know a lot of people wear them without believing it actually does anything. People are more willing to wear them because enough people that they know personally have been affected. It's more like, "Well, I guess I have to, there's no way around it." But there are extremists that are still going to fight it. And even if you ask politely, they will probably punch you in the face.

Cara: What is your job situation right now?

Faith: I am very lucky because I've been able to hold down both of my jobs. I have only had to be away from my jobs when I actually had the COVID, when I had to quarantine, you know, but I am very lucky to be able to continue to work, and it's just a huge blessing.

Cara: When do you think life be back to normal?

Faith: Well, it's been a year, I thought things would have at least shifted to more normal, like I thought during the summer things were going to get better, but it kind of kind of stayed at a level that wasn't normal, but it was better. And I thought, you know, maybe we'll get better by the time school rolls back around, but that's when everybody gets sick anyways in the cold months. And so maybe next summer. I don't know.

Cara: OK. What things do you think we're stuck with now in the new normal, is there a new normal? Or are we just getting used to some things?

Faith: Well. I'm a little hesitant, a little anxious, I guess, more or less, about the new vaccine. You know, some people are saying it's going to be required, but you know, where there's other vaccines that aren't required, that anti-vaccers have always fought... I don't know, I hope it's just going to be like a flu shot where you're never, ever going to get the right strain. So it's not really going to change. I don't know. But for things we're stuck with, I don't think our nation is going to just recover from this. I don't think we're going to forget about it and just move on. I don't think we're going to have to wear masks forever; there's studies that show that you're getting like micro fibers from breathing it in all the time. It's not good for you, but there might be better masks in the future. I really hope we don't have to wear masks constantly.

There's so many issues with it, you know, not being able to identify people's faces when there's criminal activity, when there's people missing, it's harder to find them in big crowds, it's just so many issues that are being sort of run over while we're trying to figure out how to help, but eventually I think our immune systems are going to either fight it or not, and we can't just be afraid of germs forever or we'll never do anything. I don't know if a new normal will go back, but I think I think our nation as a whole is going to have a better backup plan for this sort of emergency.

Cara: Is that your reaction to COVID now? You feel as though we're going to have to come up with a better backup plan?

Faith: Probably I think it was sort of like a Titanic realization, you know, where they had

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some lifeboats, but a lot of people ended up just drowning because they weren't prepared to save everyone. So I think hospitals are being just overwhelmed with the amount of people that need help. And I think there's going to be more funding put into more hospitals and. The ripple effect of what that will do will probably fall on us and the taxpayers, but I think there is going to be more set up to be able to accommodate for large scale disasters.

Cara: Is there anything that you would like people in 20 years to understand about your experience with COVID in 2020?

Faith: I know there are people that will still passionately deny that this is a problem. And I don't want people in 20 years to think that this was nothing, that this was just a government ploy, because there are people dying. I had it and it was the weirdest disease. What kind of germ completely shuts off one of your senses and then it comes back? Like other diseases, you go blind, you stay blind. Other diseases, if you go deaf, you stay deaf.

I've never heard of a disease that makes you just lose your sense of taste and smell and then it just comes back. That's weird. That's an odd thing. And, I don't want people to also think that shutting down the nation is what will save us. I don't think shutting down is ever the answer to anything, I think you should stand up and fight it, do more things to protect the people that are at risk, obviously. But for most young people, we're going to be OK. And if we don't get the immune system, we're putting ourselves at risk by not being able to fight it. The world isn't going to continue to spin if we aren't pushing it, and I'm not just talking about the important workers, the essential workers. There's more people that have to make money and live, and even the essential workers aren't going to be able to make enough money to support the whole of our society. We have to be able to work back towards the normal. We have to learn from what all this did to us. But where people are having to sell their businesses, move away and there just aren't enough jobs because there aren't enough essential positions to give everyone a job, and so we can't depend on the essential workers to keep the financial flow going. They can't pay for all of us to survive. So we can let fear destroy what we've built, but we won't come back from that.

Cara: Thank you very much!