

COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: COVID-19 EXPERIENCES ORAL HISTORIES

Trish Blooding Interview

November 23, 2020

Virtual Meeting, Dubois, Wyoming

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Trish Blooding Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: My name is Robyn Pierce working in conjunction with the Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Today's date is November 23, 2020. This is an interview of Trish Blooding about the effects of COVID on her ability to work. The interview will go into detail about her job as a guest ranch office manager, both before and after the shelter in place was ordered. Trish lives in Dubois, Wyoming and works at Crooked Creek Guest Ranch. This interview is being recorded remotely and will be housed at the Reuther Library, which is part of Wayne State University.

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So I always start with the question, do you have an affiliation with Wayne State University?

[00:00:58]

TRISH BLOODING: I do not.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay. And then could you give me a description of what a guest ranch office manager is.

TRISH BLOODING: So, technically I haven't really been doing my job because we are short on housekeepers. And so I've been doing a lot more of that than what the office manager position would be.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: The office manager position takes care of the housekeeping schedule, the check ins, check outs, where we need to order, what we need to order as far as for the laundry room, for maintenance, for cabins, for those type of things. So the guest ranch isn't just lodging

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here. [00:01:58] Our guest ranch is lodging, gasoline, rentals of snowmobiles in the winter, ATVs and horses in the summer and mules in the fall. And then also we have a restaurant and bar on property as well.

ROBYN PIERCE: So, is Crooked Creek like a vacation destination?

TRISH BLOODING: It is.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay. So before the shelter-in-place or stay-at-home order was issued in Michigan, it was the beginning of March. I'm not sure what the timeline in Wyoming is but—

TRISH BLOODING: Wyoming was—it was March sixteenth.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

TRISH BLOODING: And our lodging never shut down.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh okay.

TRISH BLOODING: We were only required to shut down the restaurant for in space dining, or in room dining. And that was only until the nineteenth of May. [00:03:00]

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

TRISH BLOODING: Our governor—his actual statement was, I expect Wyoming's citizens to be responsible.

ROBYN PIERCE: Well, that sounds reasonable.

TRISH BLOODING: And so we didn't have anywhere near the restrictions other states had.

ROBYN PIERCE: So, are your guests—you said cabins earlier—are your guest areas like individual houses, or are they all connected like a hotel is?

TRISH BLOODING: So we are individual cabins. We have seventeen of them.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

TRISH BLOODING: We have anywhere from a single queen [bed] up to Cabin 17, which has three queens and eleven twins. [00:04:00]

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice. When you were doing the takeout—right?—for your restaurant, did you notice anything else that changed about how—I don't know how to ask this. Was the public—did the public come in and utilize your facilities as much as they had prior to COVID during that time frame?

TRISH BLOODING: So the interesting thing with us is up here we have two months in the spring and two months in the fall where we—what we call the slow season. And so it fell that March to May is our slow season.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

TRISH BLOODING: So it really—I mean, it affected us, but it really didn't kill us.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And then like now we're in our second slow season. [00:04:59] We're between summer and our—have enough snow for everybody to come up and snowmobile. And they just—there's counties around us that have put in face masks [mandates]. You must wear face masks. We are not statewide that you have to wear one. And so it's interesting to see. So Teton County, which is Jackson Hole—has had a face mask everywhere since, what was it, babe? June? [directed toward person in the background] June. So that includes Grand Teton National Park and then Jackson Hole itself, plus the airport. It does not include Yellowstone. [00:06:01]

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh.

TRISH BLOODING: And it doesn't include us. We are on the western edge of Fremont County. We were the first county to have any cases in our state. We had a—we don't know if it was a

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visitor, or if it was a nurse that had it that went into an assisted living home. Yeah. And lots of cases out of that.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And so that was—we were the biggest hit right off the bat, and then there was very little for quite a while. But it was—

ROBYN PIERCE: Have the numbers started coming back up now?

TRISH BLOODING: We're sitting at number four as the most dangerous state to visit right now.
[00:06:58]

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh no. That's too bad. (Both laugh)

TRISH BLOODING: Going into Thanksgiving weekend.

ROBYN PIERCE: So, you said that you were—you've been short staffed. So you've been working in other departments later lately?

TRISH BLOODING: Yes.

ROBYN PIERCE: Is that due to COVID or just happenstance?

TRISH BLOODING: I think it's a combination. So COVID—because of it, no J1s [J1 visas] were able to come across the seas. Most of your hotels, motels, restaurants in this area depends on J1s. So your locals don't do it. They don't do the housekeeping. They don't do the cook, or the bartending, or any of those things. They're mostly J1 workers. And so trying to fill that in, most of them are wore out from summer. [00:08:01]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: They don't want to. Two people in town put up their hotels for sale.

ROBYN PIERCE: Wow.

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TRISH BLOODING: Because they just couldn't find help, and it wore them out to do it.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. And that's probably directly affiliated with the COVID because people aren't able to travel as much.

TRISH BLOODING: Right. So you can't travel international, and J1 is international exchange students.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And so, like people from China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan. Any of those countries weren't allowed to travel at all.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And so we didn't get the students.

ROBYN PIERCE: And that probably isn't changing now with the uptick again, is it?

TRISH BLOODING: Probably not. I haven't looked at the numbers. But you have to have it all put together six to twelve months ahead of time. [00:09:00]

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh.

TRISH BLOODING: So once we have good numbers again across the country, it'll be six to twelve months before we have foreign exchange students—J1 program working again. If we get it working again.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. That's unfortunate.

TRISH BLOODING: It is. I mean, go ahead. And a prime example of that for us is, we live seven miles west of town and then seven miles up a switchback up the mountain. We live on site-provided housing.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh nice.

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TRISH BLOODING: So, and that's a requirement for J1, is they have provided housing.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. Did they get stuck here when they couldn't travel? [00:09:58]

TRISH BLOODING: See ours—because of when it happened, our programs here in town wouldn't have been affected because it would have been a summer thing.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: They would have been expecting them to come in, in June.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

TRISH BLOODING: Jackson was affected. And some of them couldn't leave.

ROBYN PIERCE: Wow. That sucks.

TRISH BLOODING: Yeah.

ROBYN PIERCE: So, then you work five days a week, or six days a week?

TRISH BLOODING: I work whatever is needed.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay. So, then earlier—

TRISH BLOODING: So, right now, we're slow. So I worked four hours today. I worked—I didn't work Saturday or Sunday. I worked, I think, five hours on Friday. [00:11:00]

ROBYN PIERCE: That's not too bad, gives you some flexibility.

TRISH BLOODING: Yes. Thank you, love. [directed toward person in the background] I worked, you know, just what was—I work right now just what's needed. But come—I'm guessing probably mid-December is when it's going to start kicking. Come then, we're going have full load in the cabins, so it'll be full doing check-in, check-outs. Plus we'll have—we have snowmobile rentals. We'll have thirty machines. So that's check in, check out. Then all these

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guys come up here to snowmobile all day and party all night. So the bar will be full, the restaurant will be full.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: So, we'll be slammed. And we're not booked and we don't have enough staff right now.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. Good luck.

TRISH BLOODING: Thank you. (laughs) [00:11:58]

ROBYN PIERCE: So you mentioned earlier that you're helping your grandchild with some school. Like online schooling stuff.

TRISH BLOODING: Yes. So Rosie does not do well with online learning. She's really struggling.

ROBYN PIERCE: So, do you, is your online learning—is it like Zoom and content, or it is all content that you do at your own pace?

TRISH BLOODING: So she gets X-many assignments per day. She has a meeting first thing in the morning and then X-many assignments per day, regardless of what they are like. Most days she has a reading and a math. And then the others vary between, like, social studies, science. I don't remember what the other ones are. [00:12:59] But they—but most days she has at least reading and math, or English and math. Whatever way you want to word it.

ROBYN PIERCE: Right.

TRISH BLOODING: Something. English and math are the basic two she has every day. And for English she has to type it all.

ROBYN PIERCE: And she's in which grade?

TRISH BLOODING: She's ten. She's in the fourth grade.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And her assignments are supposed to be all typed in, by her. And it's, like, wait a minute, she's only ten.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. I was actually surprised when my kids came home that they hadn't yet taught them how to type properly in school.

TRISH BLOODING: Yeah, it was—so we looked up and found some fun typing games—free typing games to learn how to type. I sent those to her. And today's problem was, it's a math word problem. Or the issue today was a math word problem. [00:14:01] And they just—they fought back and forth for a couple hours over it, and I sent it to Grandpa and said, Here. Because I have a problem with math word problems.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. So is her teacher teaching her throughout the day? Are they getting instruction at all?

TRISH BLOODING: So they were doing—right now they're on all virtual until mid-December.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: They were doing a hybrid where they were in school Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday—and a half(??)—and virtual on Wednesday. A month ago, Erin texted the teacher—contacted her through whatever it is that they contact on phone. It's not text, it's not calling, it's not email. It's something,

ROBYN PIERCE: Some app.

TRISH BLOODING: Some program. [00:14:58] And she texted the teacher. It took them fourteen hours to do the assignments that needed to be done that day. Two of them were left over homework from another class—from the previous week when she was with her father. And then whatever the assignment for that day was. So she had a total of three assignments, took fourteen hours.

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ROBYN PIERCE: That's insane.

TRISH BLOODING: And so she requested from the teacher help. What can she do to help her? Not blaming it on anyone—not, you know—what can I do to make this easier on Rose? And I helped her word it because sometimes Erin has problems with wording.

ROBYN PIERCE: Well, when you're upset about something, you're definitely going to word it differently than if you think about it.

TRISH BLOODING: And it came back with a—it shouldn't be taking her this long. [00:16:02] She said it shouldn't be taking her that long. It should only be taking her 45 minutes. That's it. And so she worded it different and still the same thing. What—I understand it should only be taking this long—what can I do, to help her, so it doesn't take her so long?

ROBYN PIERCE: Mhm.

TRISH BLOODING: Well, it should only be taking her forty-five minutes. Again, that was the response. And I'm like fine, let me reach out to some friends of mine who I know have little ones in school that are virtual, and see what we can come up with.

ROBYN PIERCE: Well, and when you reached out to me—our kids, our platform is different. So they have a morning meeting and then they go into to math and she teaches them. And there's an assignment in Google Docs. And they the move on to whatever the next subject is in their routine and she teaches them, or there's a video where another teacher has recorded something ahead of time. [00:16:59] So I mean, for me, the kids go upstairs and they sit and do their stuff and they come down for breaks.

TRISH BLOODING: Yeah, see they go in and the assignment is there and—whatever it is they're working with—and it's not Google Docs, because that's what they were doing last year. And she didn't have—she had a problem but not as big of a problem.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

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TRISH BLOODING: But whatever program they're using, she went in, and she goes in and the assignment's there and it's not—it's like a textbook but it's not a textbook. And she can't get the hard copy. Because that was my next question, maybe if you print it, she would understand it better. And we can't get a hard copy so, because, you know, it's like—because I can't read off of—read and comprehend off of the phone or the computer. I literally have to print it to read it.
[00:18:02]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And if I want to retain the information. I said, So maybe she can't read it that way—maybe she's not keeping the information that way.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: So I didn't just reach out to you. I reached out to three other people and one of them had said, Is it the typing? She's only in fourth grade, is it the typing?

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, that could be.

TRISH BLOODING: And, yeah. So Erin started—had her write down her answers, and then Erin typed, and guess what? They were done by noon.

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice.

TRISH BLOODING: Yesterday they were done by ten. Not yesterday—Friday—they were done by 10.

ROBYN PIERCE: So has she started those typing games yet?

TRISH BLOODING: She just got them. I just found them yesterday.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

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TRISH BLOODING: So they were going to start them today. [00:18:59] I'm hoping she finds them fun. That was the goal.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. I have one that I have the twins do once a week. I'll have to send you the link to it. I don't remember what it's called right now.

TRISH BLOODING: Okay. Yeah, that and if they get stuck, because sometimes—so her and Rose are a lot like me and her. They butt heads really easily.

ROBYN PIERCE: That'll happen.

TRISH BLOODING: So sometimes grandma intervenes that way.

ROBYN PIERCE: (Laughs) Yeah. She probably really appreciates that.

TRISH BLOODING: Some days. Other days it's, Mom, I said the same exact thing to her. I said, Yes, but I said it in a calmer voice. (laughs)

ROBYN PIERCE: Yes. What other big changes happened when COVID swept in and changed everything?

TRISH BLOODING: So the interesting thing—and you're going to hear this totally different from me than probably everybody else you talk to—our lives up here didn't change. [00:19:59]

ROBYN PIERCE: So grocery stores and restaurants and stuff. You could still do what you wanted?

TRISH BLOODING: So Walmart, we have to wear a mask into. Smith's enforces it, which Smith's is a subsidiary of Kroger's. Restaurants, the casinos closed down here. They closed down. They opened back up, but only partially, and then they closed back down again when the numbers started going up.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

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TRISH BLOODING: That was the big change locally, is they closed down. Restaurants are offering less hours, or curbside dining.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: But really, we go to town once a week—once every two weeks. It's one hundred-two miles to town.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. [00:21:00]

TRISH BLOODING: We don't go often.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. I wouldn't either.

TRISH BLOODING: You know, but up here in the mountain things really didn't change that much.

ROBYN PIERCE: No, that's good.

TRISH BLOODING: It is.

ROBYN PIERCE: With this new uptick do you—have you heard and new changes, or impositions, or—?

TRISH BLOODING: The only thing they changed is they went from being able to have—I think it was a hundred at a venue to fifty at a venue. I think that was the only change that they made—big change that they made. And that they're recommending that people not get together for Thanksgiving.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. It's interesting to me. I've talked to two other people that were from two other states, and it's interesting to me how different every state is running everything.

[00:21:59]

TRISH BLOODING: So, M-W-M, so Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

TRISH BLOODING: Those have the strictest restrictions.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: Yeah. Minnesota shut down again. [Directed toward person in the background]

ROBYN PIERCE: I think we are too.

TRISH BLOODING: You aren't totally.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: But you're more so than most of them. A lot of your east coast states are—if you come from any of these X-states, then you have to quarantine for fourteen days or take a test and it be negative.

ROBYN PIERCE: Right.

TRISH BLOODING: So but out here—so Montana, Idaho and Oregon I want to say, they have stricter requirements than we do. [00:22:59] The funny thing is they have more cases than we do.

ROBYN PIERCE: Do they have more population, do you think?

TRISH BLOODING: I would say Idaho does. I don't know about Montana. I know we have probably the least other than Alaska. [background noises]

ROBYN PIERCE: Cases?

TRISH BLOODING: Not cases, people.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay, just wanted to clear that.

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TRISH BLOODING: Yep. Most of the state you can go miles and miles and not see people.

ROBYN PIERCE: How nice is that?

TRISH BLOODING: It's nice.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: I mean you have your towns, and you have people centered around your towns, but the nearest mall is Casper, and it's four hours [away].

ROBYN PIERCE: No thanks.

TRISH BLOODING: It's also your nearest Lowes and your nearest—oh, what's the orange one? Home Depot. [00:24:01]

ROBYN PIERCE: Home Depot. Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: It's also your nearest big chains for Red Lobster or Olive Garden, or any of those, too, so. But it's also the place you go if you want to go see a concert.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: Other than that locally, like I said Walmart's one hundred-two miles, and I think it's a one hundred-twenty the other direction. (laughs)

ROBYN PIERCE: Wow. That's a whole day.

TRISH BLOODING: Actually it's got to be more than that—because isn't—? No, Jackson is closer. Jackson is eighty. Oh, eighty something.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And there's really nothing between here and Jackson.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: I mean there's little podunk, teeny tiny "Population Thirty-Five" towns. [00:25:02] In between here and Riverton, same thing. There's little Podunk, "Population Thirty," thirty-five people.

ROBYN PIERCE: So it's probably spreading—doesn't spread as fast as those other populated areas.

TRISH BLOODING: Exactly.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: And the only—and the big reason a lot of it—so locally, in the little town of Dubois that's seven miles away, we had a huge uptick here a month ago. Because one of the churches took a whole busload of people out to—what's the word that they used? Mission.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh yeah.

TRISH BLOODING: The whole bus. Nobody wore masks. The church doesn't believe in wearing the masks at church, and doesn't believe in separating by six foot at least. So they all went—nobody wore masks, nobody did anything to prevent anything—to a town that already had it, significantly. [00:25:59]

ROBYN PIERCE: That's too bad.

TRISH BLOODING: Come back, they all went to church together, and they spread it around the whole damn town.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. That's unfortunate.

TRISH BLOODING: I get that you want to do your mission work. That's great. But let's use our brains.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

PERSON IN BACKGROUND: They don't have brains in (unintelligible). (Laughs)

ROBYN PIERCE: Well, I think that's actually all the questions I had.

TRISH BLOODING: Awesome.

ROBYN PIERCE: I want to turn the recording off, but if you could stick around so I can explain the last part I would need from you.

TRISH BLOODING: Okay.

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

End of interview