

COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: COVID-19 EXPERIENCES ORAL HISTORIES

Heather Beard Interview

November 20, 2020

Virtual Meeting, Ponotoc, Mississippi

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Heather Beard Interview

SARAH LAW: This interview is of Heather Beard, a friend of the interviewer, on November 20, 2020 via Zoom, about the effects of COVID on their ability to work and their family life. The interview will go into detail about their job and personal life both before and after the shelter in place order was issued.

This interview will be housed at the Reuther Library which is part of Wayne State University. The object that will be housed will consist of an audio recording and the transcript of the interview. While most advantageous would be to have the interview to have no restrictions, ultimately, it is up to the interviewee. This interview will be available for the public, so restrictions are understandable. The anonymity of the interviewee will be preserved if so desired, understanding that there will be a time constraint on how long the institution will honor that. There is also an option to house the audio and transcript only.

Alright, so Heather, my first question for you is a question I ask everyone which is: Are you affiliated with Wayne State University? [00:01:02]

HEATHER BEARD: No.

SARAH LAW: Okay. And where do you live?

HEATHER BEARD: Ponotoc, Mississippi.

SARAH LAW: Okay, so with being in Ponotoc, how big is that? Is it near a city in Mississippi?

HEATHER BEARD: We're smack dab in between Oxford and Tupelo, so I guess the biggest city would—I guess Oxford would be bigger. And then, the next biggest metropolitan-type area would be Memphis, which is about eighty miles away.

SARAH LAW: Okay. And what is it like, as far as living there with COVID? Have you had any problems there?

HEATHER BEARD: Not really. In the very beginning, when the lockdown really went into place, things were limited. So there's really only three restaurants that we liked to go to, to sit down

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at, and they all closed. [00:02:01] One opened a drive-through, another one took months to even get a drive-through open. The other one went under new management. And it was kind of—like, okay, that leaves us with a few options. If we wanted to eat out, it was pizza delivery, which took forever to get. If we order at five, we might not be getting our pizza until seven or seven-thirty because of the influx of people having to have stuff delivered. Or, it was just—you got tired of stuff. And then we have Walmart and Piggly Wiggly. So as far as getting groceries and stuff, getting toilet paper was a pain. And so if they didn't have it right up the road, you'd have to drive thirty minutes to Tupelo or forty-five minutes to Oxford to see if you had any luck. And even then, you may or may not have found anything, so it—it really changed the dynamic of, if you get out, why are you even getting out? [00:02:58]

We got kind of bored because, one, there's not really much to do around here, and if we wanted to do something, we'd go to Tupelo and go to the mall, but the mall was closed. Or, we'd want to go sit down and eat somewhere, so options became kind of limited. I mean, we like staying at home, too, but it certainly just—I wouldn't say it made it difficult. I think in the beginning, trying to find soap and toilet paper—and a few—and meat were hard. We could not find ground beef for weeks, so we bought a food processor and bought a roast. We made our own ground beef. And so it kind of changed the way we did things, too, as far as spending. And if we were to make a meal that required one pound of ground beef, we would buy the big thing of ground beef—separate it out for meals, that way we're not having to go to the store near as often. [00:04:00] It kind of changed how things were done.

SARAH LAW: And with the shelter in place orders going into place in Mississippi, when was that?

HEATHER BEARD: I think the end of March. I know my family was sheltering in place long before—my family in Memphis were sheltering in place long before Mississippi ever had the order put out, and our orders were far shorter than other places. I think the first was two weeks, and then it was extended another two weeks. So I think the shelter in place actually ended the end of April, because when we were sheltering in place the only places I went was,

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were—because I was pregnant when it first started. My husband went to the store, I went to the doctor's office, and that was about it. [00:04:59]

SARAH LAW: So how did COVID affect your life? I know that you were pregnant, how did that translate into COVID?

HEATHER BEARD: When we found out that I was pregnant in February, COVID was still kind of like, "Oh, it's not a big deal. It's not going to get over here. It's being controlled." And when it really became a serious thing in March, it was really scary. I was scared to go out because I had had two losses before, and so I was going to do everything in my power to make sure I stayed healthy. And then come April, we found out at our doctor's office that they were not allowing partners or spouses in with them, so it became really lonely. So, when I go to the doctor's office, I'd go in with my mask and my husband would have to sit in the car, which was extremely heartbreaking because I never knew what kind of appointment it was going to be. [00:06:02] It was all foreign and new. He could only go in for the ultrasound and then he'd be sent right back out, which made no sense to us, because he's already in the building in a mask. He can come in thirty minutes, so I can have a ultrasound done, and then he has to go back out.

But during that time, it became a really scary thought because I was hearing stories of women in New York, or states up north, or states that got hit really hard that they're having to give birth completely alone with strangers, basically. Or their child's being taken away and it became—you know, if this doesn't get better, what does it mean for us? And during the heat of everything, I was definitely considering having a home birth, because I was scared of having to give birth alone. It made appointments really upsetting. [00:06:57] I know our doctor's office, because the Mississippi rule was patient only, no one else is allowed in the building, but our—the clinic I go to said, "You know, husbands, and partners, or moms, or whoever your support person is can come in for the ultrasounds." That made a world difference that I could have him.

But when I gave birth in October, it was really rough not being able to have my mom there with me, or any of our family come see the baby after he was born. They had to come to the hospital

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window outside the building. It kind of made you feel like a zoo animal and it was really tough for everybody. That my parents didn't even get to see my son until the day we got home. My Dad didn't get to see him until a week after he was born. It definitely was difficult mentally. I would not—if I had to do it all over again, and be like, “Okay, you're pregnant and you can't have anybody, or your basically alone, would you do it?” [00:07:57] I wouldn't do it again.

I feel for every single pregnant woman or person who's sick during this time. My Grandfather got COVID, and he actually passed from complications of it. He recovered, but he passed from complications of it, and he was alone. He was just in a hospital room and it—once he was finally COVID negative, they would let visitors in, but it was one person a day and you only had an hour or two. And it takes a toll on your mental health, just not having anybody. And especially when you're pregnant, and feeling like you don't have that—support's not the right word—but you just kind of feel alone because you can't share that experience with other people.

[00:08:57] Or you feel that—I felt that even though sometimes the appointment was, “Okay, let's hear the heartbeat, let's chit-chat, how you feeling? Okay, go on your way.” I still feel like he missed out on that first child experience because he wasn't allowed to be there.

SARAH LAW: And I know that you said your grandfather passed due to complications. How was that? Are there any other ways that your family's been impacted by COVID? I know with your pregnancy and with your grandfather?

HEATHER BEARD: We've had—my aunt, actually, has stage four lung cancer. So it's made—I don't really see her very much—but it's made planning around holidays difficult. You know, is she going to get to be there? My cousin's getting married tomorrow, actually. We made the decision not to go, because of—it's a crowd of people, we have a newborn, and if we get sick he gets sick because he doesn't—his immune system is just weak. [00:10:05] My mom has a heart condition so she doesn't go out. And if we don't—before we go see family, we don't quarantine for two weeks, we just use our common sense and say, “Okay, if we're going to go see somebody, we need to make sure that we're well, and if we're not well, we don't go.” Or, it's

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me asking before we go up there, “Hey, has anybody been sick with anything other than allergies?”

It’s definitely made the family dynamic different. My husband’s father lost his job and hasn’t been able to get one. Just because of all of this, it’s made family life difficult. My grandmother, whose husband died, she doesn’t want to get out because she’s afraid of getting it. [00:10:59] My husband’s maternal grandparents have not left their house since March. We have not seen them. It’s definitely been odd.

Family gatherings are—it hasn’t affected us for the holidays. I know there are some people that we won’t get to see because they live way out there. They don’t want travel through the airport. But most of my family lives within reasonable driving distance and we keep up with them regularly, so it hasn’t stopped us from anything. My Dad and his wife went to Vegas and when they went to the airport, I told him, I said, “Don’t know how I feel about you coming over with you having been in an airport full of people, so you need to use your common sense before you come in my house.” I think that’s the worst thing I’ve told somebody. [00:11:58] My sister had a COVID scare last week, actually. She was in contact with somebody who tested positive and I gave her a hug. She had been around my baby and we had just driven down there just four hours earlier. We turned around and went back home. And then when we found out she was negative, we turned around and went right back. So, it’s been a balancing act, for sure.

SARAH LAW: So I know COVID has obviously affected your personal life and there are very big things with that. How has it affected your work life?

HEATHER BEARD: So for where I work, I’m a contractor and we work primarily with colleges and Greek life—sororities, fraternities. So when schools started sending kids home, it drove our process into the ground. [00:12:58] I had—I was very lucky that I was not furloughed or laid off. There were quite a few people who electively left. The founders of the company I work for said that they wouldn’t take a salary for the rest of the year, and this was in March. One of my good work friends got let go, and she did not come back until August. I did not get let go until July, so

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the only time I had off work was about three weeks. It may have been longer. We run based upon seasons, so college semesters—so we get really, really busy mid-January and we taper off in May and then we get really, really busy at the end of July and we taper off around Christmas. It's been really weird. I would work anywhere from thirty-five to forty hours a week, plus any overtime I want to take. [00:14:01] I have not gotten any overtime since January when—I don't mind saying this—I only bring home about eight to a thousand dollars every two weeks. That started becoming anywhere from three to five hundred dollars every two weeks, so I took a massive non-elective pay cut. And it didn't help that I took five weeks off for maternity leave, because when I got back, I cut my time in half because the hours aren't there. There were supposed to be a whole bunch of overtime benefits this year for people who chose to work extra shifts. Those aren't available.

When we'd usually be slowing down at Christmas, we've started slowing down before Halloween. So we're usually really busy, but we're not. And I don't know if, with everything going on—I've usually committed by now to go back—I don't know if I'll get to go back. [00:15:03] Thankfully I'm on a higher-level production team where my job is a bit more secure, but with everything going on and with there being shutdowns starting over again, and schools kind of shifting how they do things, there's no events at schools. There's no football games to make T-shirts for, there's no bid days or anything like that to do T-shirts for. So it's been a pay cut. It's been, uh, you know, "Hey, you know, you're only working two hours today instead of eight or nine." So I think our company was affected pretty bad. We've bounced through it really well. I think the hardest part was the unknown of, when am I going to be asked to leave? And am I going to be asked to come back?

SARAH LAW: Do you think your company's done as best they can, or as well as they can given the circumstances? [00:16:02]

HEATHER BEARD: Oh definitely. I've been absolutely amazed. So from the art side of it, because I don't see the business side of it, we branched out so much. We've partnered with bigger companies to do more than just, "Oh, hey, we make T-shirts for colleges." We make T-shirts for

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local bars or other schools, or other event-type things. We're the only company that's licensed to do Greek shirts for Life is Good, if you're familiar with that brand. They've done so many updates and they've been very open with how things are. I've never been in the dark about anything. I've been—there's just so much clarity, so there is the fear of, "Hey, we don't need as many people to go back. You weren't working as much because you have a baby. [00:16:59] You know, take a take a semester off, and then come back in the summer," kind of thing. There is that fear of not being asked to come back, just to limit how things go, and because I'm a contractor I'm expendable, more than a full-time person is. But I've never felt like, "Oh, well, they aren't telling us everything." No, the company's founders, my boss—the head of the art team—has been super open and even—. They're based out of Ohio, so I don't have to worry about any kind of, like ,company procedures or anything like that. But from what I've seen of how they operate on campus, it's—if you have to be in the office, here's what you have to do to be in the office. Because everything's made in house, the T-shirts and stuff, so procedures and stuff I think are top notch, and no one's gotten sick. Nothing's been out of the ordinary. It's just been the—we aren't doing as much work as we used to do. [00:18:02]

SARAH LAW: And I saw in your biography sheet that you have a personal business as well?

HEATHER BEARD: Uh, yeah. It's just—I do art and photography and logo design, so a lot of it's just—the last big project I worked on was a logo for someone and COVID hasn't really affected that all that much. Other—I think my pregnancy has affected it more, because I'm like, "Okay, I'm taking a break." Now, I did do a photoshoot for my little sister-in-law's friends, and the last few photos we did were kind of poking fun at having to wear a mask and social distance. I mean, they're a whole bunch of sixteen-year-olds trying to make light of a really hard situation. I mean, I can't imagine being in high school and not being able to see my friends. [00:18:58]

SARAH LAW: And going back a little bit, what was your life like before COVID? I know you'd said that you'd eaten out a lot or you just went into Tupelo. But are there any other things that COVID affected your life?

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HEATHER BEARD: Um, yeah. We would go to a movie maybe once or twice a month. On Tuesdays, they did five dollar movies. So we would be seeing a movie maybe a few times a month. That was our primary date night, you know? Because there's really not much to do around here, so let's go see a movie and walk around the mall. So there was no more walking around the mall, there was no more five dollar movie dates. There were no more, "Hey, let's go eat out, because we can." We would plan a weekend and go to the zoo in Memphis. I haven't been to the zoo since, maybe, the first weekend in March. There were no—I have family in Nashville. [00:20:00] There was no, "Hey, let's go pick up and go to Nashville for a weekend." We went on our anniversary in June when things opened back up, but even then there were still things we didn't get to do, like go to the zoo in Nashville, go to a museum. A lot of the, I guess, extra activities that were the norm like going to the movies or the mall were taken away because, I mean, that's all we really did. And it became really boring, so we found fun things to do at home.

And then the doctor's appointments were—I could have my husband there. I didn't have to go by myself, or expect to sit by myself. And the first few doctor's appointments I went to, all they were seeing was their pregnancy patients. So before I'd be waiting two hours at the doctor's office, and then when all the COVID stuff happened—I was only waiting—I was in and out in twenty minutes, which was really nice. [00:20:58] So I do miss the short doctor's appointments, instead of like having to sit there for two hours like I did today.

It definitely became, "Okay, what do we do this weekend?" We like board games, but between March and now, I'm sure we've bought like ten or fifteen new board games, just to have something to do.

SARAH LAW: How was—with your pregnancy, what was it like, just you and your husband at the hospital, instead of more people like you wanted to originally? Especially with COVID?

HEATHER BEARD: There was a sense of anger leading up to it. In the weeks leading up to it, I would call the hospital saying, "Have you changed your visitor policy? Have you changed your

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visitor policy? Can you please have one more person? Can my mom please be there?”

[00:21:58] Now, there were some things that they laxed up on, like us having to wear masks. Now, everybody else wore a mask. But if they came in our room, and we weren't wearing a mask, they weren't upset about it because we were healthy. The day we got there—because I was induced—the day we went in, I was not okay. I was just upset because I couldn't have my Mom there. I couldn't have my husband's Mom there. I couldn't have anybody. I couldn't even have a friend there. It was just him. So I had my husband to support me, but there was no one to support him, in case, you know, I lost it. So thank goodness for FaceTime, because if I hadn't FaceTimed my Mom, I don't think I could've really gotten through a lot of the process of it.

Being in the hospital by ourselves was really, really boring. Not that I didn't enjoy having a newborn, but he'd eat and he'd sleep, he'd eat and he'd sleep. [00:22:59] There was no playing with a two-day old. When my husband's family came to the window, it didn't really affect me as much as I thought it would. I think it affected them more because they're having to see their grandson through glass. I think it affected me more when I came home and my mom was there waiting. Because it was, “I did it, but I did it without you. I didn't want to do it without you, but I did it.” Which is a feat in itself is having to, you know—not that I was alone—but I didn't have everybody there that I wanted to have there. I feel like we missed out on pictures that I wanted to have, because there was only one person. I'm not going to hand the nurse my cellphone and be like, “Okay, you know, I want this picture. Make sure you get it.” Because they're there to help me. And so I feel like there's just little moments that I just have to have in my memory. [00:24:00]

The hospital was a bit more lax on some things that we were afraid that they wouldn't be lax on. Because the first thing I wanted to eat—they were able to send people. They could—people could come to the lobby and give us something and then they'd go home, but they couldn't come back to our room. So we were very excited to be sent home, just because it was just the three of us. And one of us can only communicate through crying, so it was really hard. I look back on it and think, I never want to do that. I never want to do it like that again. If I had to, I

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could do it, but I never ever want to do that again. My best friend's actually pregnant right now and she just got told that her husband can't be at any appointments. And I said, "You need to find out what your hospital policy is now and consider switching if they won't let him be there." [00:24:59] So, just from people who I know who are pregnant, I tell them, I said, "You need to be prepared now." Because, we were—but we kept expecting change, and change never happened.

SARAH LAW: Do you think the hospital did their job as far as COVID goes, though?

HEATHER BEARD: Definitely. I never had an issue with, you know—they would—every nurse and doctor had a mask on. They'd come in, they put on hand sanitizer on. They'd talk to me, check out the baby. They'd limit their time in there and they'd send us home. They do their thing. So it wasn't—I was never concerned about Coronavirus while we were in the hospital. I was more concerned of getting in, getting out, feeling better and going home. [00:25:58]

SARAH LAW: And how do you think your state handled dealing with Coronavirus, or COVID?

HEATHER BEARD: I think the state has handled it well. I really like our governor. I think the people of Mississippi have not handled it well. Like, okay, our Walmart says please wear—you know, masks are required when you come in. Okay, I'm wearing a mask because the sign on the door said, please wear a mask. I'm going to follow the rules. Now, if there's no sign on the door that says, Please wear a mask, I may or may not be wearing one. Our Mexican restaurant doesn't have a sign up anymore. Now, our county's under a mask mandate, again, so I will wear a mask. But we were just eating lunch and there was this one lady just saying, "Well, I'm not going to wear a mask, blah-blah-blah." I think people down here really, really fight it. I'm definitely over it. [00:27:00] I don't like wearing a mask because, glasses. I'm sure you understand the whole glasses fogging up thing. I don't like having to, but I've just accepted that it's a thing. I was more upset with having to wear a mask and going through labor. And so I was excited when my nurse said, You can take that off. I'm just like, Good. So, that was—honestly,

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that was my biggest concern with the mask was having to go through the hard part and I didn't have to.

And, so now I'm just over it. I don't—I've always wondered, "So why don't we wear masks during flu season if this is such a big deal?" Or, you know, if you're going to wear a mask, at least wear it correctly. I feel like I flip-flop on it sometimes, but I'm not scared of the Coronavirus. Now I'm scared of people being absolutely ridiculous. Like, "Oh hey, I have the Coronavirus. I'm going to go out." You're sick. Stay home. [00:28:00] Or, the sign says wear a mask. Follow the rules. So that's kind of where I'm at. I think that people of Mississippi are not handling it well, but (background noises) I think our governor is doing a decent job. My husband is a preacher and so we were concerned with, you know, are they going to shut down churches again? And he said, No, churches are exempt as long as they follow common sense kind of rules.

SARAH LAW: How has COVID affected not just your husband, but he's a preacher—

HEATHER BEARD: Mhm.

SARAH LAW: But how has that affected you as far as your role in the church?

HEATHER BEARD: With me being pregnant, there were periods of time where I stayed home. I would watch from my phone or I'd watch from where my parents worship. [00:29:00] So when the shutdown started happening, we were doing church in our kitchen. So I would set my phone up. Justin would preach. He'd walk everybody through the service. He would say, Hey, you know, here's a link to congregational singing. And call it a day. So when we started meeting again on Sunday mornings, I was not going because there was no—there were not enough studies out to show that how COVID would affect pregnant women. And so, I'd stay at home. I don't think—so after we first shut down, we started meeting again maybe June or July? And I'd stay home for a little bit. I think it was well into the second trimester when I went back to church on Sunday for the first time, and then we added Wednesday nights back and I didn't go

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on a Wednesday night until, well—I went back to my first Wednesday night church service two weeks ago. [00:30:00]

And then there was a discussion of when do we take the baby out? Because the pediatrician said eight weeks. That's a long time to be at home and he went to his first church service last Sunday and he was almost six weeks old. But it was, "Don't touch him, keep your distance." And everybody respected that. But as far as my role in the church is concerned, I just wasn't there. I wasn't present. So I guess that's what really affected things the most. And so, if it was a visitation meeting-type thing where we write cards for people, it's my list got sent home to me. Or I would help do our Facebook Live stuff. That role got given to somebody else, because I couldn't. I wasn't there. [00:31:00] So a lot of what little I did before everything, because we don't have—we have an older congregation, so there's really no kids to teach so that—I guess my role wasn't affected as all that much, except, "Hey, Heather's not here. Who's doing Facebook Live on her Sunday?"

SARAH LAW: What is something you miss from pre-COVID?

HEATHER BEARD: Going to the movies. I really miss—there were two movies I wanted to see this year. I wanted to see the new *James Bond* and I wanted to see *Wonder Woman*. They're both moved to next year. I was really, really disappointed. Because *James Bond* was something my Mom enjoyed and I wanted to go see it with her after she saw it with my stepdad. And so I'm like, "Okay, after you see it once, we're going to go see it again." But it—I like movies. [00:32:01] I like—I miss the sense of normalcy, like, being able to walk into a store and being able to try on something. The hardest thing through—besides missing movies, I miss dressing rooms. I have trouble finding jeans that fit and so, when everything—after I had my son it's, "Okay, I want a new pair of jeans. Alright, got to take them home, got to try them on, got to take them back." And some stores won't take stuff back. And so it's just—well, I guess I'm going to live in pregnancy yoga pants for a few more weeks until, my other stuff fits. But definitely movie theaters and dressing rooms.

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SARAH LAW: Is there anything that you would consider a positive through COVID? [00:33:00]

HEATHER BEARD: I don't know. Personally, I still think some things operate as normal. Now, if you were to ask me what's a positive that came out of 2020, I'd definitely say my son. I wouldn't say that my son is a positive thing from COVID. He definitely made some of the—wow, this really stinks that we can't do this. Because some of the things that we couldn't do anyway, like theme parks and movies and other big activities, I couldn't do anyway because I was pregnant. I missed a lot of the events that like—they would do fireworks. We live right down the street from a park. There were no fireworks this year. There was no Christmas tree lighting to go to this year. So I don't really know if there's like a direct positive from COVID, other than I have my son. [00:34:01] You know, that's a happy thing. So COVID doesn't bother me. I have a child that makes me happy.

SARAH LAW: Alright, I'm about wrapping up and I have—

HEATHER BEARD: Mhm.

SARAH LAW: —one last question for you today, and that question is: When COVID is over, what is one thing you want to do?

HEATHER BEARD: See a movie and go to the zoo, either one of those things. Probably the zoo. Without a mask and being able to go inside—the indoor exhibits—because I think at Memphis those are still closed. I don't know. They might not be. I know for a while all the indoor exhibits were closed, which is why we never went, because half of the fun exhibits are the ones that are inside. But probably a movie. I'll just—my husband's grandmother lives in Tupelo, so it's like, "Can you watch our child for two hours so we can go see a movie?" [00:35:00] That's probably the first thing, when everything is better, to see a movie.

SARAH LAW: Well, thank you so much for doing this with me today, Heather.

HEATHER BEARD: Yeah! Yeah, this was good. I hope. I don't know if this is helpful to anybody, but I know it's helpful to you and I'm happy to help, so.

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SARAH LAW: Well, thank you. It's very helpful.

End of interview