

Coping with a Pandemic—the Voice of a Nurse’s Daughter

An Interview by Tessa Murphy

This interview delves into the life of Emily Tran, a college student attending Rowan University, and her experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. She discusses her initial stressors, current feelings, and her plans for the future amidst a global crisis. It is important to be able to understand that everyone may experience different emotions and opinions about a pandemic depending upon their situation. This interview presents how one young adult girl—a daughter of a first responder— experienced the effects COVID-19 has had on her and her family. It reveals significant emotional impacts, such as having to watch a loved one go through turmoil due to their proximity to the virus. While pandemics can devastate people’s lives physically, it is meaningful to observe the emotional and social influences that also stem from such a crisis.

Tessa: What were your initial thoughts when COVID-19 was introduced into our world? Before it struck the United States, what were your feelings toward it?

Emily: I feel like there was a lot of fear surrounding it. At the time, COVID-19 was so unknown, and we had never seen it before. Just hearing it spreading so fast from Wuhan made me really scared. I knew that the United States was a wealthy country and has the ability to shut things down and provide protection, but hearing this illness spread from country to country made me realize that this was getting real.

Tessa: Did you think that COVID-19 would actually reach the United States?

Emily: I thought that it would reach us, maybe under 10 cases, and remain that way because we could stop it. I was so shocked when it first hit California and New York and the cases began to increase tremendously and people began to die. Actually, at first I didn’t really know anything about the Corona Virus, so I just assumed it was deadly to all people. I thought that anyone that got it would die because I didn’t do a lot of research on it. The fact that Wuhan was on the news and so many were dying made me think that this was a deadly disease, which it still is, but that it made everyone drop like flies. Now I’m less scared, since I am more knowledgeable to who is more at risk. I can understand how some will get it more than others based on their age or other factors.

Tessa: So, do you think knowing more about the virus helped you?

Emily: Oh yes definitely. The fact that it was a new virus, no one knew anything about it, and we didn't have a cure made it terrifying. Knowing more helped me relax and think clearly about the situation.

Tessa: What was your daily routine before the pandemic reached our country?

Emily: Honestly, considering that I am a commuter at school at Rowan, I would spend my entire day out of the house. I was always at school all day, hanging out with my friends a lot and studying on campus. I am not the type to sit at home a lot, which was why quarantine was so difficult. My basic day would be to wake up and go to class around 9 in the morning, spend pretty much all day out studying and being around friends, and finally around late in the evening like 8 pm I would come home and relax.

Tessa: Did the declaration of a state of emergency, along with the developments regarding COVID-19 in the following weeks, change how you thought about the situation? If so, what were those changes in thought?

Emily: When it hit New Jersey, it was truly tough because my mom is a nurse practitioner. She used to work at a long-term care facility, which means she was surrounded by people at risk. So mainly old people, people with diabetes, and those with other conditions. It was really tough for her because she had to take social distancing really seriously. When she got home, she couldn't stay close to us and she had her own room to stay in. I watched as more and more cases came to New Jersey, my mom's mental health began to decrease drastically due to her work as a healthcare provider. Another change was simply being home constantly when I used to be out all the time, and my parents never had a problem with me coming home late. In the beginning stages of the pandemic before quarantine, my parents began telling me to come home earlier, which briefly caused a lot of head butting and clashing between us. I understand now that they just wanted me to be safe because they were scared, but at the time I was a little selfish in that I was thinking more about the things I wanted to do.

Tessa: Would you say you were more afraid when the virus was confirmed in places near your residence?

Emily: Definitely. I first heard about a case reaching Cherry Hill, which was 5 minutes away from the person that I tutored, and that really made me understand that this was getting worse. At that point I decided to stop working as a tutor and to stay at home more.

Tessa: What was your daily routine after the pandemic reached the United States? During quarantine, did you introduce anything new into your life?

Emily: At the time we were still in school and finals were around the corner, so it was definitely stressful when the pandemic reached the United States. Since we moved to virtual learning, it was much more difficult to communicate with professors and the school in general. So I would mostly spend my time watching lectures, eating, studying,

and chill for the rest of the day. It felt like the same day every day. School, food, sleep, repeat. The good part about it was that since I have some qualities of an introverted personality, I didn't really mind doing this for a while. As for new hobbies, I picked up cooking more and exercising such as yoga. I also painted a little and tried sewing, mainly crafts from the internet. I had the free time, so I tried different things.

Tessa: Taking a look at your life amidst a pandemic, what changes have been the easiest to accommodate to? What changes have been the hardest?

Emily: Easier changes to accommodate to would be doing my chores because I had so much more time. I became more responsible in doing dishes, grocery shopping, and just keeping the house tidy. When you are home all the time, you are more aware of what needs to be done. The hardest thing to get used to was my sleep schedule. Before the pandemic I had things that would get me out of bed like school, but during the pandemic I did not have a reason to get out of bed since all I needed was my laptop for online meetings. It was hard to get motivated, so I combatted this by getting dressed in nicer clothes to get me up and ready for the day. As a commuter, I would dress up in the morning in nice clothes to go to school, so I tried to do this at home to trick my mind.

Tessa: Have you been dealing with any stress?

Emily: Currently I worry a lot about school, specifically how classes will run and how it will be for students living on campus. In the first half of this pandemic, a lot of stress was watching my mom go down a vicious spiral due to her work. She would have to watch people die of COVID-19 alone without their loved ones, since they don't let people see them if they are infected. Also, my relationship with my mom became stressful since she would come home and release that stress on us. She would come home and have a breakdown or act out on us, which made it hard for my family to get along with her. Plus, it did not make it better that she had to stay away from us due to her job. In the second half of the pandemic until now, I don't find myself stressing a ton, but I did think a lot about my relationships and friends I didn't see. Regarding mental health, I did get a little lonely in the first half of the pandemic because I couldn't see friends or my boyfriend. In a way I felt like this pandemic tested some of my relationships because it was definitely easier staying in touch with some people while it felt like I was struggling to keep in touch with others.

Tessa: What are some ways you have coped with this stress?

Emily: With my family, I had to just let that one ride out. I am the type of person that always wants to talk things out or solve it in that moment, even though sometimes the solution I push to isn't always the best one, but I realized that my mom really just needed time to think alone. My mom apologized for the stress she caused once she

realized how she had been. She also got a new job, which relieved a tremendous amount of pressure. For school, the fact that I had pretty awesome classmates to discuss problems with helped out a lot. The stress surrounding school was probably the one I thought about the most. I also experienced a bit of stress surrounding a friendship— it was hard to navigate because up until then, I had never really had to deal with issues with friends, so it also affected how I saw myself too. So I got over my fears and talked out my feelings with the one I felt uncomfortable with. With all the time I've had to ponder while being in quarantine, I think I grew out of the habit of being a person that constantly steamrolls for a solution in that moment, and started letting time and space do its job to help simmer things down and make decisions more clear for me and others.

Tessa: What do you foresee for your future and how do you think COVID-19 will impact our future? What do you hope to see?

Emily: I think for my future it is going to be a little bit tough in that the education I expected this year might not be as fulfilling as it usually would, which is understandable considering the pandemic. In general, I picture a permanent change in that social distancing and masks will linger around for the next couple of years. Of course I also expect some to continue partying and to attend big gatherings with social distancing still in effect, but I know we cannot control all of them unfortunately. I really do think there will be a large change economically, especially in businesses that had to shut down. My dad owns a gym that has been shut down for more than six months. All of the businesses that have been shut down for so long have to catch up now. I also hope to see that after we get past this pandemic people will learn to have better sanitary habits. I definitely see a change in myself in that I am more conscious of those things. I also hope to see political events like Black Lives Matter to continue and not be pushed aside. I believe that this generation will not stop, and they will fight for change. That is what gives me hope.

Below you will find a cheery photograph of Emily Tran and her parents posing together.

