

*Journalism and COVID-19 Oral History Interview Guide*  
*Elinor Aspegren*

**Interview's Overarching Objective:** I am doing these interviews to get another historical perspective about the change over the period of 19 months (so far) that has made up the pandemic. I am interviewing journalists to get this perspective and to learn about the burnout and trauma that comes with being a breaking news reporter and reporting on COVID-19 during the spring and summer of 2020. As we get farther and farther from this pandemic, it is important to have a historical record of the lives we lived during it and the collective trauma we experienced.

**Central Themes:**

- COVID-19 pandemic and how attitudes have changed over time
- Journalist burnout
- Disinformation (specifically about COVID) and its effects on the population
- Reflecting on journalistic practices pre-pandemic and post-pandemic hit

10/22/2021

Location: Theirstory

Name: Amanda Gomez

Do I have your permission to record this interview? **Yes/No**

***Initial Question/Questions***

***Beginning of life/journalist career***

1. Where and when were you born?
2. Who else is in your family, and what do they do?
3. (I will have hopefully done research before this) Can you tell me about the town or city where you grew up?
4. What was it like growing up there?
5. Can you tell me about your school experience? Do you have any specific memories from then?
6. Did you always want to be a journalist or were there other career options?
7. Can you tell me about the moment or moments when you knew that you wanted to be a journalist?
8. Were there any moments when you were discouraged?
9. How did growing up in (town or city) prepare you to become a journalist?
10. Could you walk me through your career path, starting with your experiences at college and up until your role as a reporter?
11. If you could go back and tell your younger self anything about the path to journalism, what would you tell them?
12. What did it take to move from one position to another?
13. What memorable stories did you do in your tenure before coronavirus?
14. (I know you started out here) What was it like when you got your first journalism job?
15. Other journalism projects?
16. Do you remember the first days of your current job? What were they like?
17. Is covering metro/breaking news your first choice in covering news?
  - a. As in, if you could cover any section, what would you cover?

18. (when you started at your current publication/past publication at Feb. 2020) What made you want to work at that publication?
19. Can you provide details about what your typical day/week looked like pre-pandemic?
20. What about now/during quarantine?
21. How did your experiences in the pandemic immediately change?
22. How did they change over time?
23. Do you remember your thoughts about the trajectory of your year in January and February 2020? For example, I thought I was going to start work in journalism in LA.

### **COVID-19**

24. Do you remember where you were when you first heard about COVID?
25. What went through your mind?
26. What was the first article you remember writing about it?
27. What was the first article you remember reading about it?
28. Looking back now can certainly give us some hindsight bias, but do you remember what your sentiments during the first couple months of COVID quarantine were?
29. When was the moment when you realized that that the pandemic was a serious thing?
30. When did your newsroom shut down?
31. Can you tell me about any specific moments you remember from your last day in the office?
32. How did you feel about your newsroom shutting down?
33. How were the first initial months of quarantine for your work productivity?
34. For your social life outside of work?
35. For your mental health?
36. How did COVID impact your family and friends?

37. (For Rebecca) I know you grew up outside the U.S.. How did that impact you — not being able to see family and friends, etc.
38. Did you try any new hobbies during quarantine?
39. Are there any articles about COVID-19 that you have written that have made a big impact?
40. How did these articles (or one article) impact you?
41. How did the people you interviewed for COVID stories in DC impact you?
42. Can you tell me about a time(s) during this past year when you were overwhelmed?
43. Maybe a time when you wanted to quit?
44. What is the most interesting/rewarding part about working in journalism during that year?
45. What about the most challenging?
46. How do you think that your perspective on COVID has changed from then to now?
47. Can you tell me about how the beginning of the pandemic, in terms of your coverage, impacted you?
- a. (If they ask for clarification) I think we forget about the uncertainty of that time. We didn't really know a lot about this disease, yet journalists had to act as an authority on it. What was that like for you?
- b. At the same time, journalists (and especially community journalists) had to report on how this disease tore apart their communities. Can you talk about an article that you did that really impacted you that you did on your community in (NYC, DC)?
48. Were there any other topics or moments that you covered in addition to the pandemic that were especially impactful to you?

### ***Disinformation***

49. Have you seen COVID disinformation?
- a. Examples?

50. Has COVID disinformation specifically impacted you or someone else in your life?

51. How has combatting COVID disinformation, of which the media is accused of a lot, impact you?

a. Maybe share personal anecdotes here: about how people would email me and ask me to report the survivability rate of COVID.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

52. How have you not gotten burned out by the pandemic and the deluge of breaking news? Put another way, how are you exercising self-care?

53. If you could talk to those reporters of the next pandemic, what is one piece of advice that you would give them?

54. Is there any questions that you wish I had asked?

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this interview today. Your interview has been very informative and will be a valuable contribution to understanding the COVID pandemic.