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Amanda: Today is Wednesday, July 6th, 2022. My name is Amanda Riggerbach and I am the manager for the Tumultuous 2020 Oral History Project at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. I'm currently in Peoria Heights, Illinois with Donya Brown, a certified nursing assistant and college student. We're going to be talking about her experiences as a CNA throughout the COVID-19 pandemic for the Tumultuous 2020 Oral History Project. Thank you so much for having me, Donya.

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Donya: Of course.

Amanda: Your house, your home is so beautiful.

Donya: Thank you so much.

Amanda: So really, I like to start with the background information usually.

Donya: Okay

Amanda: So when and where were you born? And you can just give me the month and year.

Donya: I was born January 18th, 2002 here in Peoria.

Amanda: And what was your childhood like? You know, who were you raised by?

Donya: I was raised with my mom and dad. And I grew up with four other siblings here in Peoria, so we've kind of been in the area our whole lives.

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But, yeah, just kind of same neighborhood our whole lives.

Amanda: And where do you fall in your siblings? Like are you the middle, the youngest, oldest?

Donya: I'm a middle child. I have the three older brothers, and then my little sister is the youngest.

Amanda: Do you think that - you know how they have those stereotypes of like the oldest having a certain personality and the middle child. Do you feel like that holds true to your family?

Donya: Yeah, you know, I think we've all kind of have different personalities, for sure.

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I'm kind of the more, you know, like the older sister, so I'm like the second mom. Definitely helped take care of the house, and my siblings, and everything, so that was kind of my role.

Amanda: But now you live on your own and it's your own place.

Donya: Yes, definitely.

Amanda: And what would you say are some of the hallmarks of your early life? If that question makes sense.

Donya: I mean, my mom, growing up, she is an immigrant from Syria, so we have kind of a bunch of different traditions from Syria.

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So we celebrate different holidays. Like Eid was our Christmas, Ramadan, fasting, just, you know, and then music-wise, we grew up with Arabic music, and just kind of the whole culture, food-wise, too.

Amanda: What are your favorite parts of Syrian culture?

Donya: Definitely the food and the music. Very different and very rich, traditional.

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Amanda: Which like dish is your favorite?

Donya: There's something called maktous that my mom makes and it's like a stuffed eggplant. It's stuffed with red peppers and walnuts, and then it's like soaked in olive oil. It's really good.

Amanda: How did your mom end up coming to the Midwest?

Donya: So my dad and her met in Syria, and I believe my dad was actually on a business trip, and he had a friend who taught him Arabic, so he had already known how to speak Arabic when he went.

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And his friend was like, oh, I know a family. They've got a daughter around your age. They introduced, and they hit it off, they got married in Syria, and then they made it back to the U.S.

Amanda: Did you grow up speaking Arabic?

Donya: Yeah, actually, Arabic is my first language. So I am a native Arabic speaker and I kind of - when I started public school in America, they put me kind of in an

English as a second language program. So I did end up learning it pretty fast, but it was kind of a different experience.

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Amanda: Did you ever feel like an ostracization from other students because of it?

Donya: I definitely felt different when I started public school. Obviously, I looked a little different to the other kids, and I spoke differently than they did. I started public school around second grade, so before that I was kind of at a private school, and it was kind of more of an Arabic-speaking like private Muslim school. So that was my experience before public school and then kind of went from there.

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So it was kind of rough at first.

Amanda: When did it start becoming - when do you feel like you started finding your feet?

Donya: Maybe not till high school, honestly. Like freshman year of high school is when I started, I guess, fitting in, maybe. I guess that might not be the word, but feeling more welcome.

Amanda: What changed in high school compared to middle school and current school?

Donya: Maybe just finding, like my people.

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Finding the friend group. Finding people with similar interests as me and, you know, becoming friends. And they definitely helped me through it.

Amanda: Absolutely. Thank you for sharing. I know that can be sometimes difficult to talk about, tumultuous growing up. And yeah, so where did you go to high school?

Donya: I went to Richwoods High School here in Peoria for my four years.

Amanda: And you mentioned freshman year was kind of when you started finding your people.

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Donya: Yeah.

Amanda: What were your expectations going into high school? Were you nervous?

Donya: A little bit, but I also was ready for a change. I felt like it was, you know, people were older and more mature, so I was excited for it.

Amanda: And what were some of your favorite moments from high school?

Donya: I think, you know, I kind of got into sports, and I got into like cross country, and soccer, and definitely like being on a team kind of helped.

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And meeting people who had similar interests as me was nice.

Amanda: And what about least favorite moments?

Donya: You know, I Donya't think I had really many bad experiences in high school, but you know, I wasn't a fan of chemistry or math. Those were kind of my worst subjects. Those were things I couldn't wait to be Donyae with.

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Amanda: And as a nursing student, I'm sure that's coming back to haunt you a little bit.

Donya: It did in the beginning. When I was doing my prerequisites, I did have to take some more chemistry and like a statistics class, but other than that, it was more science-based, which is what I like.

Amanda: And so in our pre-interview, you told me that you were doing the CNA program in high school. Can you tell me a bit about that?

Donya: So it was actually a dual credit course. So you earn college credit while - and high school credit while taking that course.

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So I started it my junior year, and by the time I graduated, I was a fully licensed CNA. So we did kind of like the prerequisites junior year, and then senior year, we went out into the community and to facilities, and got that clinical experience. And then we took a test and we were certified when we graduated.

Amanda: Was that intense while completing high like school credits?

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Donya: It wasn't. I Donya't remember it being too difficult. It was, you know, a little bit of an extra course, of course. And then there was the clinical aspect, which was, you know, separate from, you know, sitting down in class in school. But I liked it because it was very hands-on and it pertained to the field I wanted to be in. So I thought of it as a good experience.

Amanda: And kind of talking about the fall of 2019 then.

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Or actually, going back a little bit, what made you decide to take the CNA courses?

Donya: I think I always knew that I wanted to end up in the medical field. And what I liked about nursing in general was the fact that it's more personable as opposed to being like a doctor. You know, you're kind of in and out of a room, whereas with nursing, you spend more time with people. You take care of them. Get to know them, talk to them, make them feel better. So that was what appealed like nursing to me.

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So I figured CNA was just kind of the first step towards that path. And I took advantage of the opportunity of getting in as early as possible. So that was kind of why I chose to do the program in high school.

Amanda: And was it something that you had to pay extra for? Or was it-?

Donya: I believe it actually wasn't too much. Each course, each dual credit course that we had the opportunity to take was only like an additional \$50.

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So it wasn't much better than, you know, waiting till college and paying maybe that much just for a credit hour, even more so.

Amanda: Being somewhat a fresh college graduate, that's definitely a steal.

Donya: Yeah, it was very much a steal, so I figured why not take advantage of that.

Amanda: And then moving into the fall of 2019, that was your senior year.

Donya: Mm-hm.

Amanda: What were your expectations?

Donya: With like COVID or-?

Amanda: With like your last year of high school.

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Donya: I was really just kind of ready to be Donyae and move forward with my career. I had made friends by that point, so I was - you know, we all kind of were going in different directions, so just kind of ready to start in that path.

Amanda: And was there anything that you were most excited for?

Donya: I was excited to start, you know, my CNA job, since this would be my last year in the program. So I was ready to be over that and start working after high school.

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Amanda: And did you have like definite plans for after graduation or were you still trying to figure out which colleges to apply to?

Donya: I pretty much knew for sure that I was going to Bradley to be in their nursing program. They had offered me a very good scholarship, so it was kind of hard to look elsewhere. So I was pretty set in my plans by the time I was in my senior year.

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So the plan was to finish work as a CNA, and then, you know, go straight into the nursing program.

Amanda: And while you were doing your CNA classes and, you know, in high school, were you working any other jobs?

Donya: Yeah, actually I started working around 16. So my sophomore year I actually started work at a facility that I would later be a CNA at.

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But I did more of like dietary work and secretary work there. And then when I got my CNA license, I just kind of switched over.

Amanda: And then moving into the early part of 2020, did you have like any goals for the year before you knew about the pandemic?

Donya: Not really. I was just trying to get through the year, try and finish with the best grades possible, get through the program.

Amanda: Were your parents supportive of you doing the CNA program and being a nurse?

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Donya: Yeah, you know, they've always kind of supported anything I kind of throw at them. They're like, well, you know, if that's what you want to do, you can do anything you set your mind to. So yeah, they were always kind of been behind me in my choices.

Amanda: And, you know, did you know much about the virus in the early months of 2020, like January, February?

Donya: No, not at all. You know, I kind of knew as much as anyone else in my grade. You know, they had mentioned, you know, outbreaks starting to happen.

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And I Donya't think anyone really expected it to get as bad as it did. You know, we started with, oh, we're taking a week off school, we're taking two weeks off school, and then you're not coming back for the rest of the year. So no one really was ready for that. And especially since it was our graduating year, we definitely weren't ready for not having like a graduation or prom. I mean we ended up having like a drive-thru graduation. So that was definitely a memorable experience.

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Amanda: Absolutely. And just to kind of give you like some of those key dates, it was January 30th when the World Health Organization declared COVID a public emergency. But it wasn't until March 9th when Governor Pritzker declared a disaster proclamation for Illinois. And then it wasn't until March 13th that he announced that the schools were going to close. And initially it was March 17th to March 30th. Which was that over your spring break?

Donya: I believe. Yeah. When we were on spring break, and they told us that it was extended, and then that's when, you know, it's a month before school like gets out.

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So that's when they're like, oh, you're just not coming back for the rest of the year.

Amanda: Do you remember that moment of finding out?

Donya: Yeah. I mean, you know, at the time I was probably excited like anyone else, like, oh, we Donya't have to go back to school. But, you know, it just kept getting worse. And, you know, no one really expected that to happen. We just - you know, we saw it as, oh, we get them out a month early, but it really just kept spiraling downwards after that.

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Amanda: And can you tell me about how it impacted your schooling, like how your teachers reacted, and like what they did?

Donya: So I believe at first they were trying to have us do like schoolwork online, and but I think they knew that, you know, they probably weren't going to have much luck getting students to comply to that, so they made it kind of an optional thing and eventually students just kind of, you know, didn't...

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...stay on it as hard as they should have. You know, people who were taking like ACT tests, they didn't get to take those, so I mean that kind of took away from people who were hoping to get the credit from it after that. And then I mean for me personally, it didn't really affect me until I started college. So I started college in person, you know, sitting in class in person, and then, you know, outbreaks got worse, and we would have to switch to online.

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And at the start of my career I was living in the dorm, you know, because I figured I should live on campus, so I can be closer to my in-person classes. Then they said, oh, your classes are online. So I figured, oh, why am I staying in a dorm if my classes are online? So I actually ended up moving out of my dorm the first semester and that's when I moved here to [unintelligible 0:14:29].

Amanda: And we definitely will get into kind of that start of your freshman year of college, but before...

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...we do that, I do kind of want to talk a little bit more about those early months of COVID.

Donya: Sure.

Amanda: So what did the pandemic do to your motivation in that first, you know, weeks when we didn't know if it was going to keep going, if you were going to go back to school or not?

Donya: I mean, it definitely was kind of draining, you know, just to not know what was going to happen and regarding like the rest of the year too. It was, you know, exciting at first, but also scary because you're like...

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...well, what's next. You know, we're not going back to school. What else is going to happen? What else is going to close down?

Amanda: And how did it impact your CNA training if you were in clinicals at that point?

Donya: It did restrict some of the places that we could go to. Eventually, we ended up going to a nursing home. And there were, you know, starting to be some COVID patients. So there were some parts that we weren't, you know, allowed to access or see.

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Because, you know, this was relatively new. They didn't really want students around it at first. But I mean regarding the residents especially, they couldn't really leave their rooms in some cases. And like they were isolated just in their rooms. They couldn't go down to the dining room to eat. Couldn't socialize anymore. And it definitely kind of had a bigger effect on them than anyone else.

Amanda: Did you notice that that seemed to have like an emotional impact on them?

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Donya: Yeah, for sure. I definitely saw a lot of depression, a lot of people upset that they couldn't see their families. I saw pretty often families would come like outside of their windows to visit and it's just really sad. I mean it definitely took a toll on them for sure.

Amanda: And like I know some like universities when their clinicals were put online...

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...they invested in kind of like online modules. Did Richwoods do any of that?

Donya: No. I mean with us, not really the seniors because, you know, we were kind of Donyae anyway, and I know later they did with the younger grades. They started doing like online coursework, and eventually I believe they switched to like A and B days, so one day there would be students who had classes online, and the next day...

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...there would be students that had classes in person, and they just kind of switched. So I mean that was kind of - my sister experienced that more than I did, but it was definitely unprecedented.

Amanda: That's the word that we kept hearing that year, wasn't it?

Donya: Yeah. Definitely.

Amanda: What was it like for you then to have, you know, prom and different like senior sports events canceled?

Donya: I mean, for me it was not a huge deal, but I was kind of upset to have never had like a prom...

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...experience, and of course I did want to walk the stage for graduation, but that never happened. And it wasn't like devastating, but it was kind of disappointing.

Amanda: You mentioned that your graduation was like a drive-thru. How did that work?

Donya: So all the graduating seniors were lined up in their cars and the principal and other faculty were outside...

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...kind of by the entrance of the school. And they'd call your name, and then you'd drive up, and get your diploma. It was pretty much like a drive-thru. Like they handed you your diploma through your car window, and anything you had left in your locker, they also handed you like in a bag. So it was very kind of informal, but, you know, I guess it was some kind of recognition, so it was something.

Amanda: I feel like giving you all of those items from your locker would have taken a lot of coordinating on their end.

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Donya: Yeah. I Donya't know. They had a whole list. And honestly, I think as you pulled up, they would like see who it was, and they'd like get your things ready for you. But I mean it went smoothly. It was just kind of, you know, not what anyone expected.

Amanda: The person who introduced us, (Sincere Williams), told me that he was asked to sing at the graduation.

Donya: Oh, I actually didn't remember that, but he very well could have.

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Amanda: Was there any part of it that you watched online?

Donya: Yeah, actually there was a commencement thing online, but it was just, you know, our pictures, and any rewards that you would receive, they, you know, would say that along with your name, but it wasn't like a live feed or anything. It was just like a video they put together.

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Amanda: Was that weird for you having - you know, you had three older brothers who had gone through graduations normally. Was that slightly disappointing?

Donya: Yeah. It was very, you know, having that expectation growing up and, you know, seeing all three of my brothers graduate, and attending their graduation with a full like stadium of people, that was, you know, very different to what I experienced. It was, you know, disappointing, but I know that I also have college graduation to look...

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...forward to, hopefully.

Amanda: And what about your sister? You mentioned that she's still in school or did she graduate?

Donya: Yeah. She actually just graduated this year.

Amanda: Was her graduation a normal one?

Donya: Yeah, pretty much. They actually went right back to their regular ceremony kind of after our year graduated. So I think our year just kind of got it bad because we were in the midst of the COVID outbreak and whatnot. But yeah, my sister did have a normal graduation at the school. I know.

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Amanda: And did you graduate your CNA program at the same time that you graduated high school?

Donya: Yeah, slightly like a month before. It was pretty much right along with my graduating from school.

Amanda: And did you get a job as a CNA right away or did it take some time?

Donya: Pretty much as soon as I could. Since I'd already had the job at Independence Village, just as soon as I got my license, they kind of already knew that I was in the program.

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So I kind of just had an in from the jump.

Amanda: Oh, so I didn't realize that you had been working at Independence Village for that whole time.

Donya: Yeah. No, I'd been there since I was 16.

Amanda: Wow. So let me kind of – and I'm embarrassed because when we did our pre-interview, I accidentally wrote my notes as Liberty Village, but it's Independence Village.

Donya: Oh, no, you're fine. You're fine.

Amanda: Though thematically they sound similar.

Donya: Pretty much.

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Amanda: So what was that transition then going from doing the dietary stuff and assistant work to being a CNA?

Donya: So dietary, you know, I kind of just helped. I was basically essentially a waitress, so I would help serve food, and clean up tables, and bus, and do dishes. Secretary work, I would help print out like schedules and menus, help the residents with anything they may need like office-wise.

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But then when I transitioned to CNA, it was a lot more personable. I helped with like personal care and helping them do anything that they couldn't do like self-care-wise themselves. I'd help them get dressed, help them get ready for bed, help them with like reminding them to take their medicine. Like basically, just anything that they would struggle to do for themselves, I would help them with. So it was a lot more personable with the CNA work.

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Amanda: And, you know, with the dietary component of that job before you became a CNA, when the pandemic started, did you have to deliver food to their rooms?

Donya: Yes. So during the height of the pandemic when the outbreaks were the worst, like I said, they couldn't go to the dining room anymore to eat and socialize, so they would have to stay in their rooms. And what we would do in the kitchen is just, you know, pack up like Styrofoam plates...

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...and like label the room numbers. If anyone had special orders, we'd make their special order, but then we'd just kind of deliver them to the rooms. It was pretty sad.

Amanda: Was it hard to sometimes just leave the food in the room and not talk to or, you know, socialize with them?

Donya: Yeah, yeah it was. You know, you could tell they really just craved talking to someone or socializing with their neighbors, but it was a period where they really couldn't do that.

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Amanda: Do you think that having been a CNA, or having worked at that place for such a long time, and then becoming a CNA, were the residents more comfortable with you?

Donya: Yeah, you know what, I think it did help that they had known me before. You know, obviously when I served them as a waitress, I'd talk and conversate, and I

got to know them pretty well, so I was a familiar face to them, so it was kind of comforting...

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...for them to have someone they know taking care of them, so it was a good experience.

Amanda: And how would you say that the mood of the, you know, Liberty, or sorry, Independence Village shifted with the pandemic?

Donya: I mean, you know, it was a very lively place before then. They always had some kind of activities going on for the residents. They would have like live entertainment often and there was a director of activities that...

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...just always made sure there was some kind of arts and crafts or movie going on. It was just, you know, they were always entertained. And I mean, with the onset of COVID, a lot of that kind of stopped or, you know, slowed down quite a bit. They would still have, you know, like activities they could do in their room, or things they could do socially distanced, but it was definitely a shift in the energy. It was definitely died down a bit.

Amanda: And were staffing shortages a problem, you know, throughout your entire time there?

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Or when did that become something you noticed?

Amanda: Definitely during COVID, I believe the CNA staffing was not the best. We had a high turnover rate, I believe. People definitely got burned out quick. And so that made it a little bit harder taking care of the population that we had. There were times where I'd take care of a whole floor of people myself, or put to bed, you know, two floors of people.

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It was pretty bad, but eventually it, you know, got sorted out. It was gradually got better. But yeah, definitely during COVID staffing was an issue.

Amanda: What do you think were some of the causes of the burnout?

Donya: You know, a lot of people have family that are more susceptible. You know, a lot of people take care of their grandparents, and their parents and, you know, their children, or their babies who are more vulnerable to COVID.

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So I definitely saw a lot of people becoming frustrated with that because they didn't want to, you know, bring it home to them. And just, you know, a little bit more care that some people who may have been affected by COVID might have required - I definitely just saw people getting frustrated very fast, but I stuck around. I Donya't know.

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Amanda: And I remember in the beginning of the pandemic, you know, there was always the announcements for the general public not to buy up masks and PPE, you know, in order to save it for medical personnel. Did you guys face a shortage or were you able to stay protected in that way?

Donya: Oh yeah, you know what? We definitely had like glove shortages sometimes. There were times where they would bring us like a box of gloves and be like, this is what you have for the day.

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And we're like, oh, okay, we might need a little more than that. But yeah, it was definitely a challenge trying to be like limited to the resources that we had. And I mean acquiring resources when we did need them were also a bit of a challenge. So it was definitely a struggle.

Amanda: And were there any like particular patients that stuck out to you?

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Did you like have, you know, any that you had any type of connection with?

Donya: I had quite a few that I became really close to, and they, you know, were excited to see me come in. They were like, oh, you're on tonight, good. And, you know, being in a facility where those people, you know, live, they live their lives every day there, it's a little bit different than working somewhere like a hospital or a nursing home where, you know, the population changes a bit.

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So when I was working at Independence Village, you know, that was home to those people. So I saw the same people every single day. So I definitely got close with quite a few of them.

Amanda: While respecting their privacy, you know, are there any specific stories that stand out to you?

Donya: I'm not sure how to say it without like giving information but-

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Amanda: No, that's totally fine. Of course respecting. And so what would be like the number of people in order to ensure the best patient care to, you know, put a floor that - you know, you mentioned sometimes there's only you for two floors. Like what would be normal and how did you cope with that?

Donya: So the standard, typically we would have one to two CNAs per floor and...

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...that was, you know, preferred, so sometimes at night we'd have, you know, just one CNA for two floors, and then one on like the busiest floor, but the ideal staffing situation would be like one to two on each floor, and then the first floor was kind of the busiest, so maybe two or three there. But yeah, there were definitely times where it was just me for up to two floors. Like that was up to...

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...like 30 patients. It was pretty bad.

Amanda: How did you not get burnout? You know, did you - yeah.

Donya: I Donya't know. I definitely experienced some burnout and I mean physical too. I mean my back, I experienced a lot of like pain there. I went to a chiropractor for a while, just from the physical aspect of that, it was hard. I definitely like caused some injuries to myself.

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Amanda: And I know you still are working as a CNA though, not at Independence Village. Has your back and these health issues been remedied or are they still prevalent?

Donya: Yeah, now that I'm working more in a hospital setting, staffing is a little bit more regulated, so it's not as heavy as a workload, but it still can be a little bit heavier sometimes. But I haven't experienced the same like physical strain as I did when I worked at the retirement home.

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Amanda: And I know that it was in the like, you know, nursing homes, and I think in retirement homes, and just long-term care facilities in general that the pandemic was really strong in the beginning.

Donya: Yes.

Amanda: Did you guys see that in Independence Village?

Donya: In the beginning we did have I mean quite a few cases. There were people that got sent to the hospital for, you know, extended periods.

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But, you know, with the isolation precautions that they took, even though it, you know, was bad, people staying in their rooms, I think they did a pretty good job of, you know, keeping it at bay. So yeah, I mean despite people having to make some sacrifices and not getting to be as social as they were used to, it did - you know, it was effective. So definitely didn't see as much as we could have.

Amanda: What were your thoughts on that? Did you think that they should have let people risk COVID and have that socialization?

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Or did you think that it was the right thing to keep them healthy?

Donya: You know what? I think despite it having negative effects, I think they did the right thing. And, you know, eventually they got a little bit more lax with it. They allowed visitors who were vaccinated and were socially distanced. There was like a bench they could sit six feet apart and visit with their family. And eventually they started working social distancing into their dining experiences.

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So it got better gradually. But I think at the end of the day, their health was at, you know, their best interest. So I know their hearts were in the right places with that. And resident's care was the number one priority.

Amanda: And it was in the summer of 2020 when Illinois moved into phase three, which outside of like, you know, long-term care facilities, it allowed restaurants to open for limited indoor dining.

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And bars were starting to open back up. I think movie theaters had loosening restrictions. Is that kind of when they started doing the same thing?

Donya: Yeah. You know, they definitely took the governor's guidance into account. And they definitely went by that. So I think they definitely did the right thing, even though it was difficult. At the end of the day, it could have been worse and more people could have been affected. So, you know, especially with elderly people being the most - one of the most susceptible populations...

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...they definitely did what they had to do.

Amanda: Did you guys experience families who were upset about your guys' precautions?

Donya: Oh yeah. Yeah. It was definitely frustrating to them that they couldn't see their family after being used to it. But at the end of the day, I think they also understood and were patient with the process. So it was fine in the end.

[0:33:37]

Amanda: And then talking about the summer of 2020, in May - I had the exact date and now I lost it. I think it was May 29th is when George Floyd was murdered. And shortly after, there were international protests in support of social and racial justice. And there were several in the Peoria area. And of course, (Sincere Williams), you know, our connection. What were your feelings at the time about the situation?

[0:34:09]

Donya: You know, I feel like it has been something that's been happening in America for a long time, but I think that situation with George Floyd definitely brought it more to light and brought the attention that it needed surrounding the issue. So I mean just the fact that it raised the awareness that it did, I mean, was a good thing.

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But just the injustice that's been happening in America has been happening for a long time and still happens every single day. So it's definitely something that we need to do better with. So hopefully, I hope some kind of legislation comes into place regulating that gun violence, or, you know, regulating more police training, or something. Like something needs to be Donyae.

Amanda: Did you take part of the protests that were happening in Peoria?

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Donya: Yeah, I did actually go to a few just to show my support. And I like (Sincere). He's kind of an activist. So just kind of supported my friends who organized things like that and raising awareness towards the issue.

Amanda: Were you a part of the Young Revolution Group?

Donya: I wasn't personally, but I had several friends that were a part of it. And (Sincere) was definitely a big part of that. So I was kind of closely associated to it.

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Amanda: And when you attended the protest, were you worried about the spread of COVID?

Donya: A little bit. We definitely tried to stay masked, and distanced, and follow those regulations still, but it was definitely an issue that we felt was important enough to show up for and, you know, speak our minds about.

Amanda: Absolutely. And then just kind of continuing chronologically...

[0:36:08]

...we're kind of getting to the end of that summer. Were you planning then - you mentioned on living in a dorm, or that summer did you still live with your parents?

Donya: Yes, that summer I did. So it wasn't until, like I said, my freshman year is when I moved out and moved into that dorm. So I mean that in itself was kind of a different experience. You know, it's not your typical, oh, I'm going to make friends with all my dorm mates, and we're going to get along and have sleepovers.

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No, it was still, we still had to be masked up in the dorms. Anytime you weren't in your room, you had to wear a mask. Yeah, like in classrooms we had to be masked. Just outside on campus you had to wear a mask. Like anytime you were in public, you had to have a mask on.

Amanda: And so that means, I guess, did you have your own bathroom in the dorm?

Donya: There was a community one in the hall, so going to the bathroom...

[0:37:07]

...you had to wear a mask. It was - I mean you could take it off to brush your teeth or shower, but they expected you to have it on otherwise. So that was definitely kind of an eye-opener there.

Amanda: Did you have roommates or how did that work?

Donya: I had one from high school, actually, my friend (Annalee Anderson). She was my roommate while I was actually in the dorm. But like I said, the majority of my classes were switched to online...

[0:37:36]

...during that time period due to rising numbers on campus. So I made the decision to move out because, you know, I figured why pay all this money for the dorm if my classes aren't even on campus? So that's when I decided to just move out and commute to school.

Amanda: And how did you find your home then?

Donya: I figured I was going to try and stay within the area, at least, you know, not more than...

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...15 minutes away from campus. So I, you know, looked for places still within the area, and like I said, I was just at work one night, and applying for places, and I found this one, so I got it. And I moved in shortly after that and just have been commuting to school since then.

Amanda: Does Bradley have the - I thought they had a rule that if you were a freshman and sophomore you had to live on campus or like with your parents?

[0:38:36]

Donya: Yes. So technically with all the dual credit courses that I did in high school, I was going into Bradley as a sophomore. So I kind of like got around that rule a little bit because I was like technically a sophomore. And I kind of explained my situation a little bit, and they were like, okay, like we'll make the exception.

Amanda: Do you think having the pandemic kind of helped them be a bit more lenient with it?

[0:39:04]

Donya: I think so. I think they were aware that, you know, not everyone was going to have the ideal situation that they wanted and people were living on campus probably weren't going to be happy staying in their rooms if, you know, the courses are online. So I think it was, you know. I definitely wasn't the only one. So I'm sure they had to make some exceptions.

Amanda: Like what month did you end up leaving your dorm?

Donya: Let's see. So I honestly Donya't think I was there for more than a month. So I started...

[0:39:34]

...maybe like August 15th and definitely left sometime in September.

Amanda: It just wasn't-

Donya: Yeah, it just wasn't worth staying there, just when I could just attend class from my own home online.

Amanda: Was it an adjustment going from, you know, a dorm, which is a very different way of living than you living with your parents, and then living in your own home where, you know, you have your space...

[0:40:04]

...but you have to be an adult, I guess?

Donya: Yeah, it was definitely a transition. You know, I had been working so I was definitely prepared for it. I had the funds to live on my own, and I mean it was cheaper than living in the dorm anyway, so it was not that big of a deal like financially, but definitely had to have a little bit more pressure on myself to keep up with like attending class online and making sure that I kept up with work because I didn't have anyone...

[0:40:32]

...you know, physically telling me to do it. I just definitely had to grow up a little bit in that aspect and make sure I stayed on schedule.

Amanda: And were all of your classes fully online or would they transition depending on COVID numbers?

Donya: So I think that year my classes stayed online for the rest of the year and with the exception of like a lab that I had in person. That was, you know, in a pretty big room.

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So it was socially distanced, but other than that, I mean yeah, my classes were online for the rest of the year. For that semester, I mean, yeah.

Amanda: And that was fall of 2020?

Donya: Yeah.

Amanda: And how was it balancing school and work?

Donya: It was a challenge. At first it was definitely a learning curve. Like I said, with my classes being online, the responsibility to complete all my coursework kind of fell on myself.

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And working at the hospital has definitely allowed me a little bit more freedom in my schedule since I work nightshift. So I would try and attend my classes during the day and get as much homework as I could Donya. And then when I would go to work, I would do what I had to do with the patients, get them to bed.

And then when everyone was asleep, I would have some time to do some schoolwork. So it worked out pretty well actually, schedule wise. It was just kind of that aspect of making sure I stayed with it and like forced myself to stay on schedule.

[0:42:02]

So that was the most challenging part.

Amanda: And do you think that the pandemic had an impact simply just on like the stress levels and the effort that it took to do, you know, all of this work?

Donya: Yeah, just in general, kind of just fear of the unknown, and kind of the idea of being in a crisis was definitely stressful for a lot of students. And I definitely saw a lot of people taking more advantage of counseling that was offered through the school.

[0:42:32]

And I think I myself went maybe once or twice just to de-stress and get everything off my plate. But it was definitely just a stressful and unknown time. And I think maybe now we've just been so used to living in it, but it's, you know, still going on, and it's still very real.

Amanda: And then moving into kind of November of 2020, did you want to stay at Liberty Village long?

[0:43:02]

Or sorry, Independence Village long term? Or what was your mindset at that point?

Donya: So actually, November 30th, 2020 is when I started at Proctor Hospital. So I think I was definitely ready for a change. It was, you know, very stressful with the like staffing. So I was definitely ready for a more structured work environment. And I feel like I was going to get that with a hospital setting, which I did. But yeah, about November 30th is when I started at Proctor.

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Amanda: Was it difficult to leave Independence after all those years?

Donya: It was definitely hard to say goodbye to the people that I had, you know, grown to know and love. But I was definitely ready for a change. So I mean, I knew that I could still go back and visit if I wanted to. So it wasn't that hard. But I knew I probably deserved a little better with, you know, staffing and like management wise.

Amanda: Did you also experience a high turnover of managers at Independence Village during the pandemic?

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Donya: With our CNA managers, actually I did see maybe three different ones, so it was definitely stressful on both parties.

Amanda: And can you tell me a bit about your job at Proctor?

Donya: It's pretty similar to what I was doing at Independence Village. Just, you know, in a hospital setting you might have a different patient every day or you might have the same patients for a week before they discharge.

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And then you get a new set of patients. So I think the main difference is the fact that, you know, it's not going to be the same people every day. You get a different population every once in a while.

Amanda: And what department are you in at Proctor?

Donya: I work on the transitional care center floor, so it's like a rehab floor. You know, people get there to get stronger and work with therapy, and the goal is for them to go home. So that's kind of the deal with my floor.

[0:45:09]

Amanda: Do you enjoy it?

Donya: I do. I do like it. The workload is definitely better. It's not as stressful on my body for sure. I've had the chance to heal, and, you know, they definitely emphasize like proper body mechanics, and then the hospital beds have settings where you can, you know, raise and lower the bed, so you're not breaking your back trying to like lift someone up in bed. It's a lot better on the body for sure.

Interest So I know that you described it a little bit earlier.

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But kind of what is that broad range of duties that you do as a CNA?

Donya: So, you know, starting someone's day, I might help them go to the bathroom, help them get cleaned up if they need, help them get dressed, help them get positioned. For people with like mobility issues, if they need, if they require, like special equipment to move, I will help transfer them with equipment, just help them get set up, you know, open things if they need opened for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

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Just repositioning them. Yeah, like I said, just anything they really can't do for themselves is what my job comes in.

Amanda: It sounds like you have to be very intimate with the people that you help.

Donya: Yeah, we definitely are very close with them and probably see parts of them that no one else would. And you definitely see the emotional side too, the vulnerability of them...

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...and their situation. You know, the CNA is with the patient the most, so you kind of hear about their worries the most and comfort them. You know, it's very, very emotional like job, I think.

Amanda: What do you think are some of the qualities that you've built or that you've kind of developed, you know, working at this job for the past two years?

Donya: You know, I think I've always kind of been an empathetic person, but definitely empathy for sure.

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You have to kind of understand the person and their situation. If they're not having the best day, kind of look at, you know, the situation they're in, and what factors are contributing to their mood. And you just kind of have to try and talk to them and understand like what's going on, or try and make them feel better. Just try and be a helping hand, you know, that person that they can talk to.

Amanda: And then kind of moving into December of 2020, that's when the vaccine became available to healthcare workers.

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I think like the exact like date that it came out was December 15th. What were your thoughts about the vaccine at that time?

Donya: I mean, of course, like anyone else, I was a little bit wary of it at first, but, you know, I know that it's been through the same process that other vaccines have been in the past. And, you know, I've gotten all the necessary vaccines, so I was kind of a little bit indifferent towards it.

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You know, I kind of held off on getting it at first, but eventually it actually did become mandatory, not only at my job to get it, but with school too, since I was

in a nursing profession. So either way, I kind of wasn't going to be able to get out of it if I wanted to. So I kind of just went with it and I got it.

Amanda: Did you feel comfortable? Like at what point did you end up becoming vaccinated? Like I guess, in the year, like was it in the spring, or was it earlier, later?

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Donya: It was shortly after it became available to healthcare workers. I figured, why not get it as soon as possible, since I'm going to be, you know, exposed to COVID. I might as well protect myself as much as I can, so I just kind of opted to get it and figured it would be helpful.

Amanda: Does your family feel the same way about the vaccine? Did you kind of have that support or what was that like?

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Donya: I think my parents were a little bit wary of it, but also a little bit indifferent at the same time. They also are both vaccinated, so they kind of had the same thought process, you know, like we got all the other vaccines, and we're fine. So, yeah, you know, so it was not a huge issue to us.

Amanda: And then with, you know, that winter coming, were you looking forward to the end of the semester?

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Donya: Yeah, for sure. It was definitely not like any other semester I've had at school before, so I was, you know, excited for it to be over and have that break before transitioning to the next semester and kind of like recoup and look back, like okay, that happened. It was a good break before the next semester started, and, you know, the semester after that slowly got better.

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Amanda: What were some coping skills, if you had used any, that got you through, you know, the semester, and, you know, how did you take care of yourself during that break?

Donya: I definitely found myself just doing things that brought me simple like pleasures. I would read a lot more. I'd find myself going to the gym more. Just things that I felt made me feel like I was taking care of myself as best as I could.

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I would, you know, do like a skin care routine or just really any self-care thing kind of would make me feel better.

Amanda: And did you think that pandemic mitigations at Bradley would look differently in spring of 2021?

Donya: They definitely started to lighten up, but, you know, the mask requirement was still a thing anytime you were in public...

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...or in the classroom, so gradually classes started shifting from online back to in-person that semester. I believe that semester I might have only had one or two classes online. So it got better that semester, but still same requirements with the masks, and then that's when I believe they required students to have vaccines too, so especially like students in the health care field. So you know, you could tell it started to lighten up, but you could - you know, you still felt that you were in a pandemic.

[0:51:33]

Amanda: And how does your family normally spend like the holiday season? You mentioned that you guys celebrate - is it Ramadan that you said, as like around the wintertime?

Donya: Yes, so there's actually like three Eids, and honestly, I couldn't tell you like when all of them are. My mom's the one who kind of is like, oh, Eid's coming, and I'm just like, oh okay. Ramadan is more towards like summer.

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It kind of depends on the lunar calendar. So with those celebrations, our community kind of goes to like the mosque, and they have like a prayer, and a dinner, and like a feast type thing. So I mean, with those, those were also affected. I believe maybe when COVID was at its worst, it was probably just canceled completely and then maybe the next year it was a little more like socially distanced.

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So it was, you know, definitely effect on the community as well. And I mean with my mom, she kind of just had like the at home celebrations kind of like anyone else with like Christmas or Thanksgiving, just kind of celebrated at home with family.

Amanda: How does your family kind of navigate having these - you know, being multicultural? If that's the right word.

Donya: Yeah. I mean, it's always kind of been - we've always kind of Donya'e it the same way in our house, I guess.

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Not much has changed. Kind of just my mom's proud of her identity, and she doesn't really, I Donya't know, change to conform at all, so she just - she's had the same traditions for years. Yeah.

Amanda: Does your father, is he also Muslim or-?

Donya: My dad is Muslim but he's a convert. So his nationality is white.

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He's a white American but he's a convert. He converted to Islam and he speaks Arabic. So yeah, he met my mom in Syria and brought her back here.

Amanda: And then just kind of talking about 2021, did you have a lot of hopes for the new year? Like any goals? Or if you do New Year's resolutions.

Donya: I mean, you know, just they were kind of focused...

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...around my life at the time and what I had going on. So mainly just, you know, I wanted to do well in school and focus on some goals I had, like gym wise, trying to go more regularly and yeah, pretty much. I just wanted to get through school.

Amanda: And then you started talking about the restrictions for spring semester of 2021...

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...with having more classes in person. You know, how did that make you feel? What was that like?

Donya: Definitely gave me a little more of a hopeful outlook that it would get better when they started transitioning back to in-person more. And I know we're not quite there yet, but with my most like recent semester, they actually lifted the mask ban, so or the mask mandate. So it has gotten better.

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And I know Bradley has been working very diligently to like track the COVID cases and like do contact tracing. So if anyone ever had like known contact with someone with COVID, they would be notified. And I think they've Donya'e a very good job overall of trying to keep the numbers down. And obviously it's been working, so it's been getting better.

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Amanda: And what do you think about online classes? Did you feel like you were learning as much with them?

Donya: You know what? I really - you know, I saw them as kind of a negative thing. I feel like I didn't learn as much as I could have with them since a lot of my learning was kind of dependent on myself. You know, I wasn't like directly learning from a teacher lecturing to us. It was like, oh, you have to read this and then do this assignment. So it was very kind of self-dependent.

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Like my learning kind of depended on me and I feel like I could have taken more from it if it, you know, was in a traditional like classroom setting.

Amanda: And that summer of 2021 was kind of a moment with the vaccines being distributed to, I think all Illinoisans in April, beginning of April, I believe, April 9th maybe. I had the number and I deleted it.

[0:56:24]

But by summer of 2021 we moved into phase five, which was almost like complete reopening. Did you think that it was time kind of looking back?

Donya: I mean I know that they felt it was time with like the numbers decreasing, but I think we probably should have gone about it maybe a little bit differently. Looking at like maybe some other countries and how they handled it...

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...they like did a complete lockdown. And then by the time they reopened, the numbers were almost like non-existent. So I felt like maybe with lockdown, it wasn't necessarily like the governor's fault or Illinois, but I feel like us as Americans, we feel like, oh, our freedom is being taken away from us. And a lot of us were very like resistant to, you know, abiding by like the stay-at-home orders. So I just feel like maybe if we as like Illinoisans were a little more...

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...compliant with that, then we could have been in a bit of a better situation right now, but, you know, I feel like they're doing the best they can right now. So that's kind of my stance on it.

Amanda: And yeah, I mean in that summer, like the mask mandate did go away for a little bit, but I think it was August 2nd or 4th that it came back because the Delta variant became very prevalent.

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And that was about the point that school was starting again. What were your classes like that semester?

Donya: You know, the mask mandate was still around, but for the most part, our classes were in person. They still had, you know, the contact tracing and everything with the new variant. So they were still watching it and being vigilant about it. But for the most part, it was still overall like improving with our numbers.

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So I think we did a good job with that.

Amanda: And I remember reading that Bradley did not have a vaccine requirement in that fall, at least not for like general population. What did you think about that?

Donya: You know, I think it was good that they left it to choice because, you know, obviously a lot of people are hesitant about the vaccine and you know, feel like they needed to know more about it before they got it.

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So I feel like, you know, respecting people's rights was a good thing, but as a nursing student, we were like required to get it. So, you know, it was kind of two-sided in that regard, but I think, you know, they handled it as best as they could, so tried to please as many people as possible.

Amanda: And then just as like you had mentioned with the nursing students, with the FDA submitting their approval for the Pfizer vaccine...

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...I think that led to a lot more vaccine requirements becoming more - more of them happening. And so was it kind of - it was that that fall semester of 2021 that the nursing department had it?

Donya: Yeah.

Amanda: Did other departments?

Donya: I believe it was nursing, maybe like the med students also, maybe biomed, like anyone who was going to be out in the clinical setting, actually dealing with patients, so would be required to get it, I believe.

[0:59:55]

So yeah, just it was kind of interesting to see that, you know, some people had a choice and some people really didn't. But, you know, it was kind of understandable with the professions that we were going to be going into.

Amanda: What did you think about - I think some - or did Proctor or yeah, hospitals kind of in the area, did they start having vaccine requirements?

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Donya: You know, I think UnityPoint in general made it a requirement. So that'd be like Methodist, Proctor, Pekin. I believe there were some exceptions, like if you were pregnant, and you were unsure of the vaccine, you could, or like because you had specific beliefs, you could like submit a form, and they would maybe grant you like an exception.

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So yeah, it was definitely a work in progress.

Amanda: And then again, from fall of 2021 to winter, there was again another increase in like COVID numbers because Omicron became intensive. Did you experience that at the hospital?

Donya: Yes. So I believe at that time was when I noticed kind of a bit of a surge again.

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Our unit had been open for a while and around that time is when it kind of closed down a little bit again. So with that, we would have like lower patient numbers. And then if we did have a COVID patient on the unit, they would be kind of isolated in a different hallway. And then we'd have like one staff member assigned to that patient. So I did see a rise kind of in that time period, definitely at the hospital. Not so much at school though.

Amanda: And at the hospital, was PPE shortages at all a concern?

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Donya: Not at the hospital. I never really noticed a lack of supplies. So I was fortunate with that. We always kind of had the necessary supplies. And then if we had a COVID patient, we'd have like, you know, specific supplies to that patient, like an N95 mask, gown, goggles, gloves, face mask, face shield. So they always made sure that we had everything we needed. So that was good.

Amanda: Has the way that you take care of COVID patients changed from then to now?

[1:02:26]

Or is it still pretty rigid?

Donya: Still pretty much the same guidelines. You know, if someone has COVID, they obviously have - you know, they're in isolation. Their room is closed. There's signs outside the door to make sure everyone knows that before they go in that they have to have the proper, you know, equipment to care with that patient. So I mean they've always been pretty strict about it. And I guess that's essentially a good thing.

[1:02:56]

Amanda: Do you think that your understanding of the virus is different than other people's because of your experiences as a CNA?

Donya: A little bit. I think it's definitely a lot more real for people who are actually in health care because they get to, you know, witness people who are affected by COVID and, you know, may even be affected themselves after dealing with people who have COVID. So I think, you know, a lot of people on the outside Donya't understand like the...

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...actual severity of it, and, you know, they may be a little more lax about making sure they have like PPE on, or, you know, trying not to spread it to family members and friends. So I think it's definitely been a more real experience for people who are actually in health care.

Amanda: And I remember in the beginning of the pandemic, you know, there was a lot of support for health care workers. At least there was that performative element on social media and...

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...hearts for health care workers. Did you think that that was something that continued or did it start to wane after a while?

Donya: Definitely in the beginning, you know, they were like oh, you guys are heroes, but, you know, then especially maybe when the vaccine became a requirement, and then, you know, people were getting fired if they didn't comply with it, you know, that's when people started to feel less valued than they did at the beginning because they're like oh, we were so...

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...in need in the beginning, and now we're getting let go if we Donya't comply with the vaccine. So it was kind of interesting to see that shift a little bit, but I

think we definitely still feel valued because we are still very much needed, but it has been interesting to see that change with like the vaccine requirement.

[1:04:53]

Amanda: Lovely cat. Very cute. No. I hear what you're saying. And kind of then moving into we're in 2022 and - actually wait. I'm sorry. I remembered my other question. With 2020, there was the uncertainty of the unknown. In 2021, COVID had been around for a year. Did you think that one...

[1:05:22]

...year was harder than the other?

Donya: I think it was definitely more scary with like not knowing where it's been going. I feel like now, even though COVID is still around, people have just been so used to living in it. And, you know, there aren't as many restrictions as there were, so maybe people feel a sense of normalcy again. But it is still very real, and I still am seeing COVID cases at the hospital all the time. So it's definitely not over yet, and I think we still need to, you know, be diligent about...

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...it and try and get that spread to go down again.

Amanda: And, you know, now then going into summer of 2022, it seems to be an interesting period of time to becoming an adult and coming of age. You know, what has that been like for you experiencing this record high inflation?

Donya: Oh man, it's been pretty crazy. I mean it kind of feels like everything, every bad thing that could have happened kind of happened as soon as I like became an adult.

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And it's been kind of overwhelming. But, you know, all I can do is my best with navigating it and trying to be flexible with everything that's coming at me. I'm just doing my best really at the end of the day. That's all I can really do. I can't change what's happening. Just got to go with it, I guess.

Amanda: And are you ready for the new school year?

Donya: Yeah, I'm definitely excited. This semester, we're going to be going to different clinical sites and I won't be working as much with like elderly populations.

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I'll be working more with like pediatrics and mom, baby nursing. So that's definitely going to be a change from working with the elder populations that I have been working with. So I'm excited for that change and seeing a different aspect of health care. So I'm ready.

Amanda: Do you have an idea of what kind of nursing you want to do or are you flexible?

Donya: I think right now, based on what I have seen, you know, I'm used to working with elderly patients, so I wouldn't be opposed to a career with that.

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But I did do a surgical rotation, so I'm not opposed to surgical nursing. I think I'll definitely know for sure after I've Donyae all my rotations, and, you know, I've seen all the things I can do with my career as a nurse. So we'll see.

Amanda: Have you Donyae some clinicals already then last semester?

Donya: Yes. So last semester we did medical surgical nursing. So with that, that's kind of more of an adult population, but you could really see anyone with that.

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A lot of like rehab stuff, physical like rehab, and like surgical patients. So things like that. That was kind of the focus of last semester. And like I said, this semester is going to be like labor, and delivery, and pediatric nursing. So we're going to work with a lot of kids and new mothers, so babies.

Amanda: And do you know if Bradley has any mitigations for the pandemic or are things relatively as they were 2019?

[1:08:42]

Donya: Right now I believe the mask mandate is no longer. So I believe right now we can be mask free on campus. But, you know, that's always subject to change. They're always monitoring the numbers. They're always doing like random COVID tests on people. So if that changes I believe eventually they would, you know, be stricter again. But hopefully, we can keep the numbers down because it has been, you know, a different experience and like a normal college experience so far.

[1:09:12]

So well, you know, currently.

Amanda: Did the mask mandate at Bradley end on like March 3rd of this year, of the spring semester kind of when the statewide one ended?

Donya: Yes. So they again have been kind of also going along with like the state guidelines. So it did end fairly recently, like this last semester, around that time.

Amanda: And what sort of experiences have you had that feel like they're normal college experiences, quote, unquote?

[1:09:42]

Donya: I mean definitely, for a start, going back to just in-person class was a start. I mean it was a little foreign feeling with the masks. But being able to socialize on campus, I mean that was a big one. I mean that's something we didn't really get to do before. So that definitely helped it feel more normal. And now that we Donya't have masks, I mean we're kind of all seeing each other like fully for the first time. And it's like oh, like, you know, that's not what I expected.

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And, you know, it's just different getting to actually see everyone for who they actually are, and not having anything restricting us, so it's exciting.

Amanda: And what about the hospital now? You mentioned that, you know, they still are treating COVID very seriously. Is there still a mask mandate?

Donya: Yes. At the hospital, you are expected to wear like a surgical mask if you're just out on the floor or, you know, anywhere in the hospital.

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And then, you know, that changes as you deal with COVID patients or anyone that may have like an infection that can spread. The PPE changes along with, you know, the patient.

Amanda: Do you think that there are elements of, you know, protection that will stay even as the pandemic becomes endemic?

Donya: I think, you know, kind of whenever we get a new admission on our floor, they are tested for COVID.

[1:11:08]

And if they aren't vaccinated, they are put into isolation for 14 days, just to make sure that they Donya't develop like COVID. So I think that, I could see that kind of staying around a little longer just as like a precaution thing whenever getting like a new admit. If they aren't vaccinated, they're tested. So I think I could see that staying around just as like a precautionary thing.

Amanda: And then, you know, kind of moving into concluding questions...

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...what would you say was some of the most difficult experiences for you in 2020, and even 2021, and halfway through 2022?

Donya: I mean just with health care, definitely seeing those that it, you know, affected the worst. And, you know, I saw a lot of death that year, just with more susceptible populations. It was definitely a hard time mentally. And it was difficult seeing it affect people the way it did.

[1:12:04]

I mean I personally, I have had COVID. But I mean, I'm not - I didn't die from it. I've definitely seen people who suffered a lot worse than I did and, you know, I saw families affected by that. And it was definitely a very hard mental time. It was a difficult time for everyone really, but especially just, you know, healthcare wise, seeing it affect those people that are more susceptible.

[1:12:33]

Amanda: And I know you had mentioned before some of the ways that you coped with it, but, you know, ultimately, what got you through those most difficult times?

Donya: Just I mean, the people in my life. I'd reach out and vent about what was happening and going on in my day. And, you know, just having someone to talk to was always good, but, you know, self-care and trying to focus on the good, trying to focus on, you know, a time after COVID.

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So it really kind of depended on myself to get myself through it. But it was definitely like a hard mental battle.

Amanda: What was some of the good that you focused on? Like what were the bright spots you found?

Donya: You know, just focusing on the future and trying to understand that eventually it will become under control. And, you know, even though it didn't seem like it, I knew there would be a day where, you know, the numbers would go down.

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And we'd have some kind of sense of normalcy again, so I just really tried to kind of focus on that and just things I had planned for the future so.

Amanda: And what do you - or do you think that - or what do you think it will take for the pandemic to be over?

Donya: I mean people doing their part getting vaccinated, for sure, trying not to - I mean if you know if someone has COVID, you know, obviously Donya't hang out with them.

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But I mean for the general public, I mean, just really just have to get vaccinated. That's really all you can do right now. But I know that with especially with like the variations with COVID, I mean it's scary to know that it can change and mutate, but, you know, I feel like as long as we're doing our part and trying to stay healthy and clean, then it's all we really can do.

[1:14:35]

Amanda: And has the pandemic changed your views at all about staying in health care?

Donya: I think if anything it's proved to me that this is, you know, the field for me because, you know, I was able to stay with it during COVID. So I figure well, if I can stay with it and still like it during like the worst times, you know, I can make it through the best times and enjoy it more.

Amanda: What were some bright spots in, you know, your field?

[1:15:07]

Donya: You know, like I said, I'm kind of an empath, so I really do enjoy like just talking to people, and caring for them, and hearing their stories. I hear so many different stories every day, and it's just nice to like hear accounts of people's lives, especially with like elderly people, hearing everything they've been through like, you know, in their younger days, and how it's changed from like their generation to mine. It's like every person is like a history book, so it's very interesting to hear people's stories and talk to them...

[1:15:41]

...try and make them feel better during their situation. So I mean that's probably my favorite part.

Amanda: Would a lot of people have opinions on the pandemic in general?

Donya: You know, I've seen varying opinions. You know, obviously, there's people who are convinced it's not real and it's a hoax. But then, you know, there's people who have been personally affected by it who understand that it's very real and can potentially be deadly in some cases.

[1:16:11]

So, you know, it's just interesting to see those two spectrums.

Amanda: And did your views on the pandemic change over time?

Donya: I think it's kind of remained consistent during this whole time. I just know that, you know, obviously being in health care, I know that it was very real and, you know, just living through it, I guess, made me hope -...

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...excited for it to end. Yeah, just seeing like those personal accounts and being like personally involved with people who did have COVID and having it myself, you know, I just had an understanding of it, I guess.

Amanda: When did you have COVID?

Donya: I've had it twice now actually. So once kind of closer to maybe like December of 2020.

[1:17:10]

And then most recently, like February of this year, so twice now.

Amanda: And you mentioned that your symptoms weren't-

Donya: They weren't terrible. I did have the loss of taste the first time and that was probably the worst one. But yeah, you know, the cough, sore throat, runny nose is pretty much what I had both times.

[1:17:40]

Amanda: And I'm so sorry. Did I already ask if you want to stay in health care?

Donya: Yeah, I do. It's definitely proved to me that I can - you know, if I can deal with COVID, I can probably deal with anything in health care. You know, I do enjoy caring for people and I'm a very empathetic person. So it's something I do actually enjoy. So I do see a future in health care still.

Amanda: And if you could say anything to yourself from the very start of the pandemic, what would you say?

[1:18:14]

Donya: Hang in there. Like eventually it'll get better, but definitely at the start it was just unlike anything I'd ever seen before, so it was very uncertain and scary.

Amanda: And where would you like to see the world this time next year?

Donya: You know, hopefully our numbers go down and hopefully we can retain that sense of normalcy. Hopefully, we Donya't go back into like a lockdown or anything. It'd be nice if we could...

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...kind of stay at this plateau here, or, you know, improve numbers wise. Hopefully, you know, people - more people get vaccinated and we Donya't have to deal with it anymore. So it would be nice if we Donya't have to worry about COVID anymore.

Amanda: And then last question, you know, what would you say is like the biggest lesson that you've learned?

Donya: Biggest lesson.

Amanda: Or maybe that's not the right way to ask it.

[1:19:14]

What is the thing that you found most useful that you learned? I know that sounds similar.

Donya: No, you're good. Patience. Just, you know, patience in general. I think having a lot of patience definitely helped me get through this. And optimism helped me get through it. Just knowing that a better day is around the corner. And, you know, you just have to get through it together, really.

[1:19:43]

Amanda: And is there anything that you would like to add before we close?

Donya: Not really?

Amanda: Well, thank you so much for your time and your perspective.

Donya: Yeah, no problem. It's been a good experience. Thank you for choosing to interview me.