

Lee Flores Oral History Transcript by Syrus Redhouse

Syrus Redhouse: Okay, so, my name is Syrus Redhouse and Today is March 4 2021****. Today we'll be discussing the experiences of people during the covid 19 pandemic. Today, I'm in San Antonio, Texas, and I'm interviewing here...

Lee Flores: Im Rachel, Raquel.

Syrus Redhouse: Okay, so were going to start this off like any other interview and Im going to ask, umm, where were you born?

Lee Flores: I was born in, umm, California, Monterey Park

Syrus Redhouse: I think Ive only been to California twice? San Diego and umm, Los Angeles, actually like two years ago for BPA, uhh, I don't remember specifically, but I think Ive ever only been there twice.

Lee Flores: Okay.

Syrus Redhouse: So where are you originally from?

Lee Flores: Umm, El Paso, my mom and she lives on the Tigua Reservation. So we moved there like...

Syrus Redhouse: I remember you talking about that.

Lee Flores: Mmm.

Syrus Redhouse: Its funny because my professor actually is in El Paso right now.

Lee Flores: Is he!

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah, that's where he teaches like, through the zoom call and everything so. And not only that, we were also talking about, like these really inhumane acts that happened, like 1970, 1917 actually is when, I forgot umm, as a teenage girl who refused to be disinfected to cross the border lines or something. And we actually did that for like umm a little project, uhh not project, but umm a discussion.

Lee Flores: Umm, the Bath House Riots. That's what they were.

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I thought that was pretty interesting. It's pretty twisted, honestly. Okay. Okay, where am I at? Ok so, Where you actually at right now? Are you still in El Paso, or Are you in California?

Lee Flores: No, I live in Norway.

Syrus Redhouse: Oh Norway.

Lee Flores: Yeah.

Syrus Redhouse: What's the reason?

Lee Flores: I fell in love.

Syrus Redhouse: You fell in loves.

Lee Flores: Mhmm. Ha ha. Then I came here, and I've been here ever since.

Syrus Redhouse: Really?

Lee Flores: Mhmm

Syrus Redhouse: Do you miss home?

Lee Flores: Umm, say that again.

Syrus Redhouse: Do you miss home?

Lee Flores: Yeah, yeah. It's...It's not the same over here.

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah.

Lee Flores: You've got to like the cold, cold weather.

Syrus Redhouse: Okay, maybe, maybe I'll, I'll think about going like toward that direction because I, I really adore the cold.

Lee Flores: Really?! Oh my god. You would love it!

Syrus Redhouse: This Texas heat is horrible. Absolutely horrendous. I would step outside and I would just be drenched in sweat and I don't like being sticky at all.

Lee Flores: *Laugh* yeah, Texas is really hot. But I miss the Texas heat and everything gets warm, like the pavements warm. Everything's warm. Not here. Not here. Never.

Syrus Redhouse: You said it was always gloomy, huh.

Lee Flores: Today's actually, it's been beautiful this week. But we've been very lucky. But it's very cold, so it's like 20 degrees, and it's really windy and stuff. It's not nice.

Syrus Redhouse: Sound like nice to me. Ok so next question, what is or what was your occupation? Like, before COVID.

Lee Flores: Umm Well, I, I'm usually a musician, and 2020 was my year, too. Yeah, So I took a year off of my job, and I use to work at a retail store at umm Zara. I use to work there. Umm, but in Norway, they give you like, if because I've been at Zara for so long, and I was not a manager, but like you're kind of a manager. So you can...

Syrus Redhouse: So kinda like an assistant manager?

Lee Flores: Uhh, no, it was like a coordinator. So it's kind of...

Syrus Redhouse: Oh Okay.

Lee Flores: Yeah, not as much responsibility and you just get to do the fun stuff. And umm, and so I, I really, I really didn't, you didn't, you don't have to cut your contract but you can reduce your contract. So you don't have to go, you can take a year off and then come back. That's very Norwegian, umm, but then the pandemic hit and you know, 2020 isn't, was not my year at all.

Syrus Redhouse: So like did it inspire any of your, like, music capabilities, or like music wise?

Lee Flores: Yeah, we finished like a lot more. We finished my second project. We still haven't rolled out my first one, *laugh*.

Syrus Redhouse: *laugh* I can't wait for it. So, creativity is like improved?

Lee Flores: Say that again.

Syrus Redhouse: Creatively, Creativity has improved?

Lee Flores: Oh yeah, yeah, sure.

Syrus Redhouse: Okay, so on to the next question now. When did you, When and How did you hear about the virus? Like when was your first interaction or your first acknowledgement of it? That it was real.

Lee Flores: Umm, in I think late December, early January, we, I listened to a podcast called "*This Week in Virology*" because my sister she works at, well, we both studied microbiology in, in college. And so we listened, were devout listeners to these virologists and immunologists and they have an amazing podcast and they were talking about it, just as they'd heard about it. And everybody was like, "No, it's not going to be a big deal. This isn't going to be a pandemic." So I was like, if they're not worried, I'm not worried, you know? And they weren't worried till' they were worried. Then it was kind of *laugh*

Syrus Redhouse: They kinda lied, because were still like, what, a year and a half in the quarantine? This pandemic. Yeah.

Lee Flores: Mhmm.

Syrus Redhouse: I think the first time I heard that was umm when my grandmother actually texted me. Because generally she's on my ass about staying up to date with like the Navajo Nation stuff. I think I heard it in like early March? So around this time last year, that the virus was coming around, like I really hope my people are going to be ok. I hope most people are going be ok. And it like did some really bad damage to us, but like, were, were still, you know, cruising around, but I really hope this thing dies down. So I think that was, Yeah, that was the first time I heard about the virus.

Lee Flores: That must've been after...was that after March? Because it hit here much earlier. I think then before it started getting bad in America. Umm, because you're in the Navajo tribe, right?

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah.

Lee Flores: So they, they got hit really hard. They did.

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah, we did. What like did, uhh, before the actual virus happened, did your like job or anything, or did Norwegian, or Norway do anything for the pandemic?

Lee Flores: Uh, yeah, Norway's been really conservative with their rules. So they've they were the first to really cut off everybody. And then they, they still have basically, so they, they have the strictest rules in probably all of Europe without having to close down. We call it a soft lockdown, so through the whole pandemic, all like retail stores were able to be open. So we never closed the stores. So it didn't, it affected some of our jobs, but not so many, I would say. Many people had to work from home, but Norway has been very unaffected. Overall, life hasn't really changed too much. They've closed like um, the bars and restaurants, and stuff um recently for the second wave. But you could still go to the gym, they didn't serve alcohol, it wasn't allowed to serve alcohol, past uh they did like a national ban. But you know, people were still getting sick, like 20 year olds and stuff because they were partying in the house, you know.

Syrus Redhouse: Oh yes, that's been happening here too. It was, it was like pretty bad. I guess like um, I remember some of my friends actually got in arguments. Just because they wouldn't wear masks or comply with the actual CDC guidelines.

Lee Flores: Yeah, yeah.

Syrus Redhouse: It's pretty interesting. Up until recently, I think was this week or last week, but I know it was like very recently, Texas um actually said that you don't have to wear masks no more, so the mask mandate here is...

Lee Flores: I saw.

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah.

Lee Flores: Yeah.

Syrus Redhouse: So I'm not too keen on that. Because we already still have some ignorant people and...

Lee Flores: Yeah,

Syrus Redhouse: Theyre going to do their own thing.

Lee Flores: I don't understand him. I don't understand him. He's was, you know, El Paso where my mom lives was hit really hard. And um like, uh, the governor, the governor sued the city who cuz I think it was the complicated legal situation because the mayor, he's this white guy because El Paso has been like 85% Latino, right? They're all brown people. But they've only had historically white mayors.

Syrus Redhouse: Hmph.

Lee Flores: So for like the past 150 years they've never had uh anyone neither Mexican or otherwise. So always been a white guy. And he was like, saying that the lockdown was like Nazi Germany. So he got a lot of heat from like, from that, but he didn't want to close the city even though they were they were doing really bad, um, Saman Yego, um forced a lockdown. And then Governor Abbott got their prosecutor from, from Texas and then sued them to lift the ban. It was just its just madness. It's madness.

(Im sorry I don't know how to spell the Saman Yego judges name nor can I find him.)

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah, I didn't know about the whole white man deal uh cuz it doesn't really make sense.

Lee Flores: *Laugh* Well now you know.

Syrus Redhouse: Okay, I guess we kind of partially answered the, the next question. Um, It was can you explain how has the Coronavirus affected you and your family or friends. What has changed and you kind of already touch topics on that about how the stories and all that stuff kind of operated normally, which is more caution? Um, what about your wreck, weekly routine, like weekly daily routine, how has that been affected?

Lee Flores: Um...I'm at home a lot more that's affected me. Um, I've, I feel like it that the toll of being home all the time is starting to weigh. Um, you know, I don't know if it's the same in Texas for you, you guys are if you're only online, or?

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah its difficult like for me, its difficult. It, it, it, I find it takes away the energy and I guess being engaging and all that.

Lee Flores: Hmm. I think yeah, that, that's how my, my routine is, is that I have no routine anymore. *laugh* I just go with the flow.

Syrus Redhouse: I think I'm in the same boat too, like attending college and stuff. Sometimes I wake up and realize, like, aw I got class now. So I got to do that. And once Im finished with class theres really not much for me to do, you know, I don't have any some some resources for me to actually go out. But it's not like I'm bound to this place but I choose to be just because I'm not trying to be paranoid about the virus but Im not trying to be ignorant, either, you know what I mean?

Lee Flores: Yeah, I mean the, because my sister, she's an epidemiologist for the state of Utah. And, you know, the way that it affects us is, it's really like hit and miss no one really knows how they're gonna react. And they could be really like, one person could be not sick at all, and the other person to be sick as a dog, you know, and then you get long term COVID. That happens a lot to young people. And no one really knows how that's going to affect you later on in life. So I'm not trying to get COVID either. I don't want it. *laugh*

Syrus Redhouse: Neither do I because you know I still got grandparents to visit and you know, the elders and our elders are important especially being indigenous people. You know. I find that like, it's really alienating sometimes. I don't know if you've noticed, but like, during the whole pandemic, the election, it kind of broke off ties with most people, you know? And was wondering if that has happened to you?

Lee Flores: Sadly, yes, sadly, like Latinos are very untapped. I think, especially specifically, Mexicans are very split, I think, in some ways, because I have a few uncles and aunts who love Trump. And they're really like, pro Trump. And I don't understand it, because they're Mexican. *laugh*

Syrus Redhouse: Mhmm. Mhmm.

Lee Flores: But they're not like the white Mexicans. They're the brown Mexicans, you know, and it's like, I it's almost impossible to get sense to them. But I don't I don't break ties with them. Because they're family. So I don't, you know, it's hard.

Syrus Redhouse: So you don't associate with them as much?

Lee Flores: Say that again.

Syrus Redhouse: So do you still associate with them as much or is contact limited because of that?

Lee Flores: Yeah. I mean, we just don't talk about politics. So I went home in 2019. And I met up with all my aunties and uncles. And, you know, when they started getting on Trump, it was like, Okay, I'm out of this conversation. Because I respect my elders, was never taught to, like, speak against them. So I don't, I don't tell challenge their beliefs just because I, you know, have a bone to pick.

Syrus Redhouse: Just because you have a different one. Yeah, and that's kind of how it is, with um like in our tribe and stuff, except I noticed the younger generation in my generation as well starting to get like more bolder. And by starting to voice their opinions more, just because some of them that are on the reservation, they, they have like these problems, where their, their parents kind of shut down their voices. So that makes them more to act out more. And I can see how you're frustrated with like the Mexicans for Trump because we also have a

little rally. I'm not sure if you've seen it, but it was Navajos for Trump. And I was kind of little. I was like, are you serious right now? You're too dark to be white passing.

Lee Flores: *Laugh* It doesn't apply to us.

Syrus Redhouse: Exactly. Like you're in the struggle too you guys. You don't have any special, special treatment.

Lee Flores: No, I think it's ignorance really,

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah.

Lee Flores: And macho, I don't know if macho culture is, is in the Navajo people in your tribe.

Syrus Redhouse: *inaudible*

Lee Flores: I can understand how men can sort of like, like Trump, because he's so macho, you know, and like.

Syrus Redhouse: *Inaudible* like he doesn't back down but I think it's like an arrogant kind of confidence that he possesses. That it's something America hasn't seen, I guess you could say, like you know, in quite some time, because you had President Trump who was more *inaudible*, more peaceful and understanding. Not so arrogantly, you know?

Lee Flores: Yeah. I mean, I think, I think, Yeah, I think President Bush, You're probably a baby *laugh*

Syrus Redhouse: I was a little baby, I was a little pee-wee who couldn't understand anything.

Lee Flores: But I think he was very macho, too, but he and he was he was equally as dumb because I remember he would get a lot of criticism towards in the Iraq war. Because he was he was always commentating about it. And he was to just, he made himself look like an idiot. But I think they're the same. I just same level of macho. Only President Trump is like, like, a New York greasy businessman who is like a mobster. That's what he reminded me of.

Syrus Redhouse: Plus he had Twitter. So I mean, yeah, so the next question, actually, do you do due to the pandemic? Are you were you able to work from home? Like, I'm sure you were because you said you were a musician beforehand. So I'm wondering if that kind of plays in the part itself.

Lee Flores: Yeah. And I but I just couldn't travel because I spent a lot of my time in London. And when the travel restrictions came, I had to be like, here or my boyfriend, he had to come here. He's my producer. So we work together. And, and it just complicated everything. But I mean, we were either in a studio or here but it's just because of the restrictions in London, you couldn't travel to

London anymore, because they shut the public transport. And, and so we had to work from here my house because Norway had the least restrictions. And um, yeah, my home is comfy.*laugh*

Syrus Redhouse: Okay, so, Next Question. Do you know anyone that has been infected with the virus?

Lee Flores: Yeah, sure. You know, a lot of people I have a friend who I grew up with, he lost his dad from COVID. At the same time, he was having a baby. They were one was passing and one was coming. And, you know, in our community, too, especially in El Paso there's not anyone who hasn't been affected. Some of my friends have lost multiple people in the same span of weeks. And I don't know anyone here, but back home I do. But no one in my family...

Syrus Redhouse: That's been known personally?

Lee Flores: No.

Syrus Redhouse: Yeah, that is kind of a nightmare. You're one of your family members is going like, another one is been brought into this world. That's pretty sad. I wouldn't know what that's like, honestly. Im sorry about that. So how has adapting to the virus affected your, your responsibilities?

Lee Flores: Um, I mean, we've been very unaffected here. So I feel like my, my responsibilities have, because I have children. So them being home all the time had in the beginning of the pandemic, because now they've been going to school for since the fall. So I was just, you know, building a routine with them and making sure that they were doing all of their lessons from home, which is sucky because, you know, children need to be in school and they need to be like, hanging with their friends. Their children really took it hard. Like that was really hard.

Syrus Redhouse: I find it difficult for like, yeah, I guess online schooling is a lot more difficult mentally and there's like no engagement or physical engagement...

Lee Flores: Yeah.

Syrus Redhouse: For some of the activities because when you attend and sometimes when you attend these online synchronous classes or asynchronous classes, it's honestly it's like watching a YouTube video. And you watch it, to watch it and sometimes you doze off or you just forget about it, but it's in a way this *inaudible* like that. It's really weird. It's really weird talking to a camera sometimes.

Lee Flores: Yeah, because you're on you're fully online too, aren't you?

Syrus Redhouse: Mhm. Yeah and there's like technical problems and that would arise sometimes like my wifi would decide to, you know, not come alive or go brain

dead on me. Which is really difficult, honestly, because I would be submitting some of my work like a minute, two minutes late, and they would still count it as late *inaudible* my wife's out. It's an experience. Okay, so for the last question, actually, do you? Would you like to tell any future generations about the pandemic? Like, what would you want to tell them?

Lee Flores: Um, I, well, I think we, we will never be rid of COVID. So I think that we, they are going to know exactly what COVID is, because it's not going away forever. So I felt like, I would tell them that the first year of COVID was the worst. And by the time the future generations get it, because they know now that babies born with mothers who had COVID get the antibodies. So the next generations are going to be somewhat immune to that. So there'll be very lucky.

Syrus Redhouse: I didn't even think about this. That's actually a new perspective that you just gave me.

Lee Flores: *laugh* I feel like they're gonna be like, way better off than us. So my day, that's what we can tell them in our day.

Syrus Redhouse: Oh man, I'm like practically there.

Lee Flores: No *Laugh* maybe. I'm there.

Syrus Redhouse: Because now my I have a little niece and like I talk like that and stuff, and she be like remember back in the day, I'm like, be quiet. I'm not. I'm not that old. Okay, so I guess that was really all the questions I needed to have. So we'll conclude this interview.

Lee Flores: Okay, you're welcome.

Syrus Redhouse: My name is Syrus Redhouse and this is...

Lee Flores: Rachel Flores.

Syrus Redhouse: Okay.