

Interviewee: Wendy Villalva

Interviewer: Hannah Feuker

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Abstract:

Wendy Villalva currently lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and attends the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She is a second-year student that is majoring in Biology and double minoring in Pre-Professional Health Science and Latin American Studies. In the first half of the interview Wendy talks about how the COVID-19 Pandemic has affected her education, family, employment, and community. In the second half of the interview Wendy shares her own experience working on the rapid-response collection project for the Western Wisconsin COVID-19 Archive with the specific goal of “Documenting the Undocumented.” This part of the project focuses on documenting the Spanish speaking populations in Western Wisconsin specifically migrant and undocumented workers. Wendy discusses her role and experience with this project.

Hannah Feuker 0:03

Hi, my name is Hannah Feuker and I'm conducting an oral interview as part of the effort to archive the effects of the COVID- 19 pandemic on individuals and communities in the Midwest for both the Western Wisconsin COVID-19 Archive and The Journal of the Plague Year COVID-19 Archive. Today's date is Thursday, April 29. And it's- the time is 3:33pm. As of now, there are 31,976,888 confirmed cases and 570,421 deaths in the United States. In Wisconsin, there are 597,358 confirmed cases and 6,815 deaths 29.5% of the population has been fully vaccinated in the United States. Today, we are speaking with Wendy Villalva in Eau Claire, Wisconsin over Zoom. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today and share your experience with the pandemic, Wendy.

Wendy Villalva 0:58

Thank you for having me.

HF 1:00

To start off with, would you be willing to share demographic information for the study such as race, ethnicity, age and gender?

WV 1:07

Yeah. So, do you want me to just like- [laughs]

HF 1:13

yeah, go

WV 1:13

Okay. So yeah, I was born here in the United States. But my parents are from Mexico. So, I am a Hispanic, Mexican and I identify as female. I think that was all the questions?

HF 1:32

Age.

WV 1:33

Age. Oh, and I'm 19 years old.

HF 1:35

Okay, thank you. What are the primary things that you do on a day-to-day basis? Such as: job, extracurricular activities, school.

WV 1:43

So, I am a full-time student at the University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire. So most of my day, I spend just going to classes or doing homework and things like that. For extracurriculars that kind of depends on the day, sometimes I'm involved with, research, and sometimes I'm doing- I'm at the Writing Center, and I'm working or sometimes I'm a Campus Ambassador, and I'm giving tours to students on campus. So, it just really depends on the day.

HF 2:12

So very busy. [laughs]

WV 2:13

Yeah, really busy.

HF 2:16

Where do you live and how would you describe what it's like to live there?

WV 2:21

So currently, I live in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, I live in an apartment that I share with three other roommates. And it's a- it's comfortable, I guess you would say, it's just like an average college apartment here in Eau Claire, kind of next to campus.

HF 2:40

So, when you first learned about COVID-19, do you remember what your thoughts were?

WV 2:47

So, I remember when my dad told me about COVID-19. And actually, it was like back in December. And he saw it over Facebook, and like, I didn't believe him at first. But then it just got really serious all of a sudden. And so that's kind of what I thought, like, wasn't really serious at first, and then it just became a pandemic, all of a sudden.

HF 3:10

So, it's safe to say your thoughts have changed a lot now?

WV 3:13

Yeah, definitely. For sure.

HF 3:15

So what issues were you most concerned about during the COVID-19 pandemic?

WV 3:21

What issues?

HF 3:22

Yeah.

WV 3:25

I know, like, school was really a big factor. Like how I was going to do academically, when the pandemic began. Work was a really big thing as well because I know a lot of people were unemployed. Thankfully, I wasn't, but- and my family wasn't either. But I know that was a really big thing as well. And, like safety, that was also another thing we didn't want to get- you didn't want to get sick. So those were just a couple things that we were worried about.

HF 3:59

You mentioned that employment was an issue for you. Did you have a job during the pandemic?

WV 4:05

Yeah, I did have a job. I had a couple jobs during the pandemic. But I know like, not everyone had employment. My family, we have extended family living in New York, and I know they were unemployed and so we were kind of scared that my parents were going to be laid off or something. But thankfully, they weren't. And I was able to save my job as well.

HF 4:32

What was it- what was your job that you did?

WV 4:36

So, I actually worked back home at a cheese factory. So, it was just like a summer job. And we were considered essential workers because of dairy. So, yeah, that was my job.

HF 4:48

How did you see things that you're doing your job changing because of the pandemic? Were there more safety measures or-

WV 4:56

So, I actually started the job right when, like- right in the summer, so right when COVID was kind of evolving. So, I didn't really see how work was before. But I did have coworkers tell me that they implemented the mask mandate at work. They had little plastic coverings to separate us during our lunch breaks and things like that. So that's just a few ways that they changed. But I personally didn't see any, any differences.

HF 5:33

Has COVID-19 affected you and your family's day-to-day activities at all or especially during lockdown?

WV 5:42

So, I know one of the biggest changes was me having to leave the university last school year, because I was a freshman at the time, and I was living in the dorm. So I had to come back and stay with my parents. I know my siblings also had to go back home and our home is pretty small. So, it was like, really hard to get adjusted to all of that. But other than that, that was that was like the biggest thing that we had to adjust to.

HF 6:12

Was it a shock being a freshman in college and having the pandemic happens having to switch to online like that?

WV 6:19

Yeah, I would definitely say it was especially comparing it to this year too. Because last year, we didn't get to experience spring and we didn't get to- everything just kind of shifted, labs were suddenly a lot more difficult to complete. And the semester like it's spring, now we're still on campus. And now I get to see like the differences and stuff. But it was definitely really hard to get adjusted, especially since it was my first year. And yeah, I didn't really know how it would change academically.

HF 6:53

What are you studying at UW-Eau Claire?

WV 6:56

So I'm currently majoring in biology and double minoring in pre professional Health Sciences and Latin American Studies. Yeah, then hoping to use my degree later on.

HF 7:10

So how have you seen your classes adjust to being online? Or have they done any unique things?

WV 7:18

So last school year, I know all of our labs and stuff, they went online, and we had to do virtual labs. So that was just one of the adjustments. Other than that, it would just be like having class online rather than in person, which is just, you know, doing it over Zoom or something. So that's just one of the biggest differences that I noticed that they've done.

HF 7:46

An unexpected freshman year anyways. [Laughs]

WV 7:49

Yeah, it was, yeah, it was different.

HF 7:53

Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed how you associate and communicate with friends and family?

WV 8:00

Yeah, sort of, so, I really had to socially distance very, very early on. But because of work and things I didn't really change a whole lot. And yeah not being in school. I guess I didn't have that interaction with people anyways. But yeah, because I was a freshman too I didn't really know too many people. And I had graduated high school, so I wasn't going to school with them anymore. So it was just- I don't think it really changed too much. Just like depending on like my circumstances. Yeah.

HF 8:40

So now that you've been back on campus have things seemed more normal again?

WV 8:46

I think so. I think a lot of the interactions that I have are just with like, close friends or like my roommates. And just with the organizations that I'm a part of, so. Yeah.

HF 8:59

Okay, so things are starting to open back up and up now, but when people were encouraged to stay home, did you and your family and friends do that? And what did you do for recreation? Or did you pick up any hobbies during quaran- or lockdown?

WV 9:15

Yeah, so we did stay home a lot. But we did, as I mentioned before, we did still have our jobs and things. So, we would go to that and I decided to work full time. So, I spent a lot of my time just at work. But other than that, I think like going for walks or going to the gym. I know I started doing that a lot more, but yeah.

HF 9:43

If you don't mind sharing, where does your family live? While you were in lockdown.

WV 9:49

Yeah, so we come from a really small town. It's just 40 minutes south of Madison. So, my family just stays there while I'm in school, because that's, that's where they lived.

HF 10:02

So how did you see the COVID-19 outbreak effect that community?

WV 10:08

So it was- it's a really small town. So, I guess a lot of people thought that they were kind of immune to it because- Yeah, because it's really small. And they didn't think that they would catch it. But it spread really fast once it was there. But yeah, other than that- yeah, that's about it.

HF 10:35

So as it started to spread, did you see people change their opinions and day to day activities based on this or were they just kind of waiting for it to pass?

WV 10:44

I think they kind of just waited for it to pass. They either said that they got it and that they were fine. Or that- I don't really think that they changed their opinion too much about it. They just said that they got it and they just went on with their lives.

HF 11:03

How did that community respond to the mask mandates and stuff?

WV 11:10

I think it was, it's pretty split. I think half of the community was for it and half of it, then just wasn't too bothered by the mask mandate, or it being enforced. So it's just, it just depended on I think, personal preference back there. And as I said they don't really enforce it all too much in public places. Yeah,

HF 11:39

Yeah. So if you don't mind sharing, what have you been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

WV 11:52

I would say- So, this is a really hard one. So I- so there's an app on my phone that gives me- it's like, it's Apple news. And it just gives me alerts all the time. So I keep up with the big things, but the small things I wouldn't, or you know- but when something that catches my attention, I would click on it. And usually the sources that I would use would be the Washington Post, I try not to be biased and, you know, go to one source rather than the other. But so I try to- I don't know, is basically just what comes up is what I see. And I try to look into it. And yeah-

HF 12:40

With social media, we're getting news from every single direction and just trying to decide what data and what to believe.

WV 12:48

Yeah.

HF 12:49

Would you say your news sources have changed over the course of the pandemic? Or is it kind of just stayed that way?

WV 12:56

I would say, I think it's kind of just stayed that way. I think I used to- I used to use CNN a lot more frequently. But now I don't do that as much. I try to just like stick to like, more factual, or as possible. But I don't think it's changed too much. No.

HF 13:18

Do you think there are important issues that the media may not have been covering during the pandemic?

WV 13:27

I think there's a lot of things that have been difficult to cover. So, I, I don't really know how to answer this one, but I think yes, and no. There's someone documenting something somewhere and everywhere, so. So it's like a little bit of yes and no.

HF 13:47

Yeah, So have you or anyone you known gotten sick during the COVID-19- with COVID-19?

WV 13:56

Yeah, so my roommate actually got sick with COVID. Last semester, it was during November, so she had to quarantine and I had to quarantine as well, but I didn't get sick and my family didn't get sick. But yeah,

HF 14:17

So how many days total did you have to quarantine?

WV 14:20

We quarantined for about two weeks.

HF 14:24

Did you just quarantine in your dorm room then?

WV 14:27

So, I actually live off campus. So, my roommate she stayed here. Yeah, it was - I was actually not here, but here, when she got the news. And so I went back home. Yeah, yeah.[laugh]

HF 14:54

How would you describe the quarantine process because I mean, two weeks is a long time to sit there and be by yourself or around other people or with the same people for a long period of time.

WV 15:07

Yeah, it was really, it was really difficult. I got tested, right, right before we found out that she was sick. So, I knew that I didn't have it and I didn't have contact with her that little period before we found out. So, I went back home and I stayed at home, I didn't go anywhere. It was, it was difficult, as I mentioned before, because our house is really small. So, I say it was like, really difficult at first, but then I kind of just got used to it. And like classes, I had to, had to communicate with my professors and sometimes keeping up with that material was a little hard, but was manageable, I think.

HF 15:52

Did your roommate get tested because they were feeling ill or because it was just a routine test?

WV 16:00

So it was actually around the time of the elections. And so right after that, she started feeling sick and I had mentioned to her that I was going to get a COVID test, just because it was frequent for me to do it. So at that time, we weren't testing, or the university wasn't testing off campus students. But I suggested that she went to go get herself tested. And she did. And she didn't think she was sick with COVID. But she was. So that's how, that's how she got tested.

HF 16:37

So she didn't really have any major symptoms and if you hadn't suggested she might not have even went to get tested?

WV 16:43

So when I suggested it, sorry, when I had suggested it, she wasn't but it was like, when I hadn't had communication with her, that's when she got sick, like really sick. And that's when they called her. So it was between the period that she got her test, and that she got her results when she felt like the most symptoms.

HF 17:04

So other than the physical ways that COVID-19 has been affecting people, how do you think people's mental health has been during this pandemic?

WV 17:14

I think a lot of people have struggled with their mental health. During the pandemic, it's really easy to feel down, especially when you don't have your daily activities to just keep you distracted or occupied. So I know it's been hard for a lot of people. Yeah.[Nervous laugh]

HF 17:36

Yeah. [Nervous Laugh] Have you or anyone, you know, had concerns about getting the vaccine?

WV 17:47

I know, my dad has concerns about getting the vaccine. I think a lot of people do just because of the timing, and, you know, everyone's got their opinions about it.

HF 18:00

If you don't mind me asking, did you receive the vaccine? And if so, did you have any side effects?

WV 18:06

I did receive the vaccine. I'm fully vaccinated now. And after my first shot, or yeah my first dose I was just like a- I just felt a little nauseous, but not really. And I didn't feel anything after my second- my second dose.

HF 18:25

And which- do you remember which vaccine you got?

WV 18:28

I got the Pfizer vaccine.

HF 18:31

And what was your experience with getting access to the vaccine?

WV 18:35

It was actually fairly easy for me, I was one of the first students on campus to be able to get it. I became eligible through the university because I was a- because I'm employed through the school. So I got it right away and I think the whole process was fairly easy. It was it just took a long time. The process itself because it was a lot of people trying to get it.

HF 19:00

Yeah. So you mentioned that you were a UWEC [University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire] student and you're a biology major, has the pandemic changed how you've thought about your major at all, or what you want to do in the future?

WV 19:13

No, I think it's just kind of reinforced it with like, what I want to do. I know a lot of my professors talk, like especially because like the material correlates so much with what's going on in the world. So I have a better understanding of what's going on and so I think it's just kind of reinforced my, my wanting to continue with my biology major.

HF 19:39

Has there been any big challenges you faced while learning online or just any major things to overcome?

WV 19:48

Definitely like getting motivation to do my schoolwork online. It's really hard to come up with a system especially since it's like- because when you have classes in person, you know that you have to be somewhere at a certain time and it's a lot more difficult to do that when you're online. Especially when not everyone is watching over you or like watching what you're doing. So, I definitely think that getting the motivation to do to keep up with all the work is a lot.

HF 20:18

Yeah. So something kind of interesting is you are also working on collecting oral histories for the Western Wisconsin COVID-19 archive project. But you were focusing specifically on the goal of documenting the undocumented? Would you like to tell me more about that project and your experience with it?

WV 20:35

Yeah, so I got recommended to work on this project with Dr. Casey last semester. And I just started off as kind of like an intern making calls to the different farmworkers on our list that we had, and then setting up interviews with them and, and conducting interviews with them. So that's just kind of how we did it. And then it's kind of slowly progressed to going on site, and collecting information that way, and then conducting interviews in person as well.

HF 21:13

What was the biggest challenge you faced during this project?

WV 21:19

I think one of the biggest challenges I faced was definitely getting like in touch with interviewees, especially since a lot of them- It was like a lot of like technology things. When we tried to do interviews over Zoom, it was just a lot more difficult than doing it in person. So definitely just like getting communicated with them. And actually setting up an interview and actually starting it.

HF 21:46

What was the most common response you got when you asked for an interview?

WV 21:53

So, when I asked for the interview, a lot of people said that they would think about it, but that they were interested. But I, I was mostly just like, focused-like the majority of the project was translation transcribing, and then calling the people that had already said yes, and gave us their contact information. So yeah, I was just mostly contacting them, but a lot of them said that they were interested in like-, Yeah, but we didn't really hear a response from them. [nervous laugh]

HF 22:31

So the people that you actually interviewed, how did they seem to respond to being interviewed?

WV 22:37

They were pretty good about it. A lot of people shared a lot of really interesting things from experiences from the pandemic. So, I think- I think it went really well.

HF 22:54

What was the most shocking thing or a different insight to these people's experience with a pandemic that you learned? Was there anything that you're just like, wow, I did not even think of that.

WV 23:15

I don't know if there was like that really big, like, wow, like, surprising factor, but I know that I was really intrigued with when I would listen, and they would talk about their work and their work schedules and sometimes with like, the enforcing, or the non-enforcing of CDC guidelines and things like that. So that was just, yeah, like it was expected. But it's still like surprising to hear.

HF 23:50

Did they talk about some problem that you did not initially consider about the pandemic or is it just kind of the CDC guidelines and their work schedule?

WV 23:58

Yeah, it was just kind of like CDC guidelines and scheduling.

HF 24:04

So, what did it most of the stories look like from the people that you got interviewed? What were most of the responses?

WV 24:12

So, a lot of people just talked about their work. And how that has changed a lot, also talked about like their kids and having to switch to online learning. So that was a lot of it. yeah, just like telling their personal experiences. And their opinions on their local communities. A lot of them also talked about their families back in Mexico and stuff. So that was also pretty, pretty interesting to learn about too.

HF 24:53

Yeah. So like, they're talking about their families and some things in Mexico happening with the pandemic.

WV 24:59

Yeah. So they would talk about how the communities in Mexico like how, how they would be enforced or not enforced to, to adhere to the CDC guidelines and things like that. Or their worries with their families in Mexico getting sick with the virus and things. Yeah, just experiences like that.

HF 25:26

So doing these oral histories can sometimes be unpredictable, because people are unpredictable. Is there a lot of things you have to change throughout this process of rapid response collecting? Has it been kind of a learning process?

WV 25:39

Um, yeah, at the start of it, we did have some questions that we realized that were not completely appropriate to ask with people who wanted to remain anonymous. So, we did have to scratch some of those out. And then like, with the vaccines becoming distributed in the middle of our

project, we started asking questions about the vaccines, too. So it was definitely a learning experience that we kind of just figured out along the way.

HF 26:09

What was it like actually going on site to these places, and speaking with them?

WV 26:15

I thought it was a really great opportunity to just kind of see the community coming together and just learning about people's experiences, just in person, especially in like a medical setting. I thought that was- I thought that was really neat.

HF 26:33

Do you want to describe what it was actually, like what you were doing on site? So what the process was that you went through?

WV 26:42

Yeah, so I went to two clinics, here in Eau Claire. And so I was there as an interpreter. Sort of. And also, like, for part of the project, I would collect interest for the interviews. And I would also kind of guide them through the process and just kind of explain what it is that the paperwork and what it is that the nurse was doing, and with the side effects of the vaccine and things like that. But yeah, then afterwards, we would hand out our promotional material, and try to get interest for the project.

HF 27:25

How did most people respond to you when you were asking them things or to speaking with them?

WV 27:31

A lot of people, a lot of people were really open to it to participating. I didn't personally have any interviews, in person. But I- a lot of people said that they were interested. But yeah, we still haven't heard from them. But yeah, they were open to it.

HF 27:53

Has your experience with this project transformed how you think about the pandemic at all? Or given you insight?

WV 28:00

It's given me more insight. I definitely feel like as the pandemic keeps going, I keep learning about it, too. And just seeing how everything kind of fits together, like definitely has, has changed since the beginning. Yeah.

HF 28:19

Is there anything else you'd like to share about that project? Like interesting things or experiences or stories? Sorry, that's a really open-ended question.

WV 28:31

Yeah. I think like the whole thing was just a really good experience overall. It really helped me kind of grow kind of like as a researcher, and just like, learn to improvise. And I learned a lot from the oral histories and just being on site. Yeah, I think it was a really beneficial experience. And I think, I think the project would do really good to a lot of people.

HF 28:55

I think it'll be really interesting to see what stories they collect.

WV 28:59

Yeah. Think so too.

HF 29:02

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience with the pandemic or anything else? Or just how you're feeling about it now that we're kind of almost seems like light at the end of the tunnel stuffs kind of opening back up again?

WV 29:18

Yeah, I feel like there's, like, there's hope for it to end and pretty soon and I mean, it's a struggle, everyone has their own personal experiences and challenges. And thankfully, I haven't had too many negative experiences with the pandemic. And my family has been doing great too. But I know it's not like, I know it's not like that everywhere. And so hopefully, hopefully cases continue to go down and people continue to get vaccinated and things. Yeah. [laughs]

HF 29:57

Well, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to share your story and experiences with me.

WV 30:03

Yeah, thank you again for having me.

HF 30:06

No problem.