

Archiving AK with UAA/ APU Archives Explaining Oral History Transcription  
Becky Butler and Rachel Nill, June 24, 2024  
Transcript completed by Annmarie Iya

Becky: All right, here is our example oral history! This is Becky Butler. I am here today in the UAA/APU Consortium Library interviewing Rachel Nill. The date is June 24th, 2024 and this interview is part of the UAA/APU Archives and Special Collections student oral history project. This interview will be made publicly accessible in the archives research room and hopefully online. So Rachel, you've already consented to this and signed over copyright.

Rachel: Yes, of course.

B: But do I have your consent to record and make this recording publicly available?

R: Yes.

B: Wonderful. So let's start with some basics. What's your name and major?

R: So as you guys have heard, my name is Rachel Nill. I was a history undergrad and I currently have an interdisciplinary degree for my graduate program, mixing anthropology, project management, and history to kind of create my own public history degree as we do not currently have one at UAA.

B: What made you decide to study at UAA both for your undergrad and now your graduate program?

R: So I am actually a local, not of Anchorage but of Alaska. I was born and raised in Soldotna. I came back from the military and I just kind of wanted to stay home and do my schooling here. It was really beneficial because I got a lot of scholarships from being local. It was awesome and it was just, I hadn't lived anywhere in Alaska other than Soldotna or Kenai so I was like "OK, let's try out Anchorage for a little while."

B: Fair enough. What is your favorite memory during your time here and why?

R: That's a good question. So this is going to sound like bragging but I am going to brag about myself a little.

B: Go for it.

R: So I did the undergraduate research showcase last year with my senior seminar project which was about the Scottish witch trials and how they varied from other witch trials in England and Europe and beyond, and honestly just working on that project and then putting it into a poster form and then getting to stand around and talk about something that I had literally spent hundreds of hours on and they were forced to stand there and listen to me talk was the best

part. I'm lying, the best part was my senior advisor when she's announcing the winners looked directly at my face before she said "First place winner" and I was like "You're not subtle." And so I got to- I won and it was a lot of fun and it was just a great time.

B: Congratulations.

R: Thanks.

B: So were you attending UAA during the COVID lockdowns?

R: So I started attending the year after it. I actually got my bachelor's in three years rather than four, but I was taking some schooling in Covid lockdown. I had done a few credits while I was still in the military during that time and it was, I mean that was kind of my first introduction to college online classes. But I had done some high school online classes but it was very different. I had never used Blackboard before so that was an interesting experience to get to learn that whole shindig.

B: I can imagine, for sure.

R: And then just always having at least one online class the rest of the semester was like "Oh, this is a new and interesting situation to be in."

B: How did you feel about that?

R: I don't hate it, I'm actually that type of person where it's like "I don't have to show up everyday and I just do school on my own time? Hell yeah."

B: For the record Rachel pumped her fist.

R: It was just one of those things where I'm like, I love going to class and getting to like, interact with people but there's also that moment of like, I kind of just want to do it when I want to, I don't want to have to get up and go to class sometimes so it's been nice to like, have those days where I'm just doing my own thing.

B: All right, are there any professors who have made an impact on your time here and how?

R: Of course, I mean she has made a cameo already in this story, but professor Ray Ball. She is truly the only reason I graduated. I had her in four of my last semesters in college. I first took her Latin America class which was fascinating. I actually used that paper for all of my graduate applications so that was fun. And then I had her for like, what does she call it, she has a different name for the class now because all of the professors, this is so funny, all of the history professors got really embarrassed cause one of the teachers had like a really cool name for his early Japan history, which was the rise, fall, and reinvention of the Samurai so it was like... a cool name for, just, Japanese history so all of them are like, Man, we got to up our game. I think

she's calling it peasants, pirates, and princesses or something like that. Which is just amazing, it's just early modern Europe, but okay get those creative names. But I took renaissance with her, and then she was my senior advisor as well. And she's just so great, great at her job. I think she's a provost at the Honor's college now so she's like getting up there in the world and I love that for her. But yeah, she's just a great teacher.

B: Fabulous. What helped you decide on your graduate major? It sounds like you constructed it yourself so tell me how you put all those pieces together.

R: Yeah. So essentially, it came down to one feverish moment of ADHD hyperfixation. I said "I have this history degree, what am I going to do with it?" I don't have the patience to be a teacher. I need a job so I went on Google and said "jobs for history majors." Very creative, I know. And two of the options came up as archivists or curators and they have similar skill sets and similar requirements. Not exactly the same, obviously. Becky could tell me.

B: That's a different podcast.

R: Different podcast. But I was like, "OK." And I loved the idea of the creative side and the project management and analytical side of museum curating. So I went and there was a couple of other programs that I had applied to that were more traditionally museum studies or history. But for many other reasons I chose to stay here at UAA and anthropology was advised as one of the majors to have for your graduate degree so that seemed like a no-brainer. But I didn't want to let history go because I love my professors so much and also it just seemed smart to have some sort of knowledge of project management fundamentals once I went into that kind of larger managing of things, even if it's as a junior curator. When I was talking to Dean Finney who was the dean of the graduate school and also the advisor for the interdisciplinary students. She advised that I follow the interdisciplinary route and so we built a little GSP or graduate study plan together and we signed off and now I have a degree that I just kind of made up.

B: Custom made.

R: Custom made for everybody.

B: Moving into a little bit of student life on campus, what are some of the fun clubs, organizations, athletics, events that you have participated in, or have previously participated in?

R: My roommate is or was, I can't remember if she still is currently, one of the student leaders of the LGBTQ Alliance here on campus. I've been to a few of their events, they're great. We went to Lavender graduation, there was a drag queen, it was amazing.

B: For the record, Rachel snapped her fingers.

R: Snap, snap, snap. But then I have also done a little bit with the theater program while it was still here. Not any large productions but I was involved in that. I've been in other community

productions but that's not necessarily campus life. But I have been to a few of the productions here on campus. There was one that was "Dead Man's Cell Phone." So good. One of my friends was in it so obviously I had to go support. Absolute queens, snapped again for the record. I did go to see Bert Kreischer when he came up. That was amazing. It was like the first time I had ever been to a concert in the airline center which was a whole other experience. It was great, you guys have to go.

B: When you say you participated in theater, were you a performer then, on stage? Or were you tech-side?

R: Yes, a bit of both. So we have several theaters here in the Anchorage community if this is going to convince anybody to come. We have a semi-professional troupe known as Cyrano's Theatre Company. I've done a lot of tech for them. I was a stage manager for two of their performances over this past year. It was "Fancy Nancy's Splendiferous Christmas" or something like that and then "Clue: the Musical." That was a lot of fun. And then I've also done a lot of performing as well. I started off over at Anchorage Community Theater performing and then I did some tech stuff for them so I've kind of been exploring every part of it and I love every part of theater. It's great.

B: Lovely. What is your proudest accomplishment in your education or personal life during your time here?

R: Oh boy. I mean, winning that scholarship was pretty great. But, I mean, I think it was just a matter of, I'm currently going to school with military benefits so I have a certain finite amount of time in which I can use it. It's typically designed to set up a student for a traditional four-year degree but my little brain said "I'm going to get a graduate snuck in there too because I can." And then I did. Or at least hopefully I can keep up with the pace this year. But, if I do, I will have a bachelor's. I got a bachelor's in three years which was already impressive in my personal opinion. I was very proud of that. But, you know, here's hoping for the future. We'll come back later and I'll give you an update.

B: Have you been living on-campus? Have you been off-campus?

R: Yes, actually I have been living in the Templewoods for the last two years. The year before that I was living in Kenai and I was doing mostly distance and some schooling over at the Kenai campus. But I've been living mostly in the Templewoods. There was a water filtration project that gives a stipend and I said "absolutely, thank you very much. I will take that" and so I've been living there for the last two years.

B: And what's that experience been like on the whole?

R: Interesting. So not all of this is going to apply because there have been some things where it's specifically because of the water project, but we did end up having a leak in the ceiling onto the second floor so we had to get renovations on the bathroom for two weeks. That was an

interesting time. I've had probably a total of seven roommates over the last two years. One of them has been there for like a year and a half. She's the LGBTQ Alliance leader. But yeah, we're just kind of a rotating room of different roommates, which has been very interesting. I got to meet a lot of interesting people through that. But yeah, living on campus is great. You get to just, you know, walk to the commons whenever you want and go get food and then the airline center is literally right down the road and you can just go see things. I think Gabriel Iglesias, the comedian, is coming in September and I am so excited. I already have tickets. Snapped again for the record.

B: All right, we're closing in on our last few questions. What is your favorite class you've taken and why?

R: It's like making me pick my favorite child. I'm not supposed to have one. But if I had to pick one... I mean... I mean I think I've loved every single one of my history classes. There's been one or two where there's moments I've dreaded. But I'm going to have to go with Elizabeth Dennison's class, love her by the way, she's a great teacher. She's like right there with Ray Ball by the way. She did a class on anarchy and so we had to learn the history of anarchists and how they evolved and what anarchy looks like in the modern day and it was just so fascinating. And then I was on a phone call with my mom and I was explaining some of the stuff and she's like "That sounds fun" and I was like "Yeah, aren't you glad I'm taking an anarchy class now?" and she went "Uh-huh."

B: And was this with the history department?

R: Yes it was one of those like, it was her last hurrahs, her last class she ever taught and I was just so glad to have it taken with her and she's just a great teacher and so fascinating.

B: All right. What advice would you give to fellow or future students?

R: Oof. Don't get set on a major. I was so set on eight years of my life through the military and before that I was going to be an English teacher from day one and it took literally two semesters and one history class for me to go "absolutely not" and change my major. Don't get set on what you think you want to do with your life. Definitely take as many classes as you can. The gen-ed is there for a reason. They're trying to expose you to all of these different things. And if you are set, good for you. You're, honestly, you got a lot of things going for you if you're that determined in life but don't freak out if you are considering changing your major. It is totally fine. Everybody does it. If you don't change it twice you're probably on the smaller end of the curve for people when it comes to joining a larger institution like the university. But, any other advice, I'd just say you know, go do sports. Go do theater. Go do things. Do not get stuck in your room and just study all the time. Find something to fill your time and don't just focus on school. Like, the whole point of being in college is to study and to do your best, obviously. Don't like, skip your studies and get a drink but like, make friends. Go have fun. Like, I was very much that person where I'm just kinda like stuck in my room all the time and I don't want to go talk to anybody but like, the most fulfilling moments were when I was doing theater or when I was doing the showcase or all

these other things. Like, go interact with people and have friends and do things like, you'll regret it if you don't.

B: Well thank you very very much, Rachel.

R: Of course.

B: This has been our first interview for the student oral history project. It was recorded in the context of being part of a podcast episode to explain what the oral history project is. Thank you again.

R: Thanks.