

Chapel Hill Public Archive
Pandemic Stories Project
recording with Jonah Lewis

Narrator: Jonah Lewis

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Location: Chapel Hill Public Library

Interviewer: Klaus Mayr

Additional Attendees: Mandella Younge

Klaus Mayr [00:00]: Cool. Cool. Alright. Well, here we go. So, first off, before we get into any of the questions, I want to first open it up to you and see if you have anything that you've been thinking about in regards to the Pandemic, anything that you want to spend some time reflecting on. We've obviously got some questions, but would love for you to take it in any direction that you want, if you have something in mind.

Jonah Lewis [00:27]: Nothing particular in mind. It's just, we've been kind of weaning off the masks this week because the mask mandate ended recently as of yesterday for us, which is cool. And then, I don't know, that's about it.

Klaus [00:42]: Actually, I realized this is something I have to remember to always do. I'm just going to introduce the interview. So we're here with Jonah Lewis. It is March 15th, just after 2:00, about 2:30 now, and we're doing an interview for the Pandemic Stories Project at the Chapel Hill Public Library. Yeah. And so we're in the midst right now of the end of the mask mandate. What is your experience of tapering off the masks?

Jonah [01:26]: Well, it's only been like a day, so I guess I'll see as it comes along, but it's exciting to not hustle people over putting a mask on when they come inside the library. I'm very excited for that. As someone who doesn't like to run up and antagonize people, even though that's what they're supposed to be doing, it's nice to not have to run around and like, we still have masks we can give out if people want them. So that's great.

Klaus [01:48]: Did you have any conflicts or anything while you've been here?

Jonah [01:53]: I had one or two of people that just didn't want to wear it or just because they had been vaccinated and they were very obstinate about putting one back on because they were on the phone or doing some other thing like that. But nothing too wild.

Klaus [02:13]: Yeah. It'll be interesting to see where it all goes. So — and this question is kind of a warm up question just to kind of get us into the mindset of the Pandemic timeline — are you able to describe the phases of the Pandemic as you experienced them?

Jonah [02:48]: Yeah, I can do that. It started around, I think a couple of days ago or recently... like two years back from a couple of days ago, we went into lockdown and started to be around that frame of mind. And I was at Carolina as a junior at Chapel Hill, and we went into lockdown and then I went home for a little while to Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina, and stayed with my family. And then as things got better with the Pandemic, we went back to school for the subsequent year and I finished up there last May and then started working here at the library in October.

Klaus [03:25]: Yeah. That's really interesting, to hear. During the Pandemic, did you pick up any new hobbies or anything?

Jonah [03:35]: I wouldn't say I picked up new hobbies. I just attempted to continue my biggest long-running hobby, which is stand up comedy that I do outside of work, which took a weird turn when everyone had to be inside. I did a lot of Zoom comedy shows, which I hope to never do again in my entire life. It doesn't lend itself super well to stand up comedy when you do it over Zoom and it cuts out your voice every third word. I had a fun joke that I will miss doing where I pointed out things in people's living rooms behind them that I would like to take, which they seem to think was funny or were just preparing for a home invasion. And then I did a lot of comedy in parking lots in December 2020 and spring 2021, where everybody had their masks on and was very serious about it. But we were standing like six feet apart in a parking lot, and we would like I worked for a comedy club that went out of business because of the pandemic. And one of the old people that bartended and managed the place put like a pallet stage together in the building's parking lot and held open mics for stand up and would, like sanitize the microphone with bleach between sets and make sure we all had microphone covers that we could take off and throw away between sets. And we would all very sheepishly stand six feet apart in a parking lot in December at night when it was like 15 degrees outside, which I guess is dedication. There's a bunch of comedians around the Triangle area where I see them, and they're the parking lot people that I hung out with when it was like big pandemic and 20 degrees outside. And that kind of formed like a coalition of like, "We're the parking lot comedians," which was an interesting time. And now we're moving back indoors for most comedy shows, which is super nice. You don't think about how much you rely on heating and air conditioning until you have to stand in a parking lot in December for like two hours.

Klaus [05:52]: Yeah. And so what is the organization or comedy club that you were working with?

Jonah [06:04]: Yeah. It was the People's Improv Theater on Franklin Street. It was all the way down Franklin, like almost getting into Carrboro, like across from the McDonald's on Franklin Street if you keep going down. It was that red building on the corner. And the rent on Franklin is just crazy high. I know the number that they paid for that building and it was wild that it was in business in the first place. As like a comedy club slash bar that only comedy people frequented. But it didn't make it past the shutdown, and the rent stayed the same through the whole pandemic. And the theaters were the first thing to close and the last thing to open. So it went out of business. And I know there's a bunch of franchise locations because it started in New York, because the guy that founded it went to school at Chapel Hill. I know a couple of the ones in New York shut down as well, which is a bit of a bummer, but it's the way it goes, I guess.

Klaus [07:01]: Other than comedy, are there any other ways that you, or are there any other things that you do for fun or started to do for fun during the pandemic?

Jonah [07:18]: Yeah, my friends and family ask me that same exact question a lot because I do maybe too much stand up comedy, but I definitely gained an appreciation for spending time outside or outdoors because that was the place that you could be the safest consistently throughout the whole thing. So not hiking or anything like that because I'm a severe indoor person, as someone that uses a walker and a wheelchair, that's kind of a lot. But like taking full advantage of spending time outside or sitting in front of a coffee shop or something like that and hanging out with someone six feet apart or later on in the pandemic when everyone felt it was kind of safe to take your mask off and be closer than six feet as long as you were outside. It's an avenue to spend time with people after you spent like months only seeing them on a screen or not at all, which is super, super nice.

Klaus [08:15]: Can you talk about your life as a student during the Pandemic and how that changed?

Jonah [08:20]: Yeah, I was a junior at Carolina when the pandemic started, as were you, I believe. And, I don't know, I was doing the normal college things that you do. I lived on campus and I was an hour from home and doing regular college kid things, going to class and coming home and hanging out with friends and whatever. And then that all kind of just stopped and you had to move out super abruptly, and we all had to kind of adjust to doing online school, which is something that I don't miss doing as a graduate. It's kind of hard to teach yourself certain things

on a screen. I'm glad I didn't have any math classes or anything like that because I'm already terrible enough at that as it is. History, you can kind of watch a recorded lecture and teach yourself. But I don't know, it just kind of... I don't know, it was a good and a bad thing, really, because it made learning harder, but it also taught everybody that you can learn from anywhere and I think some people made full advantage of that and continue to make full advantage of that because I know people that were like, "Oh, if I don't have to be at Carolina, then I won't pay rent in Chapel Hill and I'll save money that way. Or I'll just go on a never ending road trip and take my classes wherever I have Internet connection, which is a super cool thing to come out of the pandemic if you want to look at it from a good and a bad angle.

Klaus [09:49]: Yeah, absolutely. Can you talk more about the moments, like the weeks or days or anything that sticks out to you, right when the pandemic started to hit?

Jonah [10:07]: Right when it started to hit? I vividly remember the whole "two weeks to flatten the curve" thing. And we were all like, "Yeah, we'll be back from Spring Break" or wherever we were "in two to three weeks, and I'll get to see all my buddies," and then we just never came back from Spring Break. And I vividly remember when we all got the call to give up on coming back for that year-slash-semester of 2020. And then if you lived in the dorms, you got, like, a time and a place to ship out and go get your stuff that you left behind for break because you thought you were coming back, so you obviously didn't pack up your whole dorm room. And then several months without all of your belongings went by. And then they were like, hey, come get your stuff. So it was like me and my parents and my dad's truck going into an empty campus and then an empty dorm room and solemnly moving boxes out of my abandoned college living space. So that was an interesting time and one that I won't forget for sure.

And then I remember the pit. I spent way too much time there as a student. I performed, like, four to five times a week there or somewhere else in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. And I remember them trying to adjust to, like... right before we shut down, they were putting in soft guidelines of like, "Hey, stay apart, be safe, hand sanitizer" and stuff like that. And I remember them trying to adjust to that so they could stay open as a theater and then eventually just giving up and going under lockdown mandates. And then I never set foot back in there, which was wild.

Klaus [11:50]: Yeah. What other ways were you in the comedy community, like, staying in touch? Like other than the... were you able to continue developing relationships with other comedians?

Jonah [12:03]: Yeah, it was all digital. A lot of the shows that we put together around North Carolina are through, like, a Facebook group, which is a very 2008 way to structure your things. But I mean, it works if you're doing something like that. So we kind of just went on there. And I remember people being like, "Be safe, the show will be back in two weeks." And then eight months went by, and I didn't hear anything from anybody. And then I know people that were like, "Hey, I know a lot of you depend on this not as a source of income, but as an outlet for yourself or it's just something that you love doing. I'm going to do the outdoor in the cold parking lot, open mics. And if it's a thing that you're desperate enough to get back into doing, you can come freeze your butt off with me in a parking lot." And a lot of people were like, "Yeah, I'll do that, for sure, because we've been inside for eight months," and it was like, "Oh God, people," right? Also, moving out of 2020 and into 2021, the Pit got to do this thing called the SNL scholarship that Saturday Night Live put together, which was a way of... I think they were meaning to do it anyways moving forward, where they would kind of take applicants that were affiliated with different comedy clubs that they selected and put them through, like, free classes, and then at the end of the classes, you got to audition to try to work at Saturday Night Live. And I think they were going to do it anyways. But because of the Pandemic, everything went digital, and that means that the Pit in Chapel Hill could audition for the stuff the Pit in New York was doing. So I got to do that, which was a super good experience, especially when you think about building relationships with other comedians. And I was on a bunch of Zoom calls with comedians in New York and New Jersey or wherever else, and they were all, like, in their 30s and 40s and had been doing this for forever. And talent scouts and things would come by the Zoom and give us pointers and all kinds of crazy stuff. So like that's an insane experience that I wouldn't have gotten to do if I had to go to New York to physically do it. So again, the good and the bad of, like, it's harder to do the hobbies that you love and make those connections. But also, if you're willing to kind of put up with the digital version, being able to meet people further afield is also great.

Klaus [14:38]: Yeah, absolutely. It brought up some new opportunities...

Jonah [14:42]: Yeah. It was crazy to do. But I'm very glad that I wound up getting to be a part of that.

Klaus [14:51]: Yeah. When you look back at photos or journal entries from earlier in the Pandemic or any other sort of memorabilia, how do they make you feel?

Jonah [15:04]: I get a lot of them, because social media apps will often be like, "This is what you were doing a year ago!" or whatever. And when we were in the Pandemic, it was like, "This is what you were doing a year ago," and I was in college. So it was like it's Duke versus UNC

game, or you're rushing Franklin, or you're doing this party thing with your friends or whatever it is you're doing in College, or you're staying up all night to write a paper with two of your buddies. And then I'm looking at it, and I'm sitting in my parents' house in my childhood bedroom, where my bed... it's a twin bed that, like, I'm too tall to sit in. And I'm just, like, scrolling through these and that was very sad and depressing. But now I'm on the flip side of that where it's like "Here's a year ago today," and I'm like, I have a mask on like sitting on my back porch with my dad who instituted Happy Hour, air-quote, air-quote, you can't see it because I'm using a microphone. But it was "Happy Hour" where I got like one beer with my dad and like a bowl of mixed nuts that he put together for some reason. So, I mean, it's definitely a lot of like, you were sitting around for so long, but trying to find ways to entertain yourself in your house with a very select group of people is a series of memories that I'm not ungrateful for at the same time.

Klaus [16:29]: So I guess you gave one example of how this is happening, but can you talk about some ways that you stayed in touch with loved ones throughout the pandemic?

Jonah [16:40]: Yeah, a lot of it happened over Zoom, which is the way that I think all of us stayed in touch with everyone. I saw... a friend of mine pointed out how hard Skype dropped the ball to not to be completely irrelevant for more than one video chat software after they've been doing it for like a decade. But yeah, I think Zoom is the way that everybody kind of kept in touch. I remember I would get on Zoom with my friends from school for a couple of hours at a time or like, I would be really nerdy and lame and play Dungeons and Dragons over the Internet with my friends because we had like eight hours at a time to burn and I couldn't go anywhere. Or I would call my grandparents and my aunts and uncles and cousins like once a month, I think, on Zoom, we'd all hop on like my mom's side of the family, which was cool to see them, because even though it was digital, and it was only for 45 minutes at a time. That collectively is still more than I typically see them. Because, you know, you see family members at holidays and you don't really think about like, "Oh, I could see them on a Tuesday if I wanted to." And we don't typically make the time for that. But when you're in your house for months on end and you have all the time in the world, why not call your in-laws? You know what I mean? And my grandfather has since passed away, so getting to see him more often than Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas is another thing that was really a positive impact of trying to stay in touch with people.

And there's also people that I didn't stay in touch with. And like, two years have gone by and then I'll text them and be like, "Hey man, it's been a while." Like, we can get coffee now. But like, but I don't know. There's people that I saw more often and people that I haven't talked to in two and a half years or however long it's been since COVID started.

Klaus [18:45]: Yeah. How do you feel about those relationships that you haven't kept up to anything that have been harder to stay in touch with?

Jonah [18:51]: I mean, some of them it kind of highlights who the people you're willing to put in the time to talk to are. Like friends wise, they're the people that would call you out of the blue on a Tuesday because you had nothing better to do or... going on. And some of them are like, oh, these are people that I've severely missed being in contact with. Let's make an effort to do it now that things are open, or if something like this happens again, which there's no guarantee that it won't at some point happen again, I know we don't like to talk or think about that, but just highlighting like, oh, this is someone that I should reach back out to because it wouldn't have occurred to me that I haven't spoken to them if they weren't someone that I thought about or wanted to get back in touch with.

Klaus [19:42]: Yeah, that makes sense. Did your interpersonal relationships change during the pandemic and if they did, how?

Jonah [19:52]: I think so. I think all of us collectively lost a lot of social skills. I don't know for you guys or anyone else that might listen to this later on, but thinking back about the first time that you were let out of the house, like the first time you were at a bar or the first time you went out to dinner and there were just other people that you had to associate with that you're not close to. That was just a weird, like, I've forgotten how to do small talk, and that's a skill I had to relearn. Like I forgot how to banter and with people that I'm not familiar with, and I think that's something that everyone collectively forgot how to do for a minute. We had to relearn how to do that. I think that's the big key is like, I forgot how to do the small things that we do every day when we see like 80 people instead of five people.

Klaus [20:52]: Yeah, absolutely. In what ways have your mental and emotional health been affected by the pandemic?

Jonah [20:59]: I mean, I don't want to just say negatively because that's a little bit of a letdown, but you have to find a way to fill boredom and kind of limit how much you're going to get... like 'cause for two years, if we turned on the news, all of it was an extreme letdown or just bad to listen to. And we couldn't really talk to anybody about it or there was no distraction from how bad everything was for months and months and months. So I think it's just you learn the skill of how do I take what I can deal with and deal with that on my own and be self-sufficient in that way, and how do I know when to take time for myself and step away from the situation and go on a walk or do something that you enjoy. If writing something out helps you process something

that you're thinking about because we were stuck by ourselves. So either you figure it out or you don't, honestly. And I think a lot of people have figured out ways to kind of deal with that on their own, which is pretty good, really.

Klaus [22:18]: Yeah. How about your physical health? How has that been affected by the Pandemic?

Jonah [22:26]: I don't think I've been back to the gym since I... I mean, it also highlighted how gross gyms are. Like, that was a big thing in the news is like, how gross everything is. So, I don't know, it's not like I'm super itching to go back and sit on a sweaty bench that someone else has just used anytime soon. But just being aware of how much time you're spending inside or spending watching TV is something that... I turned on right previous to the Pandemic, iPhones have this timer that will tell you how much time you spend on your phone in a given week. Like, it'll track it for you, which really throws it in your face when you sit in your house for 12 hours a day. And it was like, "You've done 11 hours of screen time today." And I was like, "Seriously?" And I didn't turn that function off, which may not have been a great idea because it just bullied me for, like, a year and a half and not to say like, "Oh, you got to get off your screens and do whatever," but just being conscious of the ways that you distract yourself. And someone pointed out that... I saw something online, like, people always thought they were going to get sick, and it kind of led them to being more hypochondriac about it because they all thought they were going to have COVID, but really, they just had been dehydrated for like two days because they drank, like, a glass of water sitting around their house. So making sure that you're taking care of your basic needs is something that I think a lot of people had highlighted whenever they thought they were going to get sick and be very ill, and it turned out to just be like, a small cold or something negligible. And I don't know, just, like, reminding yourself that maybe every time you get sick isn't the one that's going to take you out is a lesson that's worth learning. Because I did the same thing of, like, oh, every time I don't feel good or like I'm sore or don't feel good or I'm really hot or whatever, it was like, "Oh, do I have COVID?" No, you don't. You just need, like, a glass of water and to take a break or something.

Klaus [24:42]: Yeah. How do you think living in Chapel Hill shaped your experience at the Pandemic? That's a great question, because I started off the Pandemic at school here and then went home to Fuquay and then came back to Chapel Hill and lived in an apartment for the second half of the Pandemic. And I live here now that things are lightening up. And it's kind of true when people say that Chapel Hill is like a bubble of people wearing masks now, because if you leave Chapel Hill, it becomes much less common for people to wear a mask. I think for a long time we saw someone not wearing a mask, and we're like, "Oh, that's a terrible person."

Not really. It's just a different community expectation, I guess. And I think Chapel Hill did a really good job of keeping the mask mandate up longer than some other places and individual businesses, making sure that people were wearing a mask inside and dispersing masks to people if they didn't have one when they came inside and making sure that we were all being as conscious as we were maybe supposed to be, which didn't occur in some other places that aren't as Chapel Hill as Chapel Hill, if you know what I mean.

Klaus [26:00]: Yeah, absolutely. How has the Pandemic affected your relationship to faith or spirituality?

Jonah [26:08]: It depends on if my mom's going to see this recording. I don't know. It highlighted the fact that prior to the Pandemic, I hadn't gone to Church in a while, and then everyone didn't go to Church, and then myself and my family included, I think haven't really picked that routine back up, and I don't think that's a weird thing for other people to not have picked back up. It's not that I've dropped completely off of whatever it was that we were all doing when we were younger, like the things that our parents brought us to, but it highlighted that, like, I don't know. It's something that we like, we fell out of that routine, and then a lot of people haven't picked it back up and may not pick it back up, which you just get to the point where you're like, oh, that's fine for whoever wants to do that. If you want to pick it back up, that's great. If you don't, and you realize that you can better yourself in a different way or spend that time doing something else. That's also fine. You know what I mean?

Klaus [27:12]: Yeah, absolutely. How is your thinking about risk changed over the course of the Pandemic?

Jonah [27:21]: I think it followed the same graph of everyone else's where it started and then I was like, "Oh, God, I have to go buy toilet paper before everyone buys toilet paper and bathe in hand sanitizer and never see the sun again." Every time someone brings this up to this part of the Pandemic up to me, I think of this episode of Always Sunny in Philadelphia. It's a sitcom TV show if you've never seen it, where Danny DeVito and all of them get locked in a basement and they think they have the flu, and he goes kind of insane and shaves all the hair off his body and starts covering himself in hand sanitizer. I think that's the mentality that we all picked up at the beginning of the pandemic, and then we all have to slowly kind of curve back to normal levels of like, "Oh, I'm going to shake someone's hand right now." A lot of times when you go to shake someone's hand now we go for the fist bump or we awkwardly don't know what to do with another person's hand at all because I'm like, do I touch that? I don't know where they've been. So we kind of curb back to a normal level of being afraid of germs, but also are aware that no

one got the common cold while we were all wearing masks. So just being aware that there are like... I vividly remember we held a primary election for President and in the same week, at the same time, we had to teach adults to wash their hands after they left the bathroom, which is another thing about the pandemic that I'll never forget. Like, that solid week where we were holding a primary election and everyone got to vote, and then those same adults didn't wash their hands after they used the bathroom. And it was just a weird disconnect of like, come on, guys, I don't know. And that's something that I think about a lot. And I think we'll all definitely remember to wash our hands after we use the bathroom now. And I don't know, just be more aware of like, we heard the phrase, like, "Immunocompromised" a lot and were pointed towards people with disabilities that may put them at a disadvantage or risk for getting really, really sick and being in a bad way. And I think I hope that a lot of people kind of hang on to that level of concern for people with disabilities or are immunocompromised, and we don't go back to the like, "Oh, but that person never leaves their house and isn't like a functioning adult person in society, and I'm not concerned about what happens to them." I just hope that we maintain the same level of awareness that we were held to earlier in the pandemic when it comes to stuff like that.

Klaus [30:14]: Is there anything that you wish you had done differently earlier in the pandemic?

Jonah [30:30]: I think it went fairly well earlier in the pandemic. I never got COVID. I guess it's a win for whatever methods me and my family were employing. I never got COVID. I believe my dad and my sister have, but I and my mom did not. So I guess it worked fairly well for me. And I don't know. I just hope that I can take that same thing that I talked about earlier with being aware and making sure that I'm being healthy and drinking water and thinking about other people and trying to stay generally clean and germ free and stuff and keep that going, maybe not to the same extreme of like, I'm going to come home and sanitize all of my groceries individually, but hold that same kind of idea just in my regular life to a much more regular degree.

Klaus [31:21]: Yeah. How about others? Is there anything that you wish others had done differently earlier in the pandemic?

Jonah [31:26]: There's a lot of things I wish others had done differently earlier in the pandemic. Two weeks to flatten the curve would have been super cool if people had actually done what they were supposed to do. So I don't know. I hope that people that didn't follow the rules learned to follow the rules. And I hope that if something like this happens again where we have to not only take care of ourselves, but rely on other people to do what they're supposed to do, I hope it

goes better next time than this time, because I feel like that's something that got really highlighted is some people just don't like to follow the rules and don't maybe think about others. So moving forward, maybe if you think about others a little bit more, that would be great.

Klaus [32:11]: Yeah. What do you want to be sure that future generations remember about the COVID pandemic?

Jonah [32:20]: Don't sit inside for eight months and watch Tiger King with your mom if you don't have to, I guess. Just be kind and understanding. And if a community health problem or a community problem arises, do what you're supposed to do and look out for your neighbor. And I remember a thing that went out at the beginning of the pandemic where it was like, "Hey, if you have an elderly neighbor that lives alone, check on 'em." And I do have an elderly neighbor that lives by themselves, and she's, very thankfully, she is my next door neighbor from growing up, and she's like having an extra grandma. She bakes us cookies and stuff when I would come home from College and just making sure that she was doing all right. And if she needed something, maybe she didn't take the offer every time, but if something like this happens again, offer to follow up with your neighbors and be as kind as you can to the people around you.

Klaus [33:26]: Yeah. What do you hope that we keep from the pandemic as a society?

Jonah [33:33]: I think there's all kinds of stuff that I would like to keep from the pandemic. I think we learned how to streamline things a lot. I'm a big fan of the bring the coffee to your car thing that coffee shops started doing. I know that's kind of a dumb answer, but it is really nice. And being conscious of like, oh, we can work from home successfully and maybe being a little bit more lenient of like, oh, this person needs to work from home today. That's totally fine. Or like, being aware that it opens up doors to spend more time with your family or to work from home in a place. Like, if you have to go out of state to take care of a relative, you can still work from home and not feel as pressured to come back and resume you're nine to five at the office. And, I don't know, just learn to be flexible. I think being flexible is something that pulling from the pandemic and keeping it around would be advantageous.

Klaus [34:36]: Yeah. Are there any books or movies, entertainment, things that you feel kind of define your experience of the pandemic?

Jonah [34:51]: Yes. A lot of streaming services were really important to me at the beginning of the pandemic. I didn't do a lot of reading in the beginning of the pandemic, even though I had all the time in the world. And I think it's because I had all the time in the world. It's hard to stay

motivated when you have when there's not something in the way we all complain about. Like, oh, I don't have enough time to read in the day when I'm at work. And then we had all the time in the world and no drive to read. And I know that's the thing that a lot of people experienced, I very confidently was like, "I'll read The Lord of the Rings over the Pandemic." I'm still on page like 98, and I haven't picked it up in months. But once things opened up and, like, life started to return, my ability to read novels also immediately returned, even though I had much less time to do it. And my senior year of College in the spring. So like, before Delta, when things were winding down and we were like, "Oh, we're done!" And then we ruined it a little bit because we got too happy about it being done. I took an English class because I needed, like, one elective for College to graduate and I took horror film and literature with the English Department at Chapel Hill, and she had us read this book by José Saramago called "Blindness" that's about a Pandemic. It was a little on the nose, but that's just something that I reflect back to. It's about a guy who... it's a bunch of different characters who all of a sudden just start going blind. And it's a virus that makes you go completely blind. And it's passed from person to person by contact. You don't know if you're going to get it when you've run into someone who is blind or not. And they quarantine off the first eight people to get it in this building, and those people have to do their thing. But on the outside of the building, everyone still gets it anyways. And society freaks out and planes are crashing and people are rioting and all kinds of stuff. And I don't know, it was just a really on the nose parallel to what we had been doing earlier, where we were like, oh, quarantine. And then everyone got sick anyway. So I don't know. I picked up an appreciation for reading in your spare time and not in your spare time outside of the things that you have to do, because if you have all the time in the world, you're never going to pick up a book. And that's a lesson that I picked up that changed the way that I look at novels and watching TV and all that kind of stuff. And now that I have more responsibilities, I've read, like, ten books, so it's just a lesson and motivation that I picked up when it comes to TVs and novels.

Klaus [37:44]: Yeah, that's really insightful. I feel like I had a similar experience. Well, I feel like you're very efficient with your words. I feel like this is like...

Jonah [37:57]: Thank you. It's the stand up.

Klaus [37:56]: Yeah, I can tell. I mean, it's obvious that you do this for... a lot. It was fascinating and very thoughtful things that you had to say. We're at 38 minutes, and we could say, cap it at 40 minutes or whenever. But I'm just curious if you have... a housemate of mine did improv, and it was like a huge thing for me during the Pandemic to have that as kind of like an outlet for just, like, emotions and stuff and just to have some fun. I'd love to just hear more about why you do

comedy and if you have any recommendations or any thoughts for other people out there as to why they might try it out.

Jonah [39:05]: Yeah. I've been doing comedy for, I think, three plus years now. I started, like, sophomore year of College because I needed an activity that wasn't my group of friends because we would, like... freshman year, you don't really have a handle on what you're doing at all, and you stay awake until, like, 05:00 a.m. Every day. And I was like, I need an extra thing that is separate from this so that I go to bed at a regular time and I auditioned for... on a whim, I auditioned for a comedy troop on campus and I didn't wind up getting in. I literally saw the flyer, and I was like, that seems like fun. And I went and they were like, "Oh, you need stand up material." So I wrote some in, like, a seat in an auditorium somewhere, like, very feverishly writing on my phone, like, some jokes. And I passed that round of auditions and passed the second one, and then I didn't make it on the last one. And they were like, "Hey, if you enjoyed it, go to the Pit on Franklin and give it a... keep going." And I was like, "Yeah, I think I will. That was really, really fun." And I think the thing that's attractive to me about it is you get to boil down your ideas and kind of your personal perspective and the things that you've experienced or been through, whatever. And as a person with a disability, I think that's really valuable and you kind of make it. If you make it entertaining, people listen to what you're talking about. And if I'm just telling people that it sucks that there's no ramps on buildings, they're going to not listen to me after ten minutes. But if it's really funny, they'll listen to like 30 minutes, 45 minutes, an hour. And I think that's something super valuable. And I think it's good for me personally because I don't know, I get to make a list of all the funny things that have happened to me and see if any of them are something I want to hang onto. I have this story that I tell about this time when I was in second grade and my class went on a field trip to, I think it was Raven Rock Nature Reserve or Nature Park or whatever it is, and I didn't go along because I use a walker or wheelchair and it's in the middle of the woods. I was like, "this is a terrible idea." So instead of being like, "cool, we'll see you on Monday," they made a two dimensional Flat Stanley of me like a little paper doll, and took it on the field trip, and then they positioned it around the woods as if it was me and took pictures and brought them back to me, which is not as nice of a gesture as they figured it would be at the time. But it's super funny when you think about it. And I don't know, it's just a really funny story that highlights weird... something weird. As soon as someone hears it, they're like, "Oh, that's strange." And if I just told that story, which is something that I do at, like parties or something, often I'll tell a story and in a room will be like, "Oh..." I'm like, "Ah, that's not what I meant." It's not a bummer if it's super, super funny and they're only going to listen to like one bummer story. If you make it super funny, then they'll keep listening and coming back. And I think that was just a really valuable tool to teach myself in terms of dealing with things that maybe get to me sometimes by making them funny or making something that will cause

someone to leave the show, go home and Google something I think is super valuable. And yeah, that's why I do stand up. I don't know. It's an opportunity to educate about one's own perspective, which is why when people ask me if they should do stand up, I'm like, you try it one time. It's free. That's why I started doing it in College, is it's a free hobby, which means if you go to an open mic, it's going to be the most insane thing you've ever been to in your entire life. Because literally anyone can walk up and do it and they'll say whatever they want. And sometimes that's not a great policy, but it's a valuable policy. But yeah, that's why I do stand up and that's why I've been doing it for so many years. And I think that's why I've been... not successful, but I don't want to say that because it seems braggish, but somewhat like, I don't know, I get paid to do it sometimes and I've gotten to do some cool stuff. So I don't know, I guess that's why I've gone so far with it, is what I'm trying to say.

Klaus [43:36]: Yeah. It's also cool that there's sort of like there's like a little bit of a confluence between... because you studied SILS right?

Jonah [43:45]: I have two degrees. I got a dual degree. I have a Bachelor's in Information and Library science and a Bachelor's in History with a concentration in Ancient Medieval History. Because I am a nerd. I tell people I majored in Ancient History and they just sigh and look at me really concerned, like that sounds like the most boring thing in the world, and I'm like, no, it's super cool. I had a whole conversation with Masir yesterday, another person that works at the library about this gang plank on a Roman ship just because it came up in my brain. And I was like, "This is what this is." And he was like, "Cool, man."

Klaus [44:27]: That's great. Yeah. Because you're talking about... I think it's a really interesting point. You've said a lot of stuff that has got me thinking. But the point about saying something that'll get people to leave the show and go Google, like, whatever, or go think about it. I feel like there's some overlap there with an information science degree.

Jonah [44:55]: I think it's just an opportunity to educate and make people look back on some presuppositions they have in their own brain. I have another joke that I like to do about now that the pandemic is ending, I get to resume my favorite activity, which is being disabled in public, because people will just come up to you and say or do the wildest stuff in the world. And it's even better if you can get another disabled person to come with you in public, because people don't know how to handle that at all. They're not accustomed to seeing one, and if they see two, they're like, "What are you planning?" They're like, "Am I responsible for them right now?" A friend of mine came down from Virginia who uses a wheelchair, and we got free food more than once in places just out of pity. And I was like, I'm not better than this. I'm going to take it. I was

like, I'm not better than a free milkshake. But I don't know. Just pointing that out, I think is valuable because it's funny in the moment. And then on the drive home, they'll be like, "Oh, wait, hang on. Maybe I shouldn't come up to that person." Well, not that you shouldn't buy them a milkshake. Someone literally saw me come out of a Taco place once and just walked over to me in the parking lot and was like, "This is for you," and handed me \$20. And I was like, I mean, all right, I'll take the \$20, but, sure, man. I don't know. It's just fun to highlight weird things that people do because if you laugh at something like that, you have a connection to it in some ways. So maybe they'll think about it later on.

Klaus [46:29]: Yeah, absolutely. Is there anything else that you want to say before we wrap up here?

Jonah [46:42]: Just thank you for having me. It was a lot of fun. I think everyone has their own personal story with the pandemic, so putting them on record, I think is super valuable. I work at the library now, but I originally wanted to be an archivist, so this is very much up my alley of things that I like. I may go back and do that some other time, but that remains to be seen, I guess. But thank you for having me. I really enjoyed it.

Klaus [47:07]: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for setting aside the time. I don't know if you have anything... because since we talked so much about your world of comedy, if there's any links or...

Jonah [47:25]: Anything to plug?

Klaus [47:29]: Videos or whatever, but also just to share with us to include with your...

Jonah [47:32]: Yeah, you can find me. I come up on Google if you search Jonah Lewis, comedian. I've done a couple not anything super crazy, but I did a local arts paper feature once for the Triangle Art Review and I was on Spectrum News Raleigh, which was an interesting time because I was very clearly a fluff piece for them. But it is what it is. But yeah, that would be super cool if you put it in there or whoever listens to this at some point goes up and Google's my name. I come up on Facebook as Jonah Lewis. A lot of my shows and stuff are just on my personal Facebook page, which maybe isn't a great idea now that I'm saying it loud. But yeah, you can find me on there. I've had a couple of interviews with Triangle Arts Review or the Daily Tar Heel or Spectrum News Raleigh, and I come up attached to the Saturday Night Live scholarship.

Klaus [48:36]: Nice.

Mandella Younge 48:36]: Do they have any of your parking lot shows videoed?

Jonah [48:46]: There's at least photos of a parking lot show on one of the Daily Tarhill entries.

Klaus [48:57]: Great. Cool. Well, yeah, I don't know. Maybe we will track those down and put them in there.

Jonah [49:02]: Yeah, if you need any help tracking them down, I'd be more than happy... more than happy to scrounge those up for you. It's not like a lot of stuff, but I have tapes of stand up if you guys want that. But yeah, I can help you track that stuff down.

Klaus [49:17]: It's completely up to you in the end. I mean, anything that you feel like would do well to accompany your story, I think would be awesome. The parking lot shows, I feel like are quintessential.

Jonah [49:32]: Yeah, I know there's photos of the parking lot show on a friend's Facebook and the Pit Facebook group. So I'll either invite you to those Facebook groups or I can just grab them. They should be on there somewhere. But there's photo evidence out there somewhere. I can find it.

Klaus [49:54]: Great. Yeah, that would be awesome. Anything else from you?

Mandella [50:02]: No, I think that was good.

Klaus [50:06]: Awesome. Yeah. Well, I've got one more form for you to fill out before you leave. It's just a metadata form so that will be... it's more of like the stuff that's going to be actually on your page. So this stuff will be public. With the exception of the contact information.

Jonah [50:33]: People just start calling me. Yeah.