

Basic Detail Report

Title Interview with Shiela Hayes

Date 2022 May 17

Medium born digital audio file

Description (a) Interview with Shiela Hayes. Interviewed by Samariya Smith and

Abbie Cowan on May 17, 2022 at Otis Library, 261 Main Street, Norwich. (b)

Photograph of Shiela Hayes taken at her interview. She was interviewed as part

of the Connecticut Historical Society's Community History Project discussing her

experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Sheila Hayes was born in St. Louis,

Missouri. Her father was working on the Alaska pipeline and lived in Alaska while

the rest of the family was in Missouri. In the late 1950s, her family moved to

Norwich, Connecticut in order to give her and her siblings greater educational

opportunities. Sheila described Norwich as 'home.' At the time of the

interview, Sheila is currently retired but active in community work and is the

president of the Norwich branch of the NAACP. Sheila described the beginning of

the pandemic as confusing and recalled receiving lots of conflicting information

from different sources. While public officials advised against the use of masks,

Sheila's brother was sending her masks and gloves, and telling her to distance

herself from others. She received information from different sources close to

her, including her brother, her daughter (a scientist), and individuals on the local

community health board and from friends working in healthcare. Sheila was

very concerned about remote learning and the welfare of children during the

beginning of the pandemic. She felt frustrated by people ignoring

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recommendations regarding social distancing and described herself as

supportive of mask and vaccine mandates in order to protect society and said

that although she is supportive of freedom and personal choice, she does not

support personal freedom when it comes at the cost of other people's

wellbeing. Sheila described the 2020 election as frustrating due to Connecticut's

lack of early/absentee voting. Voters in Connecticut were unfamiliar with

absentee voting and were wary of the process. Sheila was in Texas during the

January 6th insurrection [2021] and was shocked while watching the situation

unfold on television. She described the events as worse than 9/11 [September

11, 2001]. The pandemic interrupted many things in Sheila's life. Her son's

wedding was postponed but rescheduled to June 2021. Although some guests

were unable to attend due to the travel involved, her son and his wife still had

their wedding. She was also unable to attend her daughter's graduation from

graduate school. Sheila described herself as "Zoomed out" and exhausted,

but despite this, her mental health remained stable throughout the pandemic.

She attributes this to her involvement in the NAACP and working with children.

Sheila believed the most devastating effect of the pandemic was the increase in

suicides, particularly among young people. Sheila experienced this firsthand

through the loss of her friend, who died by suicide. The biggest thing Sheila lost

during the pandemic was the freedom to be with family, and the biggest lesson

she learned was not to take freedom and life for granted. Her advice to future

generations is to be proactive rather than reactive, and to use the pandemic as a

learning tool. She hopes that the pandemic made her more of a compassionate

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person and the public will become more civil. When asked to describe the

pandemic in one word, Sheila chose “overwhelming.” When asked if there was

anything else she would like to add, she discussed the fear white Americans

have of the “browning” of America, and how this fear has become a rallying

point for white supremacists. Although she doesn’t have a problem with the

2nd amendment, she has a problem with how the judicial system deals with

violent white people whose use guns to commit crimes.

Dimensions Duration: 48 Minutes, 22 Seconds