

**LIBR 588 Oral History Interview Transcript: At Home in 2020****Interviewee:** Hannah Blank**Interviewer:** Cejay Johnson**Date:** March 14, 2021**Location:** Bellingham, WA (Hannah Blank) and Vancouver, BC (Cejay Johnson)

CJ: Before we get into the questions, can I ask you to state your name and whether you give consent to be recorded?

HB: Yes. My name is Hannah Blank, and I give consent to be recorded.

CJ: Great, thanks. Okay, so I wanted to start with a bit of a big question. What are your initial thoughts when you hear the word home? Does anything come to mind immediately for you?

HB: To me when I hear the word home, I first think of someplace—well first of all I think of a place, and then it's—to me it's somewhere that is just really comfortable, where I can just relax and not have to, I guess, have the—be the social version of myself. I can be the couch potato, or just relax and have me time.

CJ: When you say *the social version of you*, home for you then is a place where you can be most genuinely yourself? Would you say that that's true?

HB: Yeah, I would definitely say that, and not to say that there aren't social times or events that happen within home—a home setting, where you have a couple friends over like a dinner party or birthday party, something like that, where of course it is going to be social and you're going to have a lot of energy and interaction with other people, but it's a place where you have that duality because you can have that social aspect but also at the end of the day people go to their respective homes, and you can just, once again, return to this place of comfort. I think of sleep a lot when I think of home. So yeah.

CJ: [02:11] Awesome. You mentioned that you first think of a place, and so I know that your hometown is Kennewick Washington. You grew up there. Was that the place that came to mind for you?

HB: These days, I view Kennewick as my hometown. When I go back to Kennewick to visit, I don't really view it as my home anymore, which gets into a really complex... I'm not sure how to describe it just because ever since moving to Bellingham for college, Kennewick slowly became less and less my home. I think freshman year of college I would go home for—go to Tri-Cities for summer break, Christmas time, spring break, things like that. And visiting, it would be *I'm visiting my home*, and, at the time I was living in the dorms and the dorms were not my home. It was a place I was staying at to do school. Then, sophomore year I moved into an apartment, and I think starting then, home became a little less associated with Kennewick, and my childhood home, just because I was staying in Bellingham a lot more frequently. I wasn't going to Kennewick as much. Then [laughs] I think somewhere during my junior or senior year of

college, my mom turned my old bedroom into her sewing room, which I know there's a lot of jokes out there about when kids leave home for college their parents retake their [04:15]—take the room and turn it into an office or a gym, their home gym, all of those, whatever they didn't previously have space for, they take the child's bedroom and turn it into that. They kept my bed, so I still have all of my items that were mine in high school, but it got all moved into my sister's bedroom, and so, to this day when I go back to visit my parents, both beds are in my sister's bedroom. It's really crowded [laughs] with all of this furniture, because I—I had basically moved—permanently moved out in the eyes of my parents, which is not wrong, like I—I have permanently moved out, I'm not moving back in with my parents at any time. But... it has been a weird transition moving from Kennewick being my home to Bellingham being my home, and I do think there is, at least with the language I use, I will say there is some confusion because I'll say, *Oh, I'm going to go back home*, when I'm referring to visiting my parents but I'm also going to say, *I'm going back home*, when I'm referring to going back to Bellingham, or to my place of dwelling.

CJ: Would you mind elaborating a little bit more on what it was like growing up in Kennewick?

HB: [06:00] Yeah, so for—I'm assuming most people don't know where Kennewick is—Kennewick is one of the three cities that is part of the Tri-Cities, over in eastern Washington. It's in the little bottom right corner of the state, and it's a desert, which is unique. Most people, when they think of the state of Washington, they think, first of all, Seattle, and then, rain. But that was not the case at all, growing up. We, I think, have one of the highest numbers—like average number of days of sunshine over there. It also, temperature wise, is very different from the west side of the state, so in the summers we get up into the hundreds. It's not uncommon to have a week or two during the summer where it's a consistent... into the hundreds, up to 110 weather, and then in the winter, it can be either pretty mild like in the 40s, or it can get down into the teens, and we can get lots of snow some years. We have lots of ice storms, typically, so it has... I was exposed to all of the seasons growing up, and then moving over to the west side of the state. A very big transition there. [07:41] I was born and raised in Kennewick, so before moving for college, that was really the only place I had known as my home. The home my parents are currently living in is the same house that they've lived in since I was about six, so I have very few memories of any—living in any other house, and when my parents got the house, it was a complete fixer upper. They got it, I think for sub 100 grand, because it was just so awful. I remember I wasn't allowed to walk around barefoot outside, even in our yard because it was just... there were discarded nails and trash, so it was a hot mess, and so for the past, probably 16-17 years, my dad has constantly been renovating the house, and he would usually pick one room per year basically and just renovate it. Which, the house was built in 1906, so that meant completely gutting everything, lath and plaster, we'd find birds' nests and newspapers in the walls. Just all sorts of things. So, my childhood was littered with memories of just home improvement, learning how to use tools. My dad would let my sister and I draw on the backs of the sheet rock before he would seal it all up. And so, I don't know, there's a lot of character to the house that my family has put into it, so home in Kennewick is very... intimate is not quite the word I want to use, but I don't really know a different word that quite conveys the feeling, because the house itself is very personal, [10:08] and there was a lot of time and energy put into

every aspect of it, whether it was all the way from putting up walls, to sheet rocking, putting in floors, or just painting. There's all--all of my family members participated in it. So it's... I really don't want my parents to ever sell that house. I know my mom has this dream of living on the beach or something, getting a beach house. But to me, I—I can't really see them living anywhere else just because of all the—the energy and heart that they put into this building, and it makes it so much more than the building because of that.

CJ: Yeah, the thought that came to mind for me was it sounds like as a family you were able to make a house a home, kind of that [speaking simultaneously].

HB: It's one of the best, I think, examples of that, because everybody talks about *oh, we're going to make a house a home* by like putting decorations and my personal touches on it, but quite literally, we reshaped the structure of the house. My dad had to do structural work to the foundation, things like that that it goes so much deeper than just adding a Live Laugh Love sign [speaking simultaneously] to the wall.

CJ: I love the thought, too, that those drawings that you and your sister made would... are just part of it [speaking simultaneously].

HB: They're real embarrassing.

CJ: Oh no, do you remember any [speaking simultaneously] in particular?

HB: [11:56] My—my dad and mom were really into documenting all of the renovations for sentimental reasons but also just for future renovations, like if anything were to—if pipe were to burst or electrical stuff that they would be able to go back and look at photos and be like *okay like this is where this is* and whatever, and the drawings those were part—more like on the sentimental side, but I just remember there's a picture of my sister and I doodling on the inside part of the walls of the kitchen, and in green Sharpie, I have just covered this huge section of wall with anything imaginable, like I was—I think I was in fourth grade. It's kind of the time where you like to write your name on everything. You like to sign it; you like to claim ownership. [laughs] And I also remember that I was really into drawing monkeys, because they were my favorite animal, so there's at least two large monkey faces [laughs] on there. Of course, at fourth grade they're not great drawings. I think of that and I think of future people just... I don't know how many years in the future, just being like, *let's redo some walls*, and uncovering that and just being like, *Oh, that's unique*.

CJ: [laughs] I'm sure that that would be so adorable though just to see that this house was so loved.

HB: yeah.

CJ: Besides the construction, and the making the house a home, do you have any other specific memories that stand out about it from—from your time there?

HB: [13:56] I mean I have a lot of memories, growing up and being in the Tri-Cities. I had a really great childhood in the sense that nothing super wild or crazy happened, it was just a very stereotypical normal upbringing. I lived super close to all of the schools that I attended, so I went to private school, preschool through eighth grade, and that was just down the road. I think when I

was—when I was in elementary school, in the spring, there would be a couple days where my mom, back when she was a stay-at-home mom, she would walk us to school. It was that close, which was fun. I remember there is a canal that would run next to the sidewalk, and there would be ducks and stuff in there and I just thought that was the coolest thing because we were pretty in the middle of town, and so we would have to drive a little ways to go to the river or any—or see any actual nature stuff, so having the ducks right there was real cool. And then, I mean yeah, just going into high school, high school was also really close to my house, so a lot of the friends that I made in high school lived within like a half mile radius of my house, so that was always really fun just being able to be so close to everybody. We had open lunch periods in high school so there were a couple times I would just—I would go home for lunch, once I had a car, and sometimes that had to do with I hadn't packed a lunch, or sometimes I wanted to go home and see my dog, or other times during sports seasons, I was, *I forgot insert sport item*, and I needed to go grab it before practice after school. [16:11] Yeah, and I was—I got super busy more in high school and so I definitely spent less time at my house. Whereas middle school and down, I was constantly at my house, because, I mean where—where else do you really go as a child. But it was really nice being... even in high school when I was super busy, it was like I was always able to come home and go to my bedroom, and just be done. Maybe I had homework and I would have to stay up late, but I could do it within my bedroom and it was a very comfy space where I had—where everything had its place, and so I had quite the specific system of my bed, my desk, my computer, all of that. It was all just very, very regular and normal, because I needed that consistency, which having that home since I was a really little child, also really helped in the consistency.

CJ: Yeah, that's so cool. It sounds like, too, that your house was located within the community in a way where there was a lot of opportunity for connectivity that way. Yet, I hear you saying that your home was that—you've mentioned comfort [laughs] a lot and another word, listening to you speak about it that comes to mind for me is familiarity.

HB: Yes, [speaking simultaneously] definitely.

CJ: Where there was that kind of... your home was that sort of special spot for you.

[inaudible]

CJ: [17:54] So, you also mentioned when you started talking a little bit about Bellingham and the transitions that you had to go through, where Kennewick... you would mention the language that you would still say you were going home but it was more like a separate—it was your childhood home—and then as you moved into, I think you said your first apartment, that was when you started feeling maybe that you were creating your own home, is that—is that correct?

HB: Yeah, and, I mean, I don't think that type of language is ever going to change, I'm—I'm very permanently settled in Bellingham at this point in my life, and I... I think it's just... it's not going to be a breakable habit. I'm just going to forever say, *Oh, I'm going to go home and visit my parents*, even though it's not home, really, it's just where my parents are, but I... like it'll still be home, in a sense, it'll always be my childhood home, it'll always be where I grew up and where I know so many people. Yeah, it was a weird transition to make, and I did struggle with that a lot in the beginning because I was—I didn't like the feeling of drifting, which I think a lot of college

students feel because, I mean that's what happens. If you don't stay in the same place throughout the entirety of your college career, you move a lot. I think, at least within Bellingham it's very common to move two or three times at least during a four-year undergrad. You end up only living in a place for a year. **[19:50]** I mean, one can obviously argue, *well, for an entire year it is your home*, and you can have those personal touches of adding your decorations and your little string lights and it's your home, but to me it's always really been hard to view not-permanent living situations as home, because in the back of my mind I'm always thinking, *Oh well, this is only a year lease*, and even though I—at one point, I moved from the apartment to a house, and I lived in that house for three years consistently, but even then, it was still in the back of my mind, *I'm still leasing this... a bedroom, out of this house and it's not a permanent house. I will eventually be moving*, and so—and also with a rental you can't do too much with it because landlords have rules, and that's reasonable, I understand that they don't want me to be putting a bunch of holes in the wall and whatever else. I always found that also difficult, with the constraints of... you can only decorate in certain ways, you can't really personalize anything. You can't paint anything.

CJ: Yeah that's hard.

HB: It's just like you're—you're limited to your string lights and your posters. If people still do posters these days.

CJ: Yeah and I also know, at that period of time you transitioned through a lot of roommates, also, and [laughs] so was that...

HB: Yes!

CJ: ... something that contributed to that sense of impermanency for you, too?

HB: **[21:50]** Yeah, roommates are an... interesting topic in and of itself. Just because, I did live with some roommates longer than others, and so there was a sense of stability with some of them just because it'd be... I'd live with them for three or four years and then, since there were multiple rooms in the house, some roommates would be there for a year and then they would be switched out, basically. It was always really interesting how the dynamic would change every time somebody left and somebody came into the situation just because everybody has different personalities and just going into even the logistics of it, just when do people get up in the morning? When do people go to bed at night? The shower schedule things like that. It really impacts your schedule, and one of the biggest learning curves I think that happens with college and moving out of your childhood home and living with your parents is that you have to learn to live with other people, which obviously most people come from a living situation where they lived with other people, but it's their family. When you live with your family, you know everybody's schedules, you know all their quirks, you know what annoys you, what you enjoy about them, all of those things. Then to be thrown into a situation with multiple different people who have different triggers for getting annoyed at each other or different pet peeves, it's really complicated, and then, **[23:50]** maintaining a healthy relationship with all of your roommates, so that everybody can view the shared space as being first of all... [laughs] actually shared space, equitably shared space, and just making sure that space is viewed as home for everybody so that not—so that nobody feels... I guess... alienated, or... unsafe, feeling that it's not a place where

they can actually be comfortable. I did experience that a couple times where I was like *I don't actually want to be in this living situation. I don't enjoy how being in this space makes me feel*, which is... it's a hard thing to go through, especially if you previously felt very comfortable in that space. And I know—I know this project kind of revolves around the tran—like how the idea of home changed with covid-19, and the pandemic, and I mean that also created a lot of change, and it made things—I mean it made things difficult. I mean the pandemic made a lot of things difficult. [laughs] Housing was just one of many.

CJ: Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when the pandemic started last year?

HB: So, I—I was actually in a little bit of a transitional period. I work for the university in Bellingham, Western Washington University, and after graduation, I started working part time there. And then I had finally transitioned into a full-time position, and my full-time position started on March, I believe, fifth or sixth.

CJ: [26:16] oh wow.

HB: And I had just returned from a trip to Costa Rica that week, and I remember my dad calling me while I was over there and he was like, *it looks like this COVID-19 thing is picking up. Are you going to be okay? Should you come home?* Just general concern. Not that he was concerned that I was going to get it, but more so just the logistics of will they shut everything down, close borders. We weren't too worried about it, during the trip, and when we got home, I started my new job, and then, I think it was only a week. I worked full time for a week and then they were like, *so we're sending everybody home*

CJ: Oh wow.

HB: *for a two-week quarantine*, and I remember thinking, *Oh, interesting, we're act—like I heard rumors, and my partner is [laughs] a little bit of a prepper, and he was all like, they're going to shut things down. We got to be prepared. We need to do a nice big bulk shopping trip.* He was preparing for the worst thinking that it was going to blow up into a big thing, and I was not in that mindset at all. I was like, *it's whatever, they're going to—the government's going to just overreact, and it'll be fine. We'll get back to normal.* And then we didn't. So, I—I think it was two days ago, maybe was the official one-year anniversary when the WHO declared COVID a pandemic. And I have—I have a photo I took of being in Fred Meyer

CJ: [28:16] Oh wow.

HB: in Bellingham, and we thankfully had done shopping previously, and so we were all set. We just went to the store for some random item or two, we didn't... we weren't out of anything. We didn't have a need for anything, but we just went, because we were like, *everybody else is going to the store, I guess we should also make sure... do a last minute grab of anything we might need*, and I just remember seeing empty shelves and thinking, *people are freaking out.* It's like when Bellingham gets a snowstorm. And I use the term snowstorm lightly because [laughs] they're—they're usually not real snowstorms. For the area, people aren't used to that amount of snow, and so the same thing would happen is that they would—people would freak out, everybody would rush the store, we'd run out of... whatever item. And so, I was still thinking

that it was relatively the same thing, like the classic, *the toilet paper aisle is completely empty*. Same with paper towels, and just, the weirdest items people chose to stock up on. [gestures on camera] Yeah, and so it was just... I remember thinking like, *oh, it'll be over... soon. It'll be fine*. I wasn't really worried at all. I don't think I ever really got worried at any point. I was never actively concerned and scared about anything. It was more so just like, *I don't know what everybody else is doing*.

CJ: Yeah.

HB: [30:04] Which was kind of concerning because I was like everything all of a sudden felt really far away, because nobody could go anywhere.

CJ: So when—as the lockdown continued, did that change for you at all? I mean, when you realized, *oh wow, we might be in this for the long haul?* [laughs]

HB: Yeah, so I think a lot of—most of my quarantine experience revolves around learning how to navigate my workspace, because for the most part, my job requirements remained the same as from when I had been working part time and when I had been working on campus. However, it was a weird realization to have that so much of my day consisted of just talking with people in the office, talking with students that came into my office. Without all of the in-person parts of my job, I had this weird realization that I didn't actually have that much work. I was expected to fill up eight hours a day, five days a week with work stuff. But I didn't have the quantity of work needed to fill that time, so I didn't do a lot and it kind of put me in this weird headspace of like... I was sleeping a lot, and I would wake up at the very last minute, open my computer in bed, do some work, as much as I could, and then I would kind of just waste time after that, [32:06] and then try and get into the afternoon, make it to five o'clock or whatever and then be like, *well, it's five. People aren't expecting me to be online anyways at this time so I'm going to not be online*. It was just a weird thing, because I—I didn't know what to do with myself I guess, and then... another thing that happened was, I was the only graduated individual, the only working individual, in my household. My three roommates, in the house were all students still.

CJ: Okay.

HB: What ended up happening was all of them decided to go back to their homes, with their families, because school had transitioned to online learning, and they... my roommates were very home bodies, but home bodies in the sense of they were still very attached to their childhood family home, because they transferred to Western, so they hadn't been—this was their second year living away from their family, so it was a lot harder for them to not be there. Actually, it might have been their third year, but still, they hadn't been away from their families as long as I had. So, they decided to go home and move, basically. They left most of their stuff in the house, but they—they left for weeks. I don't even remember how many weeks.

CJ: So you were alone?

HB: [34:03] Yeah, so I was alone in my house. I did have—one of the roommates would travel back and forth from her house to the house in Bellingham, because she did have a semi regular job babysitting, I believe it was, for a family up here. It was close—more closer to nannying with the amount of hours that she put in but regardless, she really wasn't in the house, most of the

time. What ended up happening was, at that point, I had started to hate living in that house because it was a very old house first of all, just to give background on it. The housing market in Bellingham's terrible. It was falling apart. It was really cold, and I was just... I had been living there for three years and I was very tired of it, and I just... I couldn't live there alone. I just... couldn't do it. I ended up more or less moving in with my partner at the time, and it wasn't a true move in because I most of my stuff was over at my house that I was living in, but I spent all of my time at his place and with his roommates, so I just, I needed people, and I needed someone to keep me accountable for doing things, [laughs] going to work, and eating meals and things like that. I was not about to thrive, being alone, and not allowed to see anybody. That was a really weird transition. [36:03] And then, in May, I believe it was, our landlord had started contacting us, because he wanted to show the house, because we had all agreed that we were not going to renew our lease,

CJ: Okay.

HB: which was a complex thing because we were still, the—the two-week quarantine had not ended. We were way past that. We were still in the height of the quarantine, and he... I think it was like, three—three times at different points, he reached out to us and he was like, *Hi, I'd like to show the house to people*. And we were like, *We... you want to bring strangers to walk through our home, when we're not even allowed to go to the office to work or go to school right now?* Literally the only people working are grocery store people, basically, and other essential businesses, but he wanted to bring groups of people through our home, so that he could rent it out.

CJ: Sounds like a lot of pressure.

HB: Yeah, and the first—the first time we just straight up said, *no, we're not comfortable*, which, to be fair, nobody was really living in the house, but at the same time, I was still frequenting the house enough, as was my other roommate, that I was like, *I don't want people coming in*. That was before we really understood how COVID worked; we kind of understood how much of it was airborne, we kind of understood how much of it was based on the items you touched. [38:06] It was still really vague. We didn't really know anything and we just wanted to play it safe, and also, we just didn't want to deal with coordinating it. We pushed it off a couple times and I know my one roommate actually contacted the Department of Health in Bellingham

CJ: Oh wow.

HB: because she wanted to make sure that legally we were in the right, and the lady at the Department said that we were. The—and then I have a realtor friend, who I also contacted about it, and legally, as a landlord, he had the ability to come by the house. He could give us a notification, I think 24 hours or 48 hours in advance, and he could come.

CJ: Okay.

HB: but that didn't include other people. He could force us to have him into the house, but it didn't include giving tours of our home

CJ: because there were still restrictions on gatherings at that point.



HB: Correct.

CJ: Yeah.

HB: We could—we could not gather with anybody, I think. It was anybody outside of your household. You could not be with people. That was something we kept bringing up with the quarantine restrictions, we were like, *it's households only. You cannot be with people outside of your household. And you think we want to have you, which is another household, and another group of people, so another household, come together?* Toward the end, our lease ended at the end of June, so it probably was in... toward the middle of May, end of May, when he was getting obviously really frustrated with us. [40:10] Understandably he needed to find people to rent it out. Even though we had provided lots of photos and videos, people don't like renting places unseen, and so we were like, *we just want to get out of this house. It's no—like, nobody's really living in it. Nobody wants this to be their home. Sure.* So, we had some groups come by, view the home. Yeah, it was—it was just a nightmare, which made me even more anxious about that house, just because I was like, *I am so tired of dealing with the landlord*, because the past three years we'd had other issues with the landlord, for various reasons, which are unnecessary to go into now [laughs], but that was a really weird experience of just having such a switch flipped of *this is my home, I'm comfortable here, I love it here, I have so many fond memories to I cannot go into this building because it causes me so much anxiety*, which made me stay at my partner's place even more because I was like, *I can't go there. It stresses me out too much*, which, in hindsight sounds real silly but I [laughs] I was getting a lot of stress and anxiety from everybody else and just the doom scrolling of social media and seeing all the things other people were posting that I like, I—I got a little, I think, is it agoraphobic? Where you can't go outside?

CJ: Oh, I'm not sure.

HB: One moment.

CJ: [laughs] Look the word up. Yeah, and that sounds like such a difficult situation.

HB: [42:10] Yeah, so agoraphobia is “the fear of places and situations that might cause panic helplessness, or embarrassment,” according to Google. I had never had that. I'm a generally anxious person, and I've been medicated in the past and done therapy and all that. And usually it's just social situations; I overanalyze things, and I get anxious, whatever. But I had never experienced anxiety in the sense that I couldn't leave the house, because of... the feeling of dread that it caused me, so it was a weird situation of being at my partner's house, which was not my home. Not being able to leave his place because I would get so anxious. I couldn't drive, I couldn't do anything to go to my other house, which also did not feel like my home, because it was cold and empty, and nobody else was there. I really didn't have a home, I guess, in the sense of like a place where I felt comfortable, and I had my things with me. It got to the point where I did end up going to therapy, again, during the quarantine because I—I wouldn't leave the room. I couldn't go even to other places in the house. I had to be in the room to not feel anxious. But I would also feel anxious because I was like, *this is unhealthy. I recognize that I should be, maybe going out into the backyard and get some sunshine and fresh air*, but I just could not do it.

CJ: [44:06] [speaking simultaneously] There was a lot [laughs] happening that was just very heavy and a lot of weight for

HB: Yeah.

CJ: you to carry and... you speaking about that, the negative associations that you were having with the house and feeling kind of—a word you used earlier was adrift, and that seems to be pretty applicable here too and the word that came to mind for me also was displacement

HB: Mhm.

CJ: where it sort of... *where do I belong*, almost.

HB: Yeah.

CJ: And it also made me think a little bit of a point when you were talking about living with roommates, and having to navigate different personalities and different things, and then, with all of the uncertainty that the pandemic brought, it just... all of that together makes me think of also how much effort might go into just trying to have some semblance of control. Yeah, would you say that you lost a little bit of a sense of control of what home was?

HB: Yeah, and I think a lot of it—I mean, yeah. I mean it does, in the end, come down to control because I couldn't control what my roommates were doing, and therefore, I was alone. I worked up in Bellingham, I—I technically could have gone back to Kennewick and hung out for the duration of—not the duration of quarantine, because we're technically still in quarantine—but I could have gone to my parents' house and worked remotely. [46:00] I could have done that, followed suit, but I lived a lot farther away. It's about six hours difference between Bellingham and Kennewick, taking in consideration of traffic. They all live within an hour and a half, two hours, of Bellingham so it's a very easy trip for them. It was just... there were a lot of frustrations, just because they had a lot more freedom, I guess, in a way, than I did. Because yes school is a commitment, you got to do all your schoolwork, but they were still able to go home, and you can do school work whenever, kind of, as long as you hit those due dates. You can do it in the middle of the night, you can do it in it in the middle of the day. Work schedules are not as flexible, though we've learned after about a year of the pandemic that you can actually make work schedules like that; it's difficult, and a little frustrating for other people, but you don't have to stick to the general eight to five work hours. But yeah just... I mean so much was just up in the air all the time it was like, *well, my roommates are gone. Are they coming back? When are they coming back? When they come back, how careful do we need to be about COVID, because who have they been around when they've been at home?* Generally, I trusted all of my roommates. I didn't ever have any issues where I was like, *you're doing some risky business. I don't want to be around you unless there's been a two-week quarantine.* I never felt worried about that aspect, which I know so many other people had to deal with that during quarantine, which I'm so thankful that I didn't have to deal with that, even when I would be at my partner's house. [48:09] I just kind of assumed the role as the extra roommate in that situation, and all of his roommates were very... they were all very conscious of the quarantine and being careful themselves, and so our bubble felt fairly secure, which was good, and I needed that. For the most part people were either working from home, or if they did still go to work because they were

essential workers, they had very limited interactions with people. They had a very set number of coworkers that they would see, and so the situation at my partner's house felt a little more in control. Also just because there was a little more communication happening because everybody was present. Nobody was present at my other house. While we could text, or we could FaceTime or do whatever to be in contact with each other, it's—it's not the same. I think we've all learned that through a year of being virtual and online, is that FaceTime does not replace in-person communication,

CJ: Yeah.

HB: and it really affects how things are communicated because even though like right now I can see your face and relatively, body language, facial expressions, it's not the same as if you were sitting across from me, and we were drinking coffee together having this conversation.

CJ: Yeah, I know. I do miss that, and I feel too, even... because the camera is such a fixed spot that if I'm looking at your face, it doesn't look like I'm making eye contact with you. It looks like I'm looking off at [inaudible]

HB: Exactly.

CJ: [50:07] or something like that. It's—it, yeah, there's definitely a disconnect. [laughs] So, I think a pertinent question for now is: where are you now? Are you living with your partner, or do you have another space?

HB: [laughs] So, we're still—I'm still kind of in that weird in-between. Right now, where I am currently sitting, I am at my partner's house. I'm here most of the time still. After my lease was up at the other house, I... for a minute, I was still going to live with those same roommates that I lived with in the house, we were just going to find a new location because we all started to resent that house, and we needed a new place to live. However, because they were all at their respective homes with their families, they were thinking, *we don't need to find the least until September. We'll just let the lease run out and then we won't get a place over the summer because we'll be still living at home*, which is great for them but I needed to place that covered the summer.

CJ: Yeah [laughs]

HB: because I would be living in Bellingham, and working, so that added a lot of stress and anxiety to that period of time in my life, and I realized that the easiest way to get out of that is to live alone. [51:46] So, I ended up getting a studio by myself in Bellingham, which honestly was probably the best move for me because although I'm paying more, currently, I have a lot more freedom and I don't... my studio doesn't exactly feel like home, but I don't have the anxieties of going to my apartment whenever I want, and not worrying like, *oh are other people going to be there? Do I have to interact with people?* I—because... with quarantine, social interactions were just so far and few in between that any—any unexpected social interactions that I have to have are draining. So, if I—back with the other house, if I would go—go there, and a roommate would happen to be home, it'd be like, *Oh, hello. I was not expecting somebody to be here, and now I have to interact with someone*, which sounds super anti-social [laughs] and weird,

CJ: That sense of surprise that kind of takes you off guard.

HB: Yeah, and so I ended up just getting a studio which was the best move. All my stuff is over there. I still am, I think, like I said before, I'm still over at my partner's place probably 80% of the time. I've transitioned into more of a, *my apartment is my office*, and so I go there during my workday. I do my work from my studio because I need a change of scenery. I was able to get through that little bit of counseling last spring, when the pandemic first started, or I guess it was technically over the summer when I was doing counseling, and after that I was able to do... get outside more, and basically just live a little more. [54: 15] I—yeah, I tried to maintain a level of flexibility of going between my studio and my partner's house just because I need that change. I need that little bit of going outside, I'm going to drive, I'm going to go somewhere. Even if it's only two minutes away, it's like this is my commute. Yeah.

CJ: Yeah [laughs]. I was going to say, it sounds like you were able to bring back a little bit of that normalcy.

HB: Yeah, and I think also another reason I've stayed a lot at my partner's place is because [inaudible] has roommates and I need social interaction. I know I just previously said it's exhausting, talking with people and interacting, but the... I guess, more so, the social interactions that I have at this house is that people have very independent schedules. I mean, they're all guys, which is a very different dynamic than a house full of girls. Whereas our house full of girls was like, *let's do things together*, which I loved, I loved having movie nights, I loved doing all sorts of fun activities together, but it was difficult when they would want to do things, and my partner would want to do things. That was an issue prior to the pandemic of like, *Oh, I have to choose my social interactions*, whereas I can have conversations with people in this house, but not feel obligated to hang out with them.

CJ: [56:16] Was the transition from your old house with the roommate—the girl roommates to this... you have your studio, and you have your partner's house, was there any other transition that happened for you, or is that—is it more of a permanent-ish [laughs] situation for you right now?

HB: That is... I mean, that's currently where we're at. My—my partner and I actually got engaged during the pandemic.

CJ: Congratulations!

HB: So, in August. Thank you. We have started the process of buying a home.

CJ: Wow!

HB: I am hopeful that with that, I'll finally exit the adrift feeling that has come with being a 20-something-year-old who is moving quite frequently. I'm really ready to be done moving all the time [laughs] and have a place for five or ten years and not move and just be able to make it—make it my own. Yeah, we're currently working towards that. All the loan stuff has been approved, and we're hopefully going to close on the house at the end of the month.

CJ: That's exciting.

HB: [57:53] It's super exciting, and we'll have a good slow move into the house because my lease—my studio's lease is not up until the end of June, and I mean my partner owns his current

house, so he has a very flexible move schedule as well. I'm hoping that... I mean, it'll be out of Bellingham a little bit, [audio distortion] which will be kind of sad to not be in town anymore, but I am also excited to start a new chapter of a little more permanency, and just, I don't know, feeling more like an adult I guess, because I'm going to be 25 this year, and I know as a kid thinking like, *Oh 20, being in their 20s or you're 25, you're so cool. You have everything put together, and you're in your dream job. You have a car, you have a house, you probably have pets.* All these things that I don't know as like an eight-year-old you're like, *life's going to be so simple and easy.* That doesn't happen because you graduate college and then you're like, *now what?* [laughs] *I'm still a child and don't know anything,* [laughs] *I just have a piece of paper that says I have a degree.*

CJ: [laughs] Yeah, oh man. Yeah, that's so exciting though, and hopefully, too, that transition for you towards more of a permanency will kind of come with transition in the pandemic also, as these vaccines keep rolling out and maybe you'll be able to have a housewarming party at [laughs] some point!

HB: **[59:51]** That would be spectacular. I would love to see people. [laughs] I know Washington State is moving towards phase three, so hopefully we'll just keep going on the up and up and will reopen soon. I mean two weeks, turned into 365 days.

CJ: [laughs] Yeah. The prediction was a little off. [laughs]

HB: Yeah.

CJ: Okay, well awesome. The last few questions I have are a little bit more general, and I think we'll probably reiterate a bit of what— [laughs] what we've already chatted about, but I guess just to wrap up a bit, what kinds of things would you say then contribute to a space being or becoming home for you?

HB: On the physical level, personally, I just need—I need my things there. Something that I have struggled with still is the fact that all of my stuff is at my studio. I'm really into doing art, which includes painting, and has a lot of physical supplies. I have to go to my studio whenever I want to do that kind of stuff, or I have to plan ahead and bring it with me to my partner's house, which is just annoying, like logistically it's annoying. For to me a huge aspect is just having all of my things with me, so it's like, if I want to just pick up a paintbrush and do art, I can just do that. I don't have to make it this whole huge thing of like, *well I either need to bring it here, I need to go over there, and then set up, takedown time, making sure everything's clean if I'm going over to my apartment and leaving.* It just adds so many layers of things I need to remember. **[62:01]** So, having all of my items. I think also a little bit, which will play into the new home, is just having it be mine. So much of renting is the fact that it's not yours. You don't own it. It's somebody else's. Even being at my partner's house, which I love this house, and all the roommates are great, but at the same time, it's—it's not my place. I'm... it's—it's his. I am a guest in his space, even—no matter how much stuff I bring over here, it'll still be his. Also, just the move to not having roommates, because I know technically, I don't have roommates in a studio apartment. But over here I do have roommates, in a way, and just moving into a whole space that is mine and my partner's, and it's just ours, and it is equally ours. We don't have to worry about anybody else's schedule, we can do [audio distortion] what we want, personalize it however we

want. Painting walls, which I'm super excited about. Just all those physical—the physical pieces I talked about of like decorating, putting your own personal touch on it. Then I think just getting comfy. Once it becomes—it'll become a new normal, once I move again. Hopefully, the last time. I'm looking forward to the place being comfortable, and just the place I look forward to being at, which I think is a huge thing. [64:00] You know when you go on vacation, obviously you're excited for vacation, but there comes a point in time during any vacation, where you're like, *wow I would really like to be in my own bed, in my house, using my own bathroom*

CJ: [laughs] Yeah.

HB: and whatever else. So, having that desire to be at home is important, and I think that is really the key thing is you want to go back. You want to be present there.

CJ: Yeah, okay, so that... some of what you said about that ease and comfort, the ownership, having it be a private space almost, makes me think of a little bit how you described your—your childhood home, or what it was like for you at that time. Do you think in your new place you're going to try to recreate a little bit of that for yourself and your partner?

HB: Yeah, I mean, probably recreate in the sense that I want it to be a place that I can, in the far future look back on and be like, *wow, that was a starting point. And look how far we've come.* Regardless of if we live there five or ten years or live there forever. I want it to be a place where I'm like, *wow I really loved that house, and we put a lot of, once again, time, energy, effort and love into the place.* We're going to put gardens and stuff and a fence and we're going to do some painting and things like that to it. Not to the same extent as my childhood home, but it's still... we're going to put a lot—a decent amount of work into it. I think in that sense, we will be recreating that sense of home that my childhood home had. [66:06] I mean it will be different, obviously. It'll never be my childhood home because there's always a sense of nostalgia that comes with looking back at your childhood home that I don't think you can ever, ever replicate. Maybe for my future children, whatever house they grow up in, they'll have those same feelings, which will be a unique thing because they might have very different feelings about the home that they grow up in than I do, because I know my parents love my house, our house, but I know for a fact that they're okay with moving. They're fine with just saying, *yeah, that was a great house. We put a lot of work into it. It was a bunch of projects, but now we're done, and we can move on and go to our next project,* which is great, but that house represents a little more to me than just a set of projects, and I'm sure my parents also have sentimental attachments to the house, but they definitely talk about moving and selling the house far more than my sister and I ever do.

CJ: Yeah, so it sounds like though, in your—in your current—current position, there's a lot of hope [laughs] and optimism for the future, where that's concerned.

HB: Yeah, I feel like, had we had this same conversation last April or May, it would have probably been a lot harder, and it would have been a lot sadder [laughs], just because I was in such a weird space. I hadn't found my studio apartment [inaudible] had a bunch of dread hanging over me of like, *I don't even know where I'm going to live,* for the following year. [68:12] I think for anybody that had to move during the pandemic it's just... moving itself is stressful, but adding moving during a pandemic is a special kind of stressful [laughs] because everybody's be—being super cautious, which of course is necessary, but there are so many layers of

complexity once again that were added because of COVID. But I'm happy to see where we're at now, in combination with vaccines, so the COVID situation itself is looking up, just as well as finding my place here in Bellingham once again. It's like the puzzle pieces are falling together, which is nice.

CJ: Yeah, that's great. Okay. Well, I think the last question that I have for you is, is there anything else that you want to say that maybe I didn't touch upon, or something you think is important, or some main takeaways from today?

HB: I think the only piece I have to add is the—the people aspect of what makes home, because I've also had to deal with a lot of friends moving out of Bellingham, and I mean that's—I chose to permanently stay in a college town, which is known for being very...

CJ: Transient?

HB: [69:59] Transient. Yes. So, it makes sense. People move here for college and then they move to wherever their job is. That's—that's how that works. But it didn't really necessarily make it any easier, when all the friends that I've made throughout the years, some as early as freshman year of college, and some as late as within the past year or two. They all definitely have a piece in the puzzle of making Bellingham home. It's always weird when they move, which I know is something that happens everywhere, all the time, when you have a good friend who moves away. It feels like a piece of home and comfort, something that's super familiar, is now gone. But I think, despite like all of the ups and downs of COVID and trying to find what feels comfy, what is home, during a very unpredictable time—unprecedented if you will [laughs]—the consistency of the friendships that I have were really helpful. Even for those who don't live in Bellingham anymore, it's always—it was very helpful to be able to video chat with them and check in, and even video chatting with people who live down the street but couldn't see them. It just was really beneficial and helped me remember that there are lots of people, you have your community still. Just because you can't physically see them at the moment, it's still your home. It's still your—your little village that's keeping you together. Yeah, and I think that's an important part of a place being a home, is having your people.

CJ: [72:13] Definitely. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. And thank you so much for your time and being here for this interview. I learned a lot, and that was really illuminating.

HB: Good, I'm glad I could help.

[end interview]