

Interviewee: Alison “Ali” Schatzman
Interviewer: Emily Martinsen
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Abstract:

Alison “Ali” Schatzman is a resident of Racine County, Wisconsin. She is currently employed as a cashier at Kwik Trip in Racine, Wisconsin. In this interview, Ali discusses how COVID-19 has impacted her life in various ways, touching on a job layoff from iHeart Radio, and her experiences working at a gas station during the pandemic. Additionally, Ali touches on the current political atmosphere as well as the global response to the pandemic. Ali also discusses social media and memes, and how informative and entertaining they’ve been during this time of uncertainty. Lastly, Ali reflects on her college years, noting the difficulties that current college students struggle with today.

EM: Alright, perfect. So, the date is November twelfth. It is now one fifty-nine p.m. Uhm, I am here today with, ah, Ali Schatzman who, I will let her introduce herself, uh in just a second. Uhm, and before we begin, nope, that’s not what I wanted to do. [Pauses] Just go with it.

AS: [Laughs] It’s fine.

EM: So, I’m just going to read you a statement about the project, and the video recording uhm, and then just after I’m going ask you if you agree to those terms, and you say yes or no. So [chuckles], I would hope you would say yes [laughs], since you’re already. Alrighty. So, let me find this. [Tsk] So, thank you for your interest in participating in this important oral history project. This project is organized by the public history program in collaboration with McIntyre Libraries, Special Collections and Archives department at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. Your participation will help us to build a resource for future generations to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the Chippewa Valley and in the Midwest as a whole. So, your participation – your participation in this project is completely voluntary. And through your participation, you agree to give to Special Collections and Archives, McIntyre Library, and UW Eau Claire as a donation the recorded interview collected in association with this project. With this gift, you agree to transfer to the recipient all legal title, and all literary liter – yeah, literary property rights to the interview, including copyright. This interview may be made available for research, usage, and public programming determined by the recipient. This may include use of interview materials and all forms of for profit and not for profit projects. So, you do agree to those terms?

AS: I sure do.

EM: Excellent. Alright, let me get back to this. Perfect! Alrighty, so if you just wanna go ahead and introduce yourself, even though I already said [both speaking-unclear] that’s fine, just to

give you know, people in – an idea, and after that if you just want to give uhm a little bit of background information about yourself. So, like your race, ethnicity, age, and gender if you are comfortable. So, after you.

AS: Okay [chuckles]. Ah, so. Ali Schatzman. I'm twenty-three. I – living in Racine, Wisconsin, right now. I'm a twenty nineteen college graduate. And I was working at iHeart Radio in Milwaukee, you know, with the state of the world, everything kind of changed. So, I've been working with Kwik Trip now for two and a half years. And that's where I'm currently employed also, so, still cruisin' there. What was the demographic information that you [Emily laughs] needed to know?

EM: No, no, you're okay, that was perfect. So, I mean, you said your age. If you wanna say your race, ethnicity, and gender, you're more than welcome to.

AS: I am a white female.

EM: Excellent. Cool. So, you said you live in Racine County currently in I believe, are you officially in Caledonia?

AS: So [laughs], it's kind of complicated where I actually live [laughs]. My mailing address is in Franksville -

EM: Okay.

AS: But my actual house I believe is in Mount Pleasant. But three houses up the road is Caledonia. Yeah. So, you're not wrong [laughs].

EM: So, Racine County.

AS: Racine County's the easiest way to say it.

EM: Alrighty, well, perfect. So, I did look up the COVID stats for Racine County. And currently I believe as of today, there are 11,411 cases and 131 deaths. So, how do you feel about that?

AS: Unfortunately, I'm not surprised by it.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: I know that Racine County has been pretty high since the beginning. It is a more populated area, since we have like the city of Racine. But also, just working with the public. I don't see like people wearing masks ever. I see large gatherings all the time. It's just, a lot of people don't think that it's real. So, they just live their lives how they want. So, it just, unfortunately, checks out.

EM: Yeah, it unfortunately does. And I feel like it's kind of like that everywhere, too, like no matter where you go in Wisconsin.

AS: Yeah, Wisconsin, I know, has become kind of a hot spot in the nation, which is not great that I – It like compares [to] like New York City at the beginning of it. Which New York City is New York City. That's the biggest city in the country. We are [pauses] in the rural Midwest. [Laughing as she says] We should not be compared to New York City.

EM: Yeah, it's pretty rough when that happens.

AS: Not great.

EM: No, not great at all [laughs]. So, you mentioned that you were employed with iHeart Radio. Um, so do you want to talk a little bit about that, and kind of what happened when you first heard about COVID? And what you were thinking, if you were, you know, kind of concerned about where your job was gonna go. So, if you want to start like with that at the beginning and kind of go chronologically, you can do that.

AS: Okay. Yeah, so I was working. I actually was working an event at iHeart, I was in promotions. So, you know, all the events we had, I was watching them get cancelled, like, I had them all scheduled in my phone. It was like, this one's cancelled. This one's cancelled. This one's postponed. This one's cancelled. So, I was watching all that happen. But I had a concert to go to on March 12. So, everything kind of shut down March 13, but March 12, we were still up and running. We still had things to do. So that one, like peoples kept calling and asked, like is this still happening? So that was just kind of weird, [emphasizes word] knowing like, everything else is falling apart. But this is still here. We still have this night of country music. So, it's kind of fun that we had that like on last hurrah, we knew it was probably gonna be the last for a little bit. But I had to go into work the next week or two. And just [pauses] just call people and let them know that their concerts are cancelled, their concerts are rescheduled. We rescheduled events for, that were supposed to happen like in April, we rescheduled for November thinking, things are gonna be good by then. I actually just a couple days ago had a notification on my phone that was like, don't forget, you have an event on Saturday. It's like, that's not happening anymore [laughs]. I forgot to cancel that one. But so that was kind of, I felt like I could watch it all, because I was still going to work when like, my sister, who was a teacher, you know, March 13 hit, she's done with school. She is at home. I was still going to work relatively normal, up and through the rest of March and through the first week of April. So that was kind of weird [chuckles]. But [pauses], as it [pauses] kept getting – going on, I noticed first of all, there was no traffic [laughs]. That was when I knew. I was going home from work, 5:30 leaving Milwaukee, and there's no traffic [laughs]. Like [pauses], there's a lot of people that aren't going out. There's a lot of people not at work right now. So as much as it was nice, it was also really weird. It felt very dystopian [Pauses, thinking and reflecting]. So then, it was watching all that. And then once we had everything cancelled, so it's like going and trying to make the best of it. But I got to a point where we knew that there was [emphasizes next word] nothing else that we could do. So, they laid off everyone in the promotions department, because they were like, we don't have any work for you right now. Well, it was a furlough. So, first, it was a furlough that was supposed to last 90 days. And I was like, okay, whatever. Saw it coming. And then [pauses, remembers], it was about 90 days had passed. And we got another email saying it was going to be extended [emphasizes] another 90 days since that only took us into the beginning of summer. And

[pauses], as you know, the beginning of summer wasn't great. So that one was going until about [pauses] October, I think. And then, in October, I got a call from my – from the promotions manager. And it was that our jobs were being terminated [emphasizes] fully at the beginning of October, because there were no events in the foreseeable future, and they felt like they were stringing people along at that point. So as unfortunate as it was, and as much as it was sad to hear, I also wasn't surprised. We know that nothing has really been happening. I mean, I wouldn't want events to be happening yet, anyway. So [pauses], yeah, so that was – it was rough, but saw it coming and it's also nice that people don't keep asking me [next part, as question] when you're going back to work, because it was just kind of a rude reminder. I'm like [pauses], I don't know. Now I can be like, I'm done there. For now, hopefully.

EM: Yeah. Yeah, I remember you telling me when all of that happened too and it's just, you know, the person who called you. I mean, they're right. I mean, obviously you don't want to be strung along, you know, thinking that there's still the possibility that [both talking – indecipherable] that you can go back to work, but, I mean, what are you going to do? I mean, your job revolves around concerts and events?

AS: Right. It's hard to work in promotions when there's nothing to promote because you can't have groups of people.

EM: Mm hmm, exactly. So, it's just, well, that stinks you know? That was your first like, big girl job -

AS: Mm hmm.

EM: You know, and then, of course, the pandemic hits and –

AS: Yep, so I was only there for [chuckles] I think it was about six months before –

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: I was laid off [sighs]. Uhh, yeah, super rough.

EM: Yeah, I'd say. And do you think, speaking of concerts, like, where do you see [pauses] like that going in the future? 'Cause I know there's a lot of talk right now about getting things rescheduled. Like [pauses], my boyfriend and I we bought tickets to a concert, to see Motley Crue at Miller Park. But that's next year. So, we think, okay, maybe there's some hope and possibility there. But you never know. So, I guess my question [AS indecipherable] – yeah. So, I guess my question for you is, like, where do you see the future of like, concerts and events going?

AS: That's a good question. It's interesting, I know, given the state of everything, it's going to be a while. I do remember seeing an article when this, like, back in the spring, saying, like, don't expect live concerts until Fall 2021. And I was like, there's no way it's gonna be that late. And [laughs] now I feel like we'll be lucky if we get that. [Pauses, coughs] Sorry, I have a cold, not COVID.

EM: [Laughs]

AS: Um [laughs, then pauses], but I did see there was a concert, I think somewhere in Europe, where they had like, glass boxes that were like six feet apart, so like you and your party. That was, you know, no more than like six people or something, because it was only so big. You all have like your own little area to sit in. So [pauses], and I saw mixed reactions [indecipherable] I saw on Twitter. So, it's just people's social media, however they wanna respond to it. Mixed reactions from people. Some people saying like, it's really nice then you can just don't have to worry about other people. But some people who [emphasizes next word] like the kind of chaotic concert experience are like no, I don't like this. I want to be able to enjoy this with other people. That's why I like going to concerts. [Pauses] So, it's – it'll be interesting for sure. Because it's, it's one thing with concerts where it's like, everyone has a seat. But any kind of general admission concert where you were just packed in there so tight. [Pauses] It's gonna be awhile I feel like before we can see anything like that.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: Yeah, cause I have concert tickets for, I think it got rescheduled for next September. And even that I'm not super confident about.

EM: Was that for Harry [Styles]? [Both indecipherable]

AS: Yeah. Which was funny. At the beginning of the pandemic, everyone else was cancelling, and he was feeling really hopeful. He released more concert dates. I was like, [drawn out] maybe. And then, you know, summer came and went, and he didn't go on tour. So, 2021 [pauses] in September.

[Both indecipherable]

AS: Here's hoping we can have it by the fall. I know they predicted it was going to spike again in the fall anyway, because cold and flu season naturally.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: So [pauses], maybe, people will [pauses] get it more under control. They see that it's going on for this long. [Pauses] It's impacting a lot of things.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: I hope, I would like to go back to my career.

EM: Right, exactly. And you would think for all of these things that people say that they miss, and they miss, like, how life was like before –

AS: Right.

EM: That people would be doing everything in their power [pauses] to making that happen.

AS: Yeah, it definitely feels that, people at first were super upset, like I can't do this, I can't do that. And now, we have just instead of finding a way to go back to normal, we've just made this the new normal.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: Like, oh, we just wear masks and we don't go out in public as much, and we don't have large gatherings, which some people are using it as an excuse to not see their family during the holidays, makes me laugh a little bit.

EM: [Laughs]

AS: I mean, you shouldn't, so I get it.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: But definitely, some people are just like, this is just the way it is now. Can we just – no one really seems to [pauses] do much.

EM: Yeah. I agree. And [sighs, pauses], like I get adapting to what's happening –

AS: Yeah. But it feels like now, we've just lost the motivation to get back there because it's been so long now –

EM: Right!

AS: It's been, like, eight months now, I think. And we were like, oh it's only gonna last for two weeks. So, it'll just be like a four-week quarantine. It's gonna be fine. And now here we are, eight months later.

EM: Right, with talk of it continuing –

AS: Continuing to get worse.

EM: Yeah. Yeah, I just – it's weird right now, just like the atmosphere, even though, I mean, I live alone. And I hardly see people but it's just, you know, you see stuff on social media and like not to just like, friends from home and other people. And you know, even seeing it on the news. That show –

AS: Yeah, it was when the governor had his like, statewide address. And you know, everyone in the family – Normally, we don't talk about politics, we don't address that kind of stuff because it gets dicey. And when we're all staying at home, it gets dicey. [Pauses] We're all, we're like, we want to hear what this is going to be. And so just having everyone like, not talking and sitting

and listening to this, and something about it just felt so very much like a zombie apocalypse movie –

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: And I, like I had this like, sit like, stop listening for a minute, and remember where I was. I was like, this is like, this is some kind of dystopian society. Like definitely something out of a movie.

[Both pause]

EM: Oh,

AS: it was a weird – [EM indecipherable] Yeah, that was like this is - I mean, did you see there's a trailer for a horror movie based on COVID. That's already coming out. [Coughs]

EM: [Speaking indecipherable]

AS: Starring KJ Appa.

EM: Is it really?

AS: KJ Appa and Sophia Carson.

EM: Wow. Interesting. So, it'll be just like real life now, unless they -

AS: Pretty much. I watched the trailer because they filmed it, um, you know, pretty early. It was one of the, I saw it was the first movies that [pauses] they filmed normally again.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: It was, you know, it took like a different turn than where it actually did.

EM: Makes sense.

AS: But there was something that they were like, this is a crazy prediction. And it's actually where we are.

EM: [Pauses before speaking] There's that.

AS: Kind of a hot mess.

EM: Oh, wow. Don't like that. [Laughs]

AS: Yeah, I watched the trailer that was like, this is just a horror movie of the world we live in. I don't want to see this.

EM: See? And, you know, you know, if and when, well, I want to say when you know, there's a cure and everything. I know, where, you know, some sort of vaccination, we're gonna look back on this, you know, like we are with, like, interviews and just recordings, you know, people are gonna look back and watch movies and you know, hear songs about, you know, being in quarantine. And they're gonna be like oh my gosh -

AS: Yeah, definitely weird. Knowing that you're living through a historical event.

EM: Yeah, for sure. The amount of times that I, you know, 'cause a lot of people know what I'm going to school for and they're like, oh, how do you feel about living through history? I'm like, well [pauses], the idea of that is fine and dandy, 'cause I mean, being a historian, it's like, yeah, history, but at the same time, I would rather um, have in-person classes and see my friends. And-

AS: I'd rather the history we're living through was like space travel or something. [Both laugh] Like, something that does not impact me in my life as much. It's like, oh, that's really cool.

EM: Exactly. Like I would like – [AS Indecipherable]

AS: I can tell you where I was the first time that we landed on Saturn.

EM: Right, not like, [sarcastically] oh, the COVID cases are hitting an all-time high.

AS: Right? Not like, Oh, I can tell you exactly where I was when I found out that the world was shutting down.

EM: Right, like I remember for me, that was my birthday. Do you remember that?

AS: I absolutely do, because I came to visit, and I brought Corona. [Laughs]

EM: Not the virus, everyone.

AS: Brought the beer. Because I was like, this is funny. This will be funny soon. [Pauses]

EM: It is [laughs].

AS: Still, it is, but it's also kind of sad that it's still around, the virus and the beer is still in the basement.

EM: [Laughs]

AS: I think I only drank like one that night. And I just look at them and I'm like, hmm. So maybe if I just keep drinking Corona. That's what's keeping me –

EM: It'll go away [laughs].

AS: Because I still have it.

EM: That's funny. Oh, and that brings me to a good question though. You know, speaking of drinking and you know, beer and things like that too, have you gone out at all like during this whole span of like when COVID hit into now, like how do you feel about going out to restaurants and bars and what do you -

AS: Yeah, I've gone a couple times to restaurants, not very often and I, I never go on the weekends at all. I, because I know that's when it's busy, especially like I've gone to some like bars and restaurant combo things. And I do not want to go near that on a weekend. Knowing how people are, for the most part I have, because I don't like to do it very often, but I have felt okay while I'm in there because it's pretty deserted. [Pauses] One of the ones I go to it's a truck stop and there's never, I've never even before, probably never seen more than three people in there. So that, [laughs] it's a classic Denny's, we love it. But I'm never too nervous. I just, normally if I want food from like a restaurant, I just try to do the like, bring it home takeout. But I've gotten a couple times and it [coughs] sorry, usually is okay. I did go, there because one of my friends, they want to go into a bar and we walked in and there were, it was packed in there. It was late summer, I think. Logically, I was like, I'm not going in here. And they're like, yeah, it's probably not the best idea. So, we just went to someone's house instead. Because, you know, sometimes you want like the bar atmosphere, but it was just, and it was a Tuesday night.

EM: And it was busy?

AS: It was a Tuesday night, I think it was horseshoe night, which is what brings some people, they had outdoor seating, but that was all packed. The bar was like shoulder to shoulder still. And not with kids. It was like adults. Like a lot of middle-aged people were in there playing horseshoes, I guess. From what I could see, I didn't go too much in there, cause I don't feel comfortable doing that even going to store sometimes. But there's a lot of people in the parking lot like, do I really need to go in here? Like, is this really necessary?

EM: Well, and I get, you know, sometimes you just like want to go in, because you almost miss the atmosphere. You know, being able to have that freedom of going out to stores and going shopping. You know, it's, it's just so strange now to and then I will just be going into crowded stores. And I don't know if this has happened to you, well I you mentioned this, like when you're working at Kwik Trip, just the amount of people that still don't wear masks.

AS: Oh, it's so many. Because in Racine, I think they might be changing it. But at first, you know, they said, state mask mandate required, but Racine County police officers are not going to be enforcing it. [Pauses] So then, what was really the point? Instead, we just had people coming in. If they weren't wearing a mask, they would tell the employees that they were delusional for believing in all of this. Or you'd have the people coming in wearing masks getting mad at the employees because you weren't telling them they had to put what on. So, everyone's just getting mad.

EM: Right. But that's, that's not in your control. I mean, you know, it's like something I say all the time, like, oh, I just work here.

AS: Yeah, pretty much. I have a pin on my name tag. It's a gold star that says, "I tried". And that's just really how this year feels. [Both laugh]

EM: We're all trying.

AS: I tried. [EM laughs]

EM: It's just, it's, it baffles me that there's I mean, again, everyone is entitled to their own opinions and views. But when it comes down to it, and this is something I've talked to like my fellow other graduate students about too, it's why has caring about people become such a political issue.

AS: That's the big question.

EM: Right?

AS: It's, everyone's so divided things. And it's so small, especially things like COVID, it's a worldwide thing, is not something that was created, to get either Trump or Biden elected. Like it is not something for politics. It's something that affects the world. And there are countries who have like worn masks and are going back to normal. I was talking to, I don't remember who it was, it was someone in my family, and they were saying, how, you know, it's only what the media wants you to believe. If you go online, you can find research that says that masks are hurting and all this other stuff, and then like, they're not telling you that because that information is wrong. They are purposely not including parts of their, what they're finding, because then they, what they're saying makes it sound like [pauses] they're right. But it's really not. Or they're, you know, they're asking three people and saying it's a huge population or something. [EM indecipherable]. No, and that goes back to, the media just feeds you lies all the time.

EM: Yeah. And speaking of the media too like, do you think they've, how do you think they've handled this whole situation? Do you think it's almost just the aspect of, [pauses, sighs] like they're scaring people, now more than anything, or just trying to inform, because obviously, this is such a big thing that's happening. There has to be that good balance of being informative, and then just kind of going over the top, you know?

AS: Right. I feel like [pauses], now we've gotten to the point where it's more informative, like I think if I watch the news at night. And it's, they have a section like, here's breaking news. And here's a COVID update. And here's more news. But before it was like, here is 80% of our show covering COVID. And it was like, so much being talked about. And it was hard, because, you know, like, a lot of things. It's not consistent among different networks, but it was so far off, because, you know, they didn't like who was coming out with the research. So, okay, so this conservative man comes out saying this, well, the liberal stations don't want to talk about that. And then everyone ends up at a loss, which also is how that becomes political because they just don't look past a person's beliefs. Instead of like, this is science. This is fact.

EM: Right. This is not pretend.

AS: Yeah, I think we've gotten past the, like, scared part of it. Maybe we should be scared again, because that's what everyone kind of was in the beginning. And people were staying at home more.

EM: That's a good point.

AS: So, I mean, now it just kind of become numb to hearing how many people are getting sick and in hospitals all the time, or the, the State Fairgrounds had that temporary hospital that they set up in like, April. And they're like, we hope we don't need to use it, and they didn't until super recently. So that should have been like a big wake up call, like, hey, things aren't great.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: You should go back.

EM: Right, we should go back to being more cautious [AS coughs], because I do it for just being all, you know, for lack of, you know, better term, and I'm just gonna sound like an old grandma, willy nilly. You know. [Both laugh]

AS: I appreciate the use of the word willy nilly.

[EM laughs]

EM: Thank you thank you.

AS: But it's a good word to use.

EM: Right. Oh, when we got the email today that classes are going to go all remote after Thanksgiving. One of the reasons they said why Eau Claire was planning on doing that is that the two big hospitals in the area, so it's Mayo Clinic, and then something else, they're at 100% capacity.

AS: Oh, great. Awesome.

EM: Right. So, we do need to be more cautious. And you know, take proactive decisions, because actually too, you know, when people travel and still go out and do stuff. It's gonna spread.

AS: Yeah, not everyone, like I know, on the East Coast, they had their like, if you leave the state, you have to be quarantined for two weeks. So then, [pauses] not everyone was doing that. But I know for sure with friends, my friend came to visit in the summer, and then going back to Connecticut, stayed in the basement for two weeks and did not see anyone in her family. [Pauses] And took it seriously. So, people like that, great. Love to see it. Love the honesty of it. Because there, that's what people keep saying like they're not going to come and check that you've been quarantining yourself for two weeks.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: They don't keep track of everyone who left the state and came back [indecipherable]. I think Chicago, it- there was a time. We might be on the list again. Wisconsin was, if you went to Wisconsin came back from Chicago, you have to quarantine for two weeks. You don't keep track of everyone who does that. The amount of people that I see at Kwik Trip that come from Chicago every day. Unreal. That was a weird time also, when I first was starting, because Illinois had their mask mandate way before we did and way stricter lockdowns than we did. And being only like 20 minutes away from the border, all the time people would just like come up. No masks on just doing whatever they wanted because we didn't have the same restrictions so they could just come do what they wanted. And it was fine. [Pauses] When it wasn't fine.

EM: Right, exactly. Like I remember a lot of people from Illinois, were coming up to Lake Geneva. And they do that normally too, because it's like a spot for them, which I think is kind of funny. But during that too, I mean, for the same reasons they were coming up because we weren't so strict. And I remember my mom said like, we don't want them here.

AS: Yep. I remember one of my coworkers, she was looking outside one day at work at all the license plates and how almost all of them are from Illinois. And she was like what are they all doing here? Like, why are you here? Because we were at the point where at work, if we went to Illinois and came back, we had to quarantine. Like, we had to contact our boss and we had to quarantine ourselves because Illinois was so bad compared to us. And she was, so she was mad because it's like, if all these people can come up from Illinois and come and talk to us, why is that okay? But I can't go and visit my sick grandma? Who lives by herself, in Gurnee, Illinois.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: So that was an interesting time. But yeah, we, there are so many people from Illinois, and never wanted them. But then you know, table's turned, and Illinois start getting a little more control. And then Wisconsin is on their don't come here list. [Pause] At least with them. Like it makes sense, because they have Chicago. They have the third biggest city in the US.

EM: Yeah

AS: Number wise state across the states, it's gonna be skewed because they have Chicago.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: We don't have a city that big.

[EM makes noise in agreement]

AS: We're just, not doing great.

EM: No. Which sucks to say.

AS: Yeah.

EM: You know, cause I think you know, going back to seeing other countries like get it mostly under control. What is that like New Zealand? That's done -

AS: Yeah -

EM: Fantastic things.

AS: And they're like, back to normal. They're just living their lives now.

EM: Wow.

AS: Crazy.

EM: I just can't get over it.

AS: Meanwhile, we had [indecipherable] the other day, it was like all counties in Wisconsin have now had at least one death.

EM: One death?

AS: At least one death from COVID. every county in Wisconsin.

EM: Oh, no.

AS: Killing it.

EM: Well and you think too, it's, for Wisconsin being so rural, especially like northern Wisconsin, you know up north for us? You would think -

AS: For a long time, it was only in like, the southern part of the state. All those super tiny communities way up north, they were fine. So that's what they were like, don't go to your cabins.

EM: Oh.

[Trails off]

AS: There was a lot of people that I work with like, have cabins up north. And they kept saying like, well, I'm gonna go up there it's safe, like but you don't know if you've had contact with someone, and you're gonna be the one to bring it up there.

EM: Exactly.

AS: And then it just got out of control when college went back. And there were so many more people in those places.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: Yeah, well, my friends worked in a COVID unit in lacrosse, one of the first ones they had set up there. And at first it was fine. She only interacted with like one person tested positive. Everyone else just thought they had it. And then the later it got, there were suddenly so many more people.

EM: It's, yeah, it's weird how you can see the progression of the two.

[Both indecipherable]

AS: Yeah, it was just interesting to hear, especially like, because lacrosse was so different than down here. No, actually. Oh, yeah. We only have like one positive case. And I'm like, oh, cool.

EM: Right, like, here we are with, you know, in the ten thousands.

AS: Yeah. Of course. Now they've gone back to school. It's been interesting. They've been having all the same problems with Eau Claire. I know, everyone on their campus, if you were living on campus, you had to get tested. Because my cousin goes to school out there. So, she's, you know, in her poor little dorm room. And it's -

EM: Wait, your cousin goes to Eau Claire?

AS: No, she goes to Lacrosse.

EM: Oh, okay. Oh, yeah yeah yeah, that's right.

AS: Yeah, she goes to Lacrosse and had to, you know, her and her roommate had to get tested, and then they like sit in quarantine in this little room for two weeks. Yeah, just my friend's brother goes to school there too. And he, when he found out that that's what we have to do. He packed up and moved home. Yeah, because they all gave the options to do classes in person or online. And he said, I'm doing the rest of semester online. See y'all later.

EM: I don't blame him. I don't.

AS: I get it. Like I, I think I would struggle doing online classes. I mean, I had one online class that was supposed to be online and I struggled with it. So, classes aren't normally online that then have to be

EM: Mm hmm. Yeah. Well, you think you know, students are going for stuff that's so hands on. What do they do?

AS: Oh, yeah, for sure. If this would have happened when I was getting my degree, I don't know what I would have done. Luckily, that program doesn't exist anymore.

EM: I forgot about that.

AS: Yeah, but like at the time, if I was thinking about that last year when it shut down. And I was talking to my friends who were still going to school there. I was like, dang, if this would have been last year, I don't know. Like, emotionally what I would have done either and like for the class is hands on news production. [Stammers] We can't do anything. I don't have any equipment or any editing software just like make a video on my own.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: Yeah, so I'm really glad that my initial plan of having to go school for five years didn't pan out and I did the four. [Laughs] Well, because at first my advisor was like you, since you don't have a major by your sophomore year, you might have to go an extra year. And I said, Okay, class of twenty twenty. That sounds kind of cool. And then I picked a major and my new advisor was like, No, you can do it. You can do in three if you want. It was like No, let's let's do a normal four. Let's find a nice middle ground. So, we did it in four, and good thing. 2020 is just too powerful of like a number [pauses] that everything had to fall apart. My favorite is the joke I've seen. You know, I saw I'll see like [indecipherable] of my like, people keep asking me what I'm doing in six months. I don't have 2020 vision. [Pauses] No one had 2020 vision. You can still use that joke. [EM laughs] You could ask me what's going to happen next month? And I would still say I don't know. I don't have 2020 vision.

EM: [Laughs] That's true. [Laughs]

AS: No one knows what's gonna happen. Remember the Murder Hornets? Where are they? I love when people refer to 2020 as like, this season of America. And like, the writers were just getting desperate. They added Murder Hornets. And then they just drop the plot.

EM: Or, like the bingo, like 2020 Bingo. With fires, you know, the weird weather, the murder Hornets. I don't even know what else has happened. Because at this point -

AS: [Laughs] That's last week, there was a bunch of stuff that happened. On, it was like on Thursday or Friday, there was just like, some ship and supernatural became canned after 15 years, and Putin was considering resigning, and some character was finally given a backstory and some It was like a bunch of stuff happening. I was like, so who had this on their bingo card?

[EM giggles]

AS: Like, hello?

EM: So funny.

AS: I learned so much news from memes that day.

EM: Yes!

AS: I like, like I saw it. I was like, Wait, what?

EM: Like I feel like memes have become like so advanced.

AS: Yeah. That's how I get information sometimes. And then to understand the meme, you go and look things up. So, then you can appreciate when BuzzFeed has an article, here are the 18 best tweets about Nevada counting votes.

[Both laugh]

EM: Oh, Nevada,

AS: Oh Nevada, did they ever finish counting?

EM: Probably not.

[Both laugh]

AS: It was, I think it was in that article. It was like Nevada got so caught up in the memes about counting votes, they forgot to count the votes.

EM: I think my favorite one was maybe Nevada's just done with everything. And they found out that Kanye won the vote.

AS: Yes!

EM: And that they're just trying to figure out how to tell us that like wow.

AS: What a time.

EM: It really is. And you know, you know, going to the more political side of Corona, even though we've talked about that, too. And I know this, what I'm going to ask is kind of a loaded question. So, you don't have to answer it if you don't want to. But, it's like not super bad. I just say that just in case. If we had different leadership, not necessarily with Trump, you know, just in general, if our nation had different leadership in the beginning, do you think we would be in a different position than we are now?

AS: I think it wouldn't be like world's better, but I do think I would be a bit better. Because there was some, some kind of like relief team or something that Trump disbanded early on, because he was like, we don't need this. And they knew of this virus being a problem in other countries, and then just didn't really do anything about it.

EM: Mm hmm.

AS: So, while I don't think that it would be like, Oh, we would've beat it in two weeks, yay. Because the American people still would not have stayed home and done nothing.

EM: Right.

AS: [Coughs] But maybe it would have been less or more controlled or slower. So maybe It'd be like where we were in July is where we'd be now, instead of us with record highs every day.

EM: Mm hmm. Yeah, it just, it seems like we almost just, you know, like, there's some sort of progress that's made. And then I just feel like we fall back from that.

AS: Every time it starts, if we know we're going up or going up, and then there's that little bit where it's almost even like, okay, we're doing good, we can go back to normal. And it's just you can't do that. That's how it was with my sister and her teaching, because right now her school is 100% online, they didn't even try hybrid. They're like, we're going online for at least the first quarter, and then we'll reevaluate. And they sent out a survey. It was a while ago now, but the sent out. A survey seeing if people were comfortable going back to school, in like a hybrid format. And that was when we discussed, like, they think that they can do that. Because their numbers are low, but the numbers are low, because it's working. So, if you go back to school, it's just going to go up, you're gonna have to go back online and go backwards. So, they just get too excited. They're like, Oh, good. It's starting to work. We don't need to do this anymore. But it's working, because you're doing it, you need to keep doing it

EM: Right.

AS: And then fully under control. But that's where we struggle. And you have people who, when you think about the economy. [Pauses] I struggle because I don't know much about the economy. We made it up. Like, I don't really get it. I get that like, my cousin owns a business and sure it would be bad if his business went under. [Pauses] But there are people that are dying. So -

EM: Right, it's like, it's like that meme with the Kardashians that says Kim, there are people that, there's people that are dying.

AS: That's how I feel when people are like, but the economy. I'm like -

EM: Right?

AS: There are people dying.

EM: Right, like, I don't know if I told you, I went to Kohl's because I needed a couple of things, of course wore a mask and was a good noodle.

AS: Right.

EM: And [laughs] the line for you know, checking out your stuff was very long because of social distancing, which [AS indecipherable] so you know, it was getting to the point where it's like, you almost go out on Black Friday. And it's like, the lines are that long. That's like how it was I'm like, okay, like, obviously, this isn't ideal. [Pauses] But ff that's the way it's going to be? Whatever, I'll just I'll stand there. And you know, you just suck it up for you know, [pauses] you just do. And I remember there were a group of like middle aged old ladies behind me, talking super loud. So of course, you know, you hear everything. And it's not like I was eavesdropping, but they were complaining about how long the wait was, and that there was only one cashier. [Pauses] And I'm thinking like, yeah, you know, whatever, you know, things aren't convenient for you anymore. But again, Kim, there's people that are dying.

AS: There's so many other things that are more important.

EM: Yeah! Exactly. Exactly. And they were saying, you know, just kind of like grumbling about that. And I thought, would you really want to be a cashier during a pandemic?

AS: Uh uh, I can tell you for a fact you don't want to.

EM: Right! Like, do you want to talk a little bit more about Kwik Trip, and you know, and just the things that you've seen how it's been anyway.

AS: I mean, it's been an interesting time there for sure. Just because we have like, self-service items, or like different things that you can do. So, at the beginning, we all, you know they're still learning how all of this is working. So, it was like, okay, every self-service thing is shut down. So, for a while I became a barista at Kwik Trip. And I was making people's coffee. I don't drink coffee. So, they are saying things to me like if they don't know what they want, and they're asking me questions [Stammers] – you want house blend? You want some Half and half creamer? And people have very, that's what I've learned, people have a very specific coffee that they drink there. Like I don't know how Starbucks people do it. [Pauses] So that was stressful, because we didn't have someone over there full time. So, then you have people coming in grumbling because they had to go ask someone to make them their coffee. We had to shut down our soda fountain because of the location, it was right next to a door. And so, so then they were going to be too close together. And we couldn't control people just going up and getting the soda. We couldn't block it off without blocking off the door. You just turned it off, you know, not that we have a whole aisle of coolers of drinks? No, they just would yell about the soda fountain. [Pauses] Yeah, so that was fun. Those are fun, fun couple weeks, that was the best thing in the world when the coffee bar opened back up. As much as I get tired of making coffee and cleaning up after people at the coffee bar, it's better than having to sit. We had a bell at one point that people could ring if they want coffee, and just, we'd have to scurry on over and make them their coffee. You know, had to put on a fresh pair of gloves between every cup. So, there were a couple times it got to the point during the week, in the mornings, we did have someone there from about five to nine. And she either had to change her gloves or sanitize her gloves between every person. Because otherwise, gloves aren't really effective. It keeps her safe doesn't keep anyone else safe. [Coughs] So that was rough. But then, when we started changing over into masks at first, it was just if you wanted it to wear when you could they supply just like some thin fabric masks. And then once it became mandate for the company. They gave us nicer ones. With

I remember when my boss is saying this will last two weeks tops. [Pauses] And here we are still wearing them. We had one guest come in, who refused to be served by someone who was wearing a mask.

EM: Wait.

AS: He didn't. Yeah, so he came up to the counter and said he wants to talk to someone else because the girl at the register was wearing a mask. And he said I don't want someone who believes in all this. I want someone who's not wearing a mask. And she was like, Sir, this is part of my uniform. I can't take it off. [Coughs] But he was so mad that everyone in the store was wearing a mask. But then he left. So, you never really know what kind of people come in. It's, It's a weird time. It was also weird. also just seeing, it was kind of comforting at first, but it was really dead a lot, like hours are getting cut all the time. But you also like, that's good. That means people aren't coming. So that was the first couple weeks and then we hit a point. And all of a sudden, we were super busy. And it was everyone stocking up on things. Which is one thing if you're stocking up on like, you know, toilet paper and necessities. It's another thing to be stocking up on rip sandwiches.

EM: Are you kidding?

AS: Like people come in, and they're like, Oh, I got stock up. And I'm like, these are good for today. You're gonna go home and eat these.

EM: Right, it's not like you can –

[Both indecipherable]

AS: I think it was, I think it was their way of trying to justify coming in.

EM: Just like, oh, I'm gonna buy 10 rib sandwiches.

AS: I'm just gonna buy a bunch of these. Yeah, before, we only had pretty much like construction workers coming in or like [coughs] we're right by a motel. So, people happen to be at the hotel, and they come in. But now, there's a lot of construction going on outside the parking lot. But we still have pretty normal amounts of people coming through. And I would say maybe half are wearing masks. And a lot of them will come in and they'll say I forgot it. And I'm like, we sell them in a bowl right there.

EM: In a bowl. [Laughs]

AS: We have a bowl, a four pack of masks. Just go ahead and buy one. You can even put it on. But people, they come in and they just, they just don't care.

[Pause]

EM: Like how could you not?

AS: Right?

[Sound in AS's room]

EM: Do you have a visitor?

AS: Yeah.

EM: Oh, Margo.

AS: Yeah, you know.

EM: Well. Yeah, I mean, if there's anything else you would like to talk about, you're more than welcome to but honestly, I think we covered quite a bit.

AS: I was gonna see if you had any other questions, that was like your dying last wishes that you need to discuss?

EM: No, I think that was all really great. I think, you know, covering, you know, kind of your thoughts, you know, starting from the beginning and now and talking about work and really everything in between. I think that's all really good. So, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I, [laughs] I appreciate it. So yeah, this is going to be part of a bigger project. And even though it's, right now it's going to be put in what's called the Chippewa Valley archive. Obviously, I know you're not from the Chippewa Valley, but the idea is that they're going to have it be more of a Midwest archive. So, or just even expanding to like all UW schools and like the surrounding areas, and obviously I live in the Chippewa Valley so it's okay.

AS: It's okay, yeah.

EM: Yes.

AS: It's in there.

EM: Right, exactly. So, it's okay. And yeah, you had a lot of great things to say and I appreciate your input and your insights. So yeah. All right. I will end this call.

AS: Alright.

EM: Thanks, Ali.

AS: No problem.