

Interviewer: Alexis Polencheck

Interviewee: Amy Burgoyne

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Abstract:

Amy Burgoyne lives in the small-town Isanti, Minnesota where she lives with her husband and is a franchisee of a restaurant with two different locations. In this interview Amy goes in-depth on the help that businesses have received and what challenges they've faced. Her own businesses have had to make changes since they were considered essential workers and had to juggle customer intake and sick workers. Amy touches on mental health, truthfulness of news, and her opinions on how state and federal workers have responded. Amy also mentions how she and her husband have found different ways to keep entertained while everything is closed and how to still see friends while staying safe. Many changes have happened because of COVID and Amy explains how her everyday life has changed while also handling two restaurants.

AP: Alright. Hi, my name is Alexis Polencheck. I'm conducting an oral history interview as a part of the effort to archive the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and individuals and communities in the Midwest for both the Chippewa Valley COVID-19 archive and the Journal of the Plague Year COVID-19 archive. The date is November 24, 2020, and the time is 11:21 [a.m.]. For current statistics on COVID-19 according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in the United States, there have been over 12 million cases and around 256,000 deaths. In Minnesota there have been 270,157 cases and 3,297 deaths because of COVID-19. Alright, so we'll just get this started. What's your name, and do you mind sharing demographic information for the study such as your race, ethnicity, age, and gender?

AB: Sure. My name is Amy Burgoyne. I'm 49, female, and white.

AP: Alright. What are the primary things you do on a day to day basis?

AB: Basically, I work as a franchisee of a large, quick service restaurant, and I have two locations so that takes a lot of my time. And then other than that, I'm just at home with my dogs and my husband. So that's what I've been doing.

AP: [laughs] Okay. Where do you live and what is it like to live there?

AB: Okay, I live in Isanti, Minnesota. Small town, probably population like 7000 [population of 5,901], I think around there. So, it's a smaller town. It's about an hour north of the Minneapolis, St. Paul [Minnesota] area. And I would say it is pretty small town-ish compared to living like right in the city. My mom lives right in South Minneapolis, so I'm visiting her often and kind of see the difference. And it's pretty rural out here. And then pretty- city where she is, so just some differences there. But I do enjoy it. People are very friendly in Minnesota so it's nice.

AP: Have any stores changed in your area?

AB: Oh, sure. Ours changed definitely. Masks are mandated, wearing masks. Sometimes a few businesses have been shut down temporarily, because maybe they had some employees or customers that contracted COVID. So, they'll shut down either due to staffing or cleaning. Things like that. So yeah, it's, it's changed a little bit.

AP: Okay. So, when you first learned about COVID in March, what were your thoughts about it? And like, how have your thoughts changed since then?

AB: Yeah, I think it was- I think we were pretty- I think as a general population, we were pretty uninformed. There wasn't a lot of information out there about it yet. It was kind of scary. The unknown is always, is always scary. And so yeah, we had to learn more about it. So, at the beginning, I think we were really more apt to really follow rules and listen to what was being said, and make sure that we were being very careful. And a lot of people were afraid to go out, I think. So yeah, but I don't- I think that didn't last very long, just because it got old. And it was easier sometimes to think that it wouldn't happen to you. And so, you could- You would just kind of later not be so strict about the rules.

AP: Mm hmm. What issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

AB: Well, I myself am at high risk. I had a kidney transplant like four years ago so, I'm on immunosuppressants. So, that scares me just because I know- I do know that there have been a lot of people that have contracted COVID and then if they have complications or have problems,

it can affect your organs, and it has been known to affect your kidneys. And I received my son's kidney four years ago, so I want to make sure that I stay as healthy as I can and keep his kidney healthy since he was so selfless to give that to me. So, and then my family, I think, worries more about me than themselves. I think everyone else is pretty healthy. And I'm healthy otherwise, so, you know, it depends on the time or the day, or what's going on in public, or what you're hearing depends on whether it's- Whether you're more concerned about it or not. So, yeah.

AP: Definitely. Has COVID affected your job, and what ways has it done so?

AB: Yes, absolutely. While running a restaurant- So we were deemed essential employees right away. So, because we were able to serve takeout, and people could just come in in there, they could have not so prolonged exposure to people, you can come in and get your food made quickly, and then leave so that you don't have that exposure. And then we have been mandated to wear masks, the employees wear masks. We are asked to have our customers wear masks, we have to stay six feet apart from them. We try to stay six feet apart from each other, even as co-workers. The- We have a lobby where people can sit and eat and at the beginning of the pandemic that was closed for, I think, a couple months and then we were trying to reopen, and our lobby was open then for a while, for a few months. And now it's been closed again, because the cases have risen pretty dramatically here in Minnesota. So, so now we're back to just doing takeout, curbside, or people can come in an order. But yeah, they can't sit there. So yeah, I'm trying to think of how else. I guess business wise at the beginning it did affect my, my business. As far as how much sales we were doing, how many customers we were getting. At the beginning, I think probably the first week that it was really in the news and everything we were down probably 70 percent of our sales. And then every week after that, it seemed like it just climbed another 10 percent as people kind of got more information and got more comfortable with it and got more used to wearing masks and what the safety precautions were in that we started gaining, like 10 percent a week. And then I noticed that we were- The week that we were given- Most people got the 1,200-dollar stimulus, federal stimulus right, right around the same time within a few days of each other. And I noticed in the week after that is when our sales went back to normal. And even after that they were probably above normal for quite a while. So, now that the state has mandated another order to close some things down, bars and restaurants and things like that, it'll be interesting to see now, with cases rising, how that'll affect customers and sales at our stores. It'll be interesting, because we're one of the only restaurants that can stay open as far as- Well, they can all do takeout. But some restaurants are more kind of probably prone to be ones where people sit down at. So, I think we should keep our sales up. I think we should do well. Which I feel very lucky for that because there's a lot of businesses that have had to close and, and can't even stay open even with takeout because it just can't maintain any sales like that. So that's unfortunate.

AP: Mm hmm. Have you had to change any of your employees, like how many employees you have in the building or not?

AB: I haven't. Again, luckily, because we've managed to keep our sales at a good level, I have had- been able to maintain the employee levels that I had before in the same hours. At first, we cut back our hours quite a bit and that did affect my employees as far as how many hours they could work. But we haven't had to do that now. We only had to do that for maybe a couple of months and then we were back to normal hours and normal sales levels. So, I know that's, again, very fortunate because a lot of restaurants are having to lay people off. So-

AP: Yeah, definitely. What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the economy more broadly?

AB: Yeah, that's the big- you know, that's the big issue with- You know, trying to kind of balance, you know, the health of our community and keeping people out of hospitals. But yet we need to keep the economy going and people need to stay working, or they won't be making any money, making a living. So yeah, it's a huge concern. Both- I mean, for me, because I own a restaurant, that's my income, I wouldn't get unemployment if, if my restaurant shut down. I wouldn't be eligible for that so that's a big concern to me. And then obviously, for the economy as a whole, that's a big concern as well, because one thing affects another for sure, because it was really interesting when our- When this first happened, and a lot of things had been shut down for a couple months and then we were having problems getting product, because a lot of the suppliers that we have weren't open and weren't producing what they were before. So, everything affects everything it seems like so any part of the economy or any, any business that is shutting down is gonna affect everyone.

AP: Definitely.

AB: Mm hmm.

AP: Has it- Has COVID affected the employment of people you know, like other people that aren't working for you?

AB: Yeah, yep. My daughter and son in law are in the healthcare industry. They- My daughter is a dental hygienist, so at first they were shut down. So, she was having to take unemployment. My son in law is a physical therapy assistant and they were shut down. He couldn't be, you know, in that close contact with people right away when we were first learning about how to, how to protect ourselves and each other from that. So yeah, they were laid off for quite a while, for at least a couple months. They luckily kept their jobs. And then they re-opened and they were able to go back to work full time eventually so that was really good. But yeah. My husband's job at first, when, when everyone else was getting laid off, my husband's work was very busy. He was working overtime, and he- They do land clearing and tree removal, and they were very busy because they were still working on the jobs that were pre-COVID. And then it was once that

everything started opening back up again, that's when they actually got slow because during the shutdown, that's when the jobs get started and the land clearing gets started. So, so yeah, his job has been affected as well- His business.

AP: Okay.

AB: So yeah.

AP: Yeah. So how is the pandemic affected you and your family's day to day activities?

AB: You know, it just is you can't go out as much you can't- You have to find things to do at home. I think now that the winter season is here, it's getting tougher. When it was summer, we spent a lot of time on the patio. We even- at the- because this started in March, we right away bought a pool for our patio so that we could have a pool- just an above ground pool just to sit in and in hang out in the summer. And that was really nice because then it could just be my husband and I and just sit in the pool and do that. But now- Yeah, now that we have to be inside and we- There's nowhere to go or nothing to do it's getting to us a little bit more because there's less to do outside. We're gonna have to try to think of, of when some winter activities, I think.

AP: Yeah. [laughs] So how else has it affected your communication with friends and family?

AB: Yeah, my- Yeah, that's been tough too. My- At the beginning of it, my father in law was sick, he started a second round of chemo. And we weren't- It was sad, we weren't really able to go and see him and visit with him because it was- We really didn't want him to be getting sick. And since he was at such high risk. So finally, in the summer, in August, we were able to go and at least visit, we sat outside and had a barbecue and social distanced and, did all that so that we could see him and that was really a good thing because he ended up passing away like two weeks later. So, I really feel for the people who are having issues with their loved ones in the hospital, and they can't see them, they can't visit with them. So, that's got to be tough. I can't imagine trying to, trying to deal with that. So yeah.

AP: Okay. What have been the biggest challenges that you face during the COVID-19 outbreak?

AB: I think for me, my employee issues are always, are always my biggest issue even without COVID. But now with COVID, you obviously cannot- Any employee who has, you know, any cough, any fever, any- I mean, obviously, you don't let them work if they're if they've vomited, or have a fever or anything like that normally, but normally, you know, if they have a cold, they

have the sniffles, they take some medication and- But you cannot let anyone work now, if they have anything, and then they need to go get tested. So that becomes an issue for staffing. Definitely. What else have been the challenges? Boredom, because there's not a lot to do, everything's shut down. So, we've done things like went and got takeout with friends, and then went to a parking lot and sat in lawn chairs and social distanced and ate our takeout because we just want to see each other, visit, or have some communication and socialize a little bit, but you've got to be careful. So, you have to find creative things to do like that. And- So you can stay safe.

AP: Mm hmm. Sounds like fun. [laughs] So how has COVID-19 affected your community, like your club, church, you said job before, but any other parts of your community?

AB: Sure, I'm trying to think of- I mean, it's everything, you can't go to sporting events, you can't- Anything where you're, you know, together the- We have- In our city, we have street dances during the summer, those were either canceled or you had to social distance. So that was tough. It just really affects a lot of things that you wouldn't- you don't even think of until they come up and then- So yeah, it's a lot of, a lot of things for a lot of people.

AP: So how are the people around you responding to the pandemic?

AB: You know, I think everybody's kind of up and down and back and forth about it. It's- You know, it depends on where you're out at the time and how it's affecting you. And I- It's, it's been a pretty divisive, you know, issue. A pretty- It's become a political issue even. I know, a lot of people will tell you their views right out, and you know right away whether they're Democrat or Republican, because of how they are kind of seeing what's going on and in their judgments. So yeah, what was the question, though?

AP: [laughs] How are the people around you responding to COVID?

AB: Yeah, so everybody's got their opinions. A lot of people look at it very differently than I do. Some people are really against all the rules, all the mandates, not liking that they're told that they can't have a group in their home, in their own home. And then other people are responding, you know, by saying that we, you know, we need to be careful like that. It just helps the whole community as a whole, not just yourselves; you need to think of everyone and how that affects our hospitals and, and how that affects our health care workers and how that affects everyone. So yeah, it's a hard balance to try to, you know, yeah.

AP: [laughs] Yeah, I get

AB: I know, I'm up and down to on it. Sometimes it's like, I can't imagine people that are going out without masks or not worrying about it or not wanting to follow rules or whatever. But on the other hand, you want to do something you want to do and then you justify it by, you know, trying to say, "Oh, it's not a big deal or whatever" because it's just easier. So, yeah.

AP: Mm hmm Self-isolation and flattening the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. How have your- you and your family and friends and community responded to the requests to self-isolate and try to flatten the curve?

AB: Yeah, I think that's what we've touched on is that you, you go back and forth on what your priority is, depending on what you're looking for. If you want to- If you're working or whatever, you're- you want to think about flattening the curve, you want to think about protecting other people. But if you're- You know it's going to be Thanksgiving on Thursday, and people are wanting to get together with their families and things like that. So, then it becomes, well, mental health is an issue too and self-isolating can be, you know, a mental health issue. So, you can kind of try to justify the risk of like having your family over, because it's something that would be too lonely or too hard to do, if you didn't. So, yeah.

AP: Mm hmm Have you or anyone, you know, gotten sick with COVID yet?

AB: I have not. Luckily, nobody in my immediate family has. I did have a manager in July who tested positive for COVID. And that was the first person I had even heard of, you know, through people or through peop- yeah through people or anyone I had known. And so that became an issue because she didn't know she was sick and was working. She had thought she had allergies. And so then, that exposed some of the employees. So, we ended up having to close for a few days for safety and for staffing issues, because once you're exposed to it, you need to quarantine for 14 days, so. So, there were quite a few of us that have been exposed to her that couldn't work. So, then we just shut, shut down for a few days or whatever. Again, luckily, I was able to do that without too many issues. And then the staff was very nice about that, about taking time off. They were fine with that. So, yup.

AP: Nice. Well not nice, but you know. I know you touched on this before, but what ways do you think COVID-19 is affecting people's mental and physical health?

AB: Yeah, definitely, I think stress, the worry of it. Everybody knows somebody, maybe a grandma or grandpa or an elderly mom or dad or somebody like me who's got health issues on the side. So, you- If you're maybe not worried so much about yourself, you are probably worried about a relative or someone in your immediate family. And so, then you worry that you're going

to be the one that exposes someone else. So, there's stress. The loneliness if you're in a household with like- My husband and I are empty nesters so it's just him and I at home. Luckily, that works out fine for us. And I can't imagine people with kids, that's got to be really stressful, because you don't get a break you can't get away and then they have all the school issues to deal with. Because there's distance learning and there's in school learning and what do you do with your kids if you got to work and they're home? Or what do you do if you got to send your kids to school then they come home exposed to it? And yeah, there's just a lot of, a lot of stress and mental health issues with this for sure. And I just, in my opinion, we aren't a country that's well equipped for mental health issues as it is normally. So then to put this on top of it, I think that's just next to impossible to try to, to get that resolved with everyone and get everyone the help they're looking for. So yeah, that worries me.

AP: Yeah, definitely. So, what have been your primary sources for news during the pandemic?

AB: [laughs] Yeah, everybody's got their different sources. There's a lot of information out there. Whether it's all factual, I don't know. But I really try to look for factual news. I think because I own a business, my primary sources, probably the Minnesota Department of Health, I look to, to that website, the CDC [Center for Disease Control and Prevention], I look to, and then as far as news, I try to look- Or if I see something that I don't know, or that I doubt if it's factual or not, I usually try to go look under the Associated Press, or Reuters, or even BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation], just because I, I'm guessing that hopefully British news wouldn't play into our American politics as much. So, I tried to do that too, but it's hard. There's a lot of, a lot of information coming at you, a lot of people telling you things a lot of, a lot of people have whatever their beliefs are, they have stats that back up those beliefs, and it's hard to judge first, whether they're factual or not and then also, are they current or not? Because we've learned a lot over the months. So maybe what they are talking about was true months ago, and not anymore. So yeah, I think I really see how our- how the public really finds and seeks out whatever facts kind of support what they already believe. So, whether they think it's from a hoax and all this is just a hoax, to you know, this being the government of China putting this out purposely or something, there's, you know, there's so many different things. And I think people can find facts to back that up if they want. So that's a hot- That's a tough one. You really have to try to sort through it and try to be unbiased in finding out your facts.

AP: Mm hmm. Have you had to change what sources you look at? Since the beginning till now?

AB: Yeah, yep. Because I think before that, I always tried to do that, too. I tried to, try to go with- Try not to watch politically biased news. So I think I've done that even more so now and tried to go with more websites that I know have kind of a scientific view and are science based on their facts, and there's no, maybe agenda for- To try to get viewers or to promote anything. Yeah, so like the state website, just because they don't, you know, they're just trying to get information out there. So yeah, definitely.

AP: Mm hmm. Do you think there are important issues that the media might not be covering?

AB: Probably, [laughs] I don't know what they would be. I guess I tried to- I try to believe that there are smarter people than me out there looking for those things and questioning those things and trying to, to get that into the media. I'm not a big conspiracy theorist, though. [laughs] I know there's a lot of people out there that believe a lot of really out there things, but I don't want to dismiss that either because sometimes some of that- those things- There's some truth to any of those things. So, you can't just blindly trust just what you hear on the news either or just- Yeah. So yeah, that's a tough one. [laughs]

AP: [laughs] Yeah. Okay, we'll just change subject here. How have leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

AB: You know, it's amazing, I think, because from federal with the stimulus right away. I mean, that was fast for a federal government to put out that money to everyone was quick. And then I was able to get a loan, through the Small Business Association, get a loan for my business that really helped me, back in May I got that money. And then even city wise the state gave money to the cities and let them decide how to disperse that money. So had I needed it I definitely could have applied for those kinds of grants and things city wise, and I got a lot of- I was really surprised at how good the cities were of getting that information to, to me as a business and making sure that I knew what, what was out there and what I could get, for sure. So, I'm glad of that just because I didn't need it as much luckily. But I know there are a lot of definitely small business out- small businesses out there that needed that help more. So. Yeah, it was good to see.

AP: Nice. Do you have any thoughts on how local, state, or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

AB: [laughs] Yeah, that's pretty divisive right there, isn't it? Yeah, it's- I just wouldn't want to be in charge of it I know that. [laughs] I mean, the governor, our governor of our state, I think he seems like he's really trying to do what's right for our state. I think he stays really informed if you listen to his speeches. He's very informed, very knowledgeable about the research, about the numbers, about the economy of our states, all that, I think he takes it all into consideration. But I think there's also a lot of people that don't agree with how he's handling it. And they don't like the state stepping in and saying- [coughs] Excuse me. But yeah, they don't like the state stepping in and mandating these things and telling us, you can't get into a group of people more than 10. And now they're saying, we can even be with people outside of our household, you know, in our own homes. And I think people don't like being told that either. But on the other hand, if there's people out there that aren't following the rules, and their actions are affecting other people, what do you do? So yeah, I know- Yeah, I would not want to be in charge of it. And then federal wise-

[coughs] Excuse me, I'm gonna take a drink of water here. Federal wise I do wish they would have taken a bigger role, instead of leaving it so much to the States. I think especially in the beginning when all the states needed more PPE [personal protective equipment] and were looking for more help like that I think, if the federal government could have stepped in more and maybe centralized that more, instead of the states fighting over all that stuff with, with each other, I think that would have worked better. But I don't know, again, I always think there's got to be smarter people than me on top of this and the logistics of all that and trying to figure that out. So, I try not to judge too harshly on that because like I said, I don't- I'm just glad somebody wants to be in charge of that because I don't want to be. [laughs]

AP: [laughs] Yeah.

AB: So yeah.

AP: Okay. Has your experience trans- transformed how you think about your family, friends or communities, and in what ways?

AB: Yeah, I think because you realize you took for granted the things that the freedoms that we have the things that we can do, as simple as- One of the examples is, for me, is like, my husband and I would go see live music all the time. And I really thought it was just something we did just because there's something to do. And now that we can't do that, it's really- I really, like realize I took it for granted and realized how much we enjoy that and how much we get from that. So, I think it does make you just really realize that time with your family, the freedom to see them, to hug them, to give them a kiss. Any of those things you realize you really take those things for granted. So, it does make you think of things differently. What else did you say? Did you think of differently?

AP: Family, friends and community.

AB: Yeah. So yeah. I think that covers it.

AP: Yeah. [laughs] It's good. So, knowing what you know, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

AB: I think we just need to learn from this, I love that this is, you know, even like this is- this documentation of this oral history of this is something that we can take away from, because we're learning a lot right now, with this pandemic. It's the first time it's happened in 100 years. So,

everything's changed so much that there's just no way to know ahead of time, how that affects everything. But hopefully, by going through this, we can document this and see what worked and what didn't, and keep that in mind if, if there's other health emergencies like that. Prepare for other things. So yeah, I think it's definitely just a learning tool, for sure.

AP: Mm hmm. Definitely. Do you have any other topics or anything else that you want to share that I haven't covered yet?

AB: Let me think. No, I think that is good, good coverage of the issues that we're facing right now.

AP: Okay, yeah. So that's all my questions I have for you. Thank you so much for doing this.

AB: Yeah, no problem. Good to see you.

AP: Yeah, good to see you too.