

# Transcript of Interview with Jacob Wrasse by Grace Luloff

**Interviewee:** Jacob Wrasse

**Interviewer:** Grace Luloff

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**Location (Interviewee):** Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Location (Interviewer):** Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Transcriber:** Grace Luloff

**Abstract:** Jacob Wrasse was born in Durand, Wisconsin and is an alumni of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where he was on the Forensics team and was elected Student Body President. He currently works in the Chancellor's office at UWEC as the Legislative and Community Relations Liaison. In his interview, Jacob Wrasse talks about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on his work, family, and the greater Eau Claire community. He gives insight into the effects of going through the pandemic in the winter where there were limited outdoor opportunities and working from home as a community relations liaison

**Luloff, Grace Reine 00:01**

Right. So it is April 29 2021. The US COVID cases are at 31,976,888. The deaths are 570,421. Wisconsin cases are at 596,522. That's 6807. Was Scott on a lighter note, Wisconsin vaccines are 34%. And we have a total of 234 million vaccines administered, which is good news.

**Jacob Wrasse 00:37**

A lot of progress, a lot of progress, but hardly out of the woods.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 00:42**

Definitely. So can you start by just giving your name and if you're comfortable sharing demographic like, age, ethnicity, ethnicity and gender?

**Jacob Wrasse 00:53**

Sure. Well, thanks for having me. And for doing this project. My name is Jake Wrasse. I currently work as the legislative and Community Relations liaison for the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, in the chancellor's office here. I am 27. And I'm a graduate of UW EC, graduated in 2016. I've been back in Eau Claire since 2018. doing this work. And it has been a really strange and you know, one of those words were just so sick of is unprecedented. But this was the first global pandemic in a postmodern, highly technologically advanced society that also has a lot of political undercurrents and movements across the world that are changing how many countries are discussing about politics and to see how it plays out just at one campus and in one community was, you know, an astounding look into into human nature. And what's possible, really, when people band together just as much as it's been a, you know, a look at how disappointing humans can can also be, and it's maybe all the more frustrating, because I think we all do those kind of human things where we, you know, we listen to the stuff that agrees with us. And we just count the things that don't. And there are a lot of human tendencies that exacerbate what we felt and what people have gone through. But I feel like it's been a privilege still to be going through it here. And being a place where there are so many folks working together to protect different industries and support all the displaced workers, but not not what I expected my early career to involve.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 02:51**

not what I expected my college career to look like either side totally. Yeah. What are the primary things that you do on a day to day basis? And this can be like, just you have an interesting job of one that it's one of those things you get into college and you're like, I didn't even know if that existed?

**Jacob Wrasse 03:09**

Yeah. So like,

**Luloff, Grace Reine 03:10**

what do you do on a day to day basis, your job extracurricular stuff like that?

**Jacob Wrasse 03:14**

Yeah. So as someone in the chancellor's office, here we are over the whole university, but also academics is very separate. And systems for promotion and tenure and setting the curriculum and courses. All kind of happens through this through this process that protects everybody's voices. So people think, Well, what does the chancellor's office two if you're not dealing with academics, it's all these different connections. So the the university is located in a community where a state public university so we are funded in part by the state government, we're overseen by UW System Board of Regents, which is sort of the authority over this pseudo state agency that is the University of Wisconsin system. And in the community, we are a major employer, one of the top five employers in Eau Claire, I believe, and we have 91,000 living alumni across the country and with all those different connections are come opportunities to you know, seek new sources of funding for programs or research or to just ensure that our legislators, local elected officials understand what kind of an impact the university is having. And, and help connect people with information. The way that we communicate and the way the internet and social media can both help and harm. The quality veracity of information that gets out there is a real challenge. But I think the benefit that universities have with maybe the exception of this last year, this is a place where people come together to talk to people and there is so much to be learned. From all the great folks who work here, and I've had the benefit of doing that in this job now for about three years, and for three and a half years, while I was a student, I was in the Student Government and just got to know how this this big, wonderful, awful, simple, confusing, complex place works, right? It's just, it's a kind of sublime thing. And we're really lucky to have it here in in the Chippewa Valley. So I'm lucky enough to get to spend time contacting those individuals who have questions, responding to questions, helping us with messaging and public engagement, so that even if you're not that tied in with the university, you can know when a good thing happens here. So the average day is about I tend to say it's about a third writing a third researching and a third talking to people. That's just what I wish it was. It's so often like, I had this whole plan, but it's, it's a 30. That's out the window. But there are all these big long term projects and goals that we get to pursue to so it's a great position. It's very humbling, because you're learning from people all over the place, who are experts and things that you're not close to an expert in. And there's there's a lot of real emotion, there's real anger, real happiness, joy, sadness, there's a lot of reasons that people reach out. So I get to do a little bit of everything and try to help share the story of how this place works. And what's happening here.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 06:29**

So, you're like a walking source of information.

**Jacob Wrasse 06:36**

Hopefully, hopefully, well, I think it's really important to be up front with people when you don't know something. And so I try to be good at that. Because there's, I don't think anything quite so disappointing is somebody telling you competently the wrong information and not following up or pretending to know and not I'd like to get back to people when this is a state institution. And it's a, you know, heavily regulated public industry. But it's still a university and gets lumped in with what people think of universities across the country. And we've got a different kind of story to tell. And it's, it is fun to get to do that. So hopefully a source of information, but at least someone who's listening, I would hope to be that

**Luloff, Grace Reine 07:28**

Which is important for for universities, especially with COVID, and how COVID is impacted higher education, burnout, students being stressed, but also the climate of Wisconsin. Politics with higher education is a whole fun thing. Um, so we're in Eau Claire. So obviously, you live in Eau Claire, what's it like? What's it like to live here? What would you say? How would you sum that up?

**Jacob Wrasse 08:01**

In the pandemic context, or

**Luloff, Grace Reine 08:04**

you could do a before and after? Or either or whatever you want to do.

**Jacob Wrasse 08:07**

Yeah. Well, I'm from Durand, Wisconsin, originally. So that's kind of about 2000 people about 30 miles from here. And a lot of the things that I think people enjoy about small towns are also things that you can enjoy about living in Eau Claire, it's not a city with a ton of traffic. It's not a city that, you know, is all high rises and towers, it's it's generally a pretty accessible city with a good public transit system. And what's changed a lot since I started as a student here in 2012, is the level of collaboration and partnerships. The university has been a big part of that. And that's one of the reasons I'm proud to work here, and was excited to come work here. But it's also renewed a focus on what makes a place special. It's easy to think put things on autopilot. And this city is one that's really intentionally said, What are our greatest assets? And are we utilizing them as best we can. So the Pablo Center is a great example of we have this vibrant arts cultural music food scene. But that's just kind of because that is here. And there are a lot of things that it's like, oh, yeah, we just have that. The community in the last 19 years has taken big risks and leaps to try and make more. And it feels like a place where people who make a difference and could be doing anything anywhere, choose to stay here because you can really make a difference here. But you can also enjoy the kind of quality of life that you'd like to have. You can have a big yard you can find a house that's affordable, hopefully, although that's that's a challenge and also something that communities working on is how can we construct more affordable housing and that's not to say just Low Income Housing, it's holistic, it's it shouldn't have to break the bank to live here. And in so many areas, I think we lead the state in terms of quality of life and just a great place to start a small business. So that's that's kind of what a Claire's like what does it feel like to live in Eau Claire? I feel like you're never that disconnected from, from nature and sort of, I guess what I'd call maybe spirituality, which I don't have a religious connotation with, but just that connection to something bigger, whether that's forests, or rivers or bodies of water, going out. birdwatching, hunting snowmobiling, there's so many ways to interface with the natural world here. And one of my favorite things is just picking up Volume One, and reading what the talented, creative people who call this place home our are up to. So it's a place that I've been able to see it grow and see it realize a lot of its potential. And now I kind of feel like I'm along for the ride. And

we're all discovering what completely new ideas that is not like growing out of this thing. But there's so much more possible. Now that we've embraced that identity as a music and arts, cultural capital, that also provides great shopping and living opportunities and a wide variety of different working opportunities. Great distance from the Twin Cities. It's just it's a Goldilocks kind of town, in a lot of ways. It's it's just right. And I think the big credit there is, is to the people who choose to stay and make things happen, instead of moving away, and you don't have to look far to see the positive impact that's had, I think during the pandemic, then it was all the more disappointing that everything that we had seen grow and grow and grow for eight years. And all this this proof of concept of we can be this kind of community if we partner, the public center was just a second year that had finished its first year without a deficit, like it came out in the black. And so to come ahead at all, in the first year of operating a public art center is kind of unheard of. And the restaurants were thriving, and all the different community theater productions, there was just a groundswell. And that was all the stuff we had to stop right away. And I think that's part of what made the community come together. It's like all the stuff we had to stop and all the people who perform that music, make that food and make this a special place by putting on these things. I think the community felt strongly that it needed to support those that were being really especially displaced and, you know, unable to pay rent. And that kind of supportiveness, I think we looked for ways to show that virtually. When we when we couldn't do it in person the way we would prefer to. And I am involved with a number of different organizations, the one that comes to mind right now we just had the Eau Claire Jazz Festival. For the first time virtually and fewer bands participating, the normal many bands and band directors told us that they really didn't have their first day of school where they had all their students in their class until earlier in the month of April. So they didn't have things performance ready. But we kind of anticipated this would be disruptive for everybody. And so there's a virtual community concert that raises money to support not only the operation of the Jazz Festival, which you know, doesn't have to have as high of a registration fee then for these bands, but also supporting the establishment of a jazz scholarship, specifically related to this festival. And the the tech they took their executive director and these two great student interns was to say, we want to provide value and that's value to the community value to future UW Eau Claire students and value to current students. So they made is more than 25 masterclasses that they recorded in public center or different spaces in the house Fine Arts and captured part of a performance and captured, it's really intimate give and take between the performer and the clinician. And some of the folks that we come in have played with the biggest names in, in contemporary music. So whether you're looking at the last 50 years, or there's always people who are really, really active and just beginning so they found a way to capture that creativity and say we get that you couldn't come perform or get adjudicated at the festival this year. But here's something you can do for 40 minutes in your next class and you'll get some of what that was like. I'm proud to see that I think a lot of organizations have had to focus in on what is the root of the value we provide What's the impact we want to have. And they found a way to do that, despite the huge and you know, perspective altering disruption, that was the pandemic. So I think Eau Claire will continue to be that kind of a place where where people gather and collaborate and celebrate year round. But it was especially bittersweet after so many years of seeing this identity grow and be validated by people the world over who were like, you've got a really cool thing going here. To see all that stops, suddenly, it was hard, hard to imagine. And still, I think we'll all be unpacking it for a long time.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 15:42**

It's a true hidden gem. When I chose to come to school here, my parents, just from around the Twin Cities that we hadn't none of us had ever been to Eau Claire, and I remember my dad being shocked. And just being like, this is just like a neat little like, this is such a neat place. And you're right with the nature thing. I can never go too far away from a river or a lake. Yeah, or in any case. That's is truly a special thing. And it is heartbreaking to see how

the pandemic like altered it. So when the pandemic first was a thing, when did you like first when did it first enter your radar?

**Jacob Wrasse 16:32**

Well, I really like that kind of idea of like resiliency, and how can things come back? And I saw, I was just thinking about that, as you asked that question, I think, Well, let me start by establishing that. I think I read more news than most people my age. Every morning, there's a website that co locates a bunch of press releases from across Wisconsin that covers the state capitol. So I read that, and the leader, telegram, TV, 13, website, TV 18. website. Volume One less frequently, because they don't always publish every day. Then statewide, Wisconsin Public Radio, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, and then Madison calm, which has the State Journal, the cap times. And the third one I always forget. Nationally, I look the Associated Press, Politico, New York Times and Washington Post and I tend to I can remember that just because that's the exact order of the bookmarks. And that's if I am looking to know what's going on. That's the kind of order of operations I go through. And in college, I was on the speech team, the competitive forensics team. And that's a very historically successful team and I had great experiences and one of the events was extemporaneous speaking, where you're covering, you get a question, you get half an hour to put together a response based on on current news. And so I recall the scare over things like Ebola and Zika virus. And these are all things I learned a fair amount about talked about and coached or even judged in speech. And so I think it was December where this, hey, there's a thing happening in China kind of first came up. And the initial reports seemed to have under stated what was going on. And so I think as we continue to see those, it's like, no, that's really, that's really bad. But there are outbreaks, and they are quashed all the time. And we generally know how to collaborate with these areas. I believe. President Trump in 2018, disbanded the pandemic response team. And the quote was something to the effect of why would I keep paying all you if I don't need you right now, if I need you, I will hire you. And

**Luloff, Grace Reine 19:13**

what poor timing.

**Jacob Wrasse 19:15**

I mean, we, we, as a country, we're able to take for granted the security and safety in many different senses that we have as people living in this country. Which isn't to say it's, it's perfect, but it's like, part of the reason this all was so shocking is that how could this even happen? And when it became clear that this was something that was spreading, and you started to see I think Italy and Europe, in February, we're really becoming these these scary epicenters, and at the same time, we're We're starting to see news and understanding it's spreading. And yet we don't have much communication. In the aftermath, it turns out between the United States and China, and you don't have a great concept of who's working on figuring out what this thing is. And so the last like normal event, I think I went to, before the pandemic was research in the rotunda, which is an annual UW System event, all the campuses come and students present their research posters and projects to elected officials. And, you know, that's the first event I was at where there was hand sanitizer everywhere. And people were like, hey, try to normalize the elbow bump, instead of a handshake, and even on the precipice of everything shutting down. It wasn't evident what this was going to mean. And I think that research in the return today was right around my birthday. So then we went out for for dinner one of those next nights, and then nothing for a year.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 21:08**

Well see you got your birthday and right before your last birthday!

**Jacob Wrasse 21:12**

yeah, it's really right under the wire. And I think there are so many things that you read the news, like that was a thing is happening. It's like, okay, let us know if it keeps happening. For it to continue happening, and then in hindsight, have turned out to be so understated that we were just completely walloped caught off our feet. And we didn't have not just, I mean, scientists have been extremely collaborative during this period. But we didn't have the federal government bringing to bear all the resources of the Centers for Disease Control in the State Department to collaborate with the Chinese government and start learning about this. It's really scary in hindsight how we walked right into something that we were totally unprepared for. So that's a long and disorganized answer to your question, when did I start hearing about it, but it was something I was kind of aware of, in the moment, I'll never forget, I guess, when it became real, and that we just kind of had to accept that we had no idea. What this was going to be is we were in a meeting where there was about to be an event where a bunch of students were going to be in Schofield Auditorium in this building here. And we're like, we do this all the time. And I had to say, guys, that the who just declared a global pandemic, it doesn't matter if we do this all the time, we've not done this before. And as possible, that was like the last right thing I knew about the pandemic was just to accept that this is we don't know what kind of a ride this is going to be. So we all we all went in, it ended up being 100 days that I was working remotely before I was able to start coming back to campus part of the time and there's such a capacity for collaboration and communication in this community. And it was really something to see how people didn't give up when this impossible, unanticipated thing that we could not have dreamed to prepare for. It just it didn't stop this place. Yeah, there's no Go ahead.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 23:34**

I was gonna say, are your thoughts about the pandemic still kind of like? Not so much like, well, we're not going to know when it's going to end? What's going to happen. We just day by day have to make sure masked six feet? Are you still kind of like taking it as it comes? Or do you have a different? Have your thoughts changed?

**Jacob Wrasse 23:58**

Yeah, well, you know, so it's, it's the end of April of 2021. And we really need this summer to be good, is what it feels like just, you know, humanity, writ large students on the campus, the faculty staff on the campus, my family, that people I know, it's just we, we need some normalcy. And it seems like the summer weather just allowing people to not be cooped up inside sharing the same air. Hopefully we get at least that buffer. It's concerning to see that vaccination rates aren't higher. It's understandable that people are put off by various developments that give them pause but mentioned before the internet and a lot of the concerns being amplified about the vaccines are just unfounded myths. And I do have that that worry trying to anticipate, like, What might we need to be getting ready for? We haven't had to re examine like, what happens if there's a new variant and it's a homegrown In the US, and we get back to fall, and we kind of have to go back into another kind of shutdown. And I think the the, the difference I'm feeling now is, I'm willing to suspend that concern, because I also need a bit of a summer and a bit of a break, either. It's, it's just why when I think about this, it usually just comes back to the nature of humanity. We forget that we're animals, we forget that the main thing we know is that eventually we pass on. And in the meantime, we have to stay alive. And so society over hundreds of 1000s of years kind of developed from hunter gatherers to where we find ourselves now, and the same impulses that served us well, when we were, you know, not exempted from the food chain, are still very much at play. So remembering what makes us feel good. So remembering where you had food, remembering a positive experience, those are things your body notes on a level, we don't really clock, things that made you afraid. places that you associate with uncertainty, like there's a

lot of intuitive and unconscious work happening in our minds that stems from an era where we don't just have things ringing in our face all the time. And I'm sitting in front of, there's like, five screens, I can count in one light and our brains, our prefrontal cortex does an okay job with that. But our ancient brains are really not all that different. And people just have horror uncertainty, because it's a reminder that all of our best laid plans, all the things that we think we can count on and make assumptions based off of, are actually themselves uncertain. And, and constructed in the way we talk to each other and the way we think about things. So it's such a natural thing for people to respond in ways that make absolutely no sense. When something that up ends, everything they thought they knew, comes to town. And that's the first thing in the US was like everybody bought toilet paper. It's like, is that really helping? Did you need it? well kept other people from getting it, maybe you needed an emotional reaction to that made sense and emotional reaction to I need to think about whether or not I give my child a vaccination, that that makes sense that we feel that way. At the same time. This The science is very different. And this happened in an era of you know, sort of rhetorical polarization politically, where the kind of American ideal of tolerance as a foundational piece of how you can have a multi ethnic, non religiously aligned democracy. Required tolerance. And that's because, again, the way humans and human society evolved, began with shortcuts. So your brain is really good at like picking out like, if you just look at an acoustic tile on a ceiling or something, you can find things that look like faces, your eyes are drawn to this. That's because your body is super ready for you to be spontaneously attacked by a tiger and have you running away before you're aware of it. That kind of reflex is not super helpful when you're trying to just calmly take in information. And so a lot of these biases, stereotypes stem from the brain's affinity for shortcuts, because we can't consciously be thinking about every single thing we do every day. Because we don't have the mental capacity. So we we make it easier for ourselves. One way to make people feel connected to a cause a candidate and idea is to focus on differences. And that was the era in which this pandemic happened. And instead of the group identity being the shared values we have it became, do you appear to be a part of this in group, whatever group you were camped in? And if you're not a part of it, then you're necessarily the other you're part of what's bad. What's wrong, is very binary thinking was already typifying some of our political trends and when you add to that, all bets are off. Everything you thought you knew is is not necessarily relevant right now. It was difficult for many people, I think to consider the possibility that they had to unlearn Some of these things are that they had to accept some level of wrongness or just like, oh, maybe I was a bit of a hard line on this thing. We've just got to buckle together and get through this. Some people self persuaded in that direction, some people self persuade just the opposite way, they stick in harder. It's like, oh, everything's wrong. The one thing I know for sure is I'm a part of this group. The pandemic. And humanity simultaneously showcased the best and the worst of what we have to offer. It's the the frontline workers, the healthcare personnel, the nurses who are going through this unimaginable emotional labor of watching so many patients die. And at the same time, there were people who were not doing things that were quite as productive. It's just such a human thing. And I think it draws some attention to what leadership and communication can do for helping a large group of people accept a direction. And that's kind of politics is, to a certain extent, the authoritarian allocation of values, it's like here is the one box in which it is legitimate for government to impose its authority. And we need to argue about what things are beneficial to us. And if that's if that's the way that we're moving things forward, we're trying to collaborate and talk. These differences in these, these biases that we bring to all of our interactions, usually without noticing them. Can undermine a lot of that potential, but it's just, it's such a human thing. So I'm accepting that I have the human need to relax. And even if there's more changes coming or more promotion that needs to be done or any of that, you know, there's a need for self acceptance and acceptance of others. And, and then also, there's just, we continue dealing with this. Humans have a remarkable capacity for change, and a remarkable capacity to forget pain. So I think we've changed a lot, we've evolved, we're working, we'll keep doing that. But pain goes away pretty quick, actually, trauma remains. But pain, it's

like, as soon as we're free of that, we start kind of acting out again, there's a huge explosion that the second wave of cases in India happening right now. And some of that was the false competence, or the letting go of some of that caution for the need to express ourselves as humans. And what Eau Claire has going for it is that we have a scene that celebrates humanity, whatever you are excited by, you can find other people excited by it and gathering to participate in those kinds of activities. So that'll be really important to nurture people as they come back.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 33:02**

I, especially working on a college campus, all the students are like, let me out, let me out of the house. I need to I can say I my whole house. I believe all of my roommates are at least three of us are fully vaccinated. someone gets their second shot today and the other gets their second shot on Saturday. And we're all just looking forward to that summer, like our families are vaccinated, we're vaccinated. There's a little room to kind of exhale. Yeah. And India's the second wave and I saw a news article that we talked about in class where there's like, crematoriums on the street. It's, and you see that and it puts it into perspective. But then you're you just were looking forward to being able to seeing your friends and family outside. Perhaps I saw this thing in social media where people are talking about the first quarantine and like, April, late March, April slash May last year where everyone was home. Anyone that wasn't a frontline worker was at home. How did you cope with that? Like, what did you do? Did you take up a new hobby? Did you go insane? scream? How'd you deal with that?

**Jacob Wrasse 34:33**

I'm really glad to hear the vaccinations are coming through for you all and it's great that you're getting them and yeah, India reminds us in the lack of another new thing I listened to is that BBC World Service daily podcast and they are just out of pure oxygen. So the it's our atmosphere is mostly nitrogen. So how can they be out of oxygen? Well, needs to be all oxygen. And so they're how do we build these oxygen concentration centers next to hospitals and I think it just reiterates that we need to be aware of the possibility of a threat that is not immediate. Just because we aren't facing it. Ay ay ay right now, doesn't mean we're not going to and the vaccine technology itself, the messenger, ribonucleic acid and our RNA technology that kind of unlocked this, this vaccine was something that started decades ago and didn't have a clear application. there's a there's a really long, long, long opinion analysis piece in The New York Times The other day, that was just how has the human races, lifespan, average lifespan doubled in the last century. And it pointed out that Alexander Fleming who discovered penicillin, left a petri dish out over the weekend and came back, it was like, Oh, that's gross. Wait a minute, this is killing the cells of the sample that's in here. You can't only fun science that you think has a clear application, because the thing that is allowing us to go back to any kind of normal, didn't start that way. Microwave ovens. That was equipment in the nose cone of an airplane, and the guy walked past it with a chocolate bar in his pocket, and it melted. It's like, Oh, that's not what we expected. So I think that thinking about the pandemic response team, and the other kind of constant vigilance and acknowledgement that we can't just be distracted by the shiny, there are these long term important goals that we have to be focused on, I think is an outcome I hope folks, remember because digital society and everything refreshes every time you pull down on a screen, life's not moving that fast. And some things do Endor. And there are real impacts, regardless of whether or not you'd like to believe it's true. Or if it's comfortable, and it's important to support all people who are working on that day in and day out whether or not it's needed in an emergency, or if we know there's an emergency coming forward. Now, for me, the start of the pandemic. probably didn't impact me as much as many other folks. I'm an introvert. I know I've been talking for 40 minutes, I'm an introvert and I

**Luloff, Grace Reine 37:29**



you were meant to, you are training your whole life to just be told to sit inside.

**Jacob Wrasse 37:34**

It wasn't a shocking contrast, the biggest thing though, the the best part of my work is getting to go out and see people so I'm professionally extroverted. And for that to go away, was a little challenging, but at the same time, that period of, I'd say, march through at least October is probably the busiest I've ever been working for home for part of that time, but there was just so much to do. I didn't really feel like I had stepped away from work, probably until summer came and it's like, oh, this is when the semesters not happening. And there would be more opportunities to go out and reconnect with people who we have ongoing partnerships with and just hear what else is important to folks know, Claire. And I so I think it became more real after the semester ended. And part of the reason for that is that my fiance and I actually moved. Oh, yeah, our lease ended. At the end of April, and the beginning, may 1, we moved into our new place. And I think something I'll always remember about the pandemic. You know, we were taking walks every day and getting out of the house and in our little neighborhood, and we were at. I remember being at the local Kwik Trip, late, April, early May. And I saw a guy wearing a mask. And that was the first one now and to her credit, my fiance had been grocery shopping. So I had been I'd not been places with a ton of people, but I remember seeing the first one and thinking okay, I guess that's, that's the thing you can do. We just had no idea how it was spreading. How it will continue to spread that that total disorientation. So we're moving out of this building. We're on a third floor needing to use a shared elevator. We're not wearing masks. People came in and out of the elevator but I had Lysol wipes and I was wiping the buttons and it's like doing what you can because that's that that was all I could do to stay safe And in hindsight, it turns out that wasn't even keeping us safe. So it was such a weird, totally human thing to do in the middle of an extremely busy period, we just took that week, and we were packing and moving and transferring stuff. And renting a truck and hearing how different everything for the people that worked at the truck rental facility where it's like, yeah, we would give you furniture pads, but we're all out of them. And we're not allowed to let you reuse them if somebody else has had them. And then we moved into this new place, and we didn't, you know, see our realtor or the property manager or anything that was just also, you know, devoid of human interaction and full of fear and uncertainty. And that was just a, you know, a very, very privilege that I was able to continue my work that it is something that can be done remotely. So if I'm in the state capitol, or in a car, or I should be able to be connected to my work, and I was able to keep doing that. But it really, in hindsight, stands out how that move was an epitome of our early uncertainty and fear. And I think there were positives that came out of it. I've, after graduate school, I've not been very good at reading, I feel like reading his work. And I read for work and getting even just into audiobooks like so make a make going for a walk part of your day, and just that intellectual curiosity sparked, and there was like this, no, just taking in new information, even if you didn't hear every word is worth it. And that's getting to that kind of spirituality idea of connecting to a bigger unknown, is great. And it was also a chance to spend a lot of time with my fiance, who was actually going to be going to graduate school in England. And then a pandemic happened, and she found an online program, and it would have been awesome for her to get to go to England. She really wanted to. I'm not mad that she's here, that did work out really well.

**Luloff, Grace Reine 42:20**

What a time to move. I remember the search in screen in May. And you were like, I'm sorry, there are Boxes everywhere. We're in a new place. Yeah. So um, you're worked in stops that you may be I remember, my mother couldn't go to work. And so she just like, Did puzzles and watched a bunch of TV and we had to ration our instacart grocery store meals on. So you maybe had a little bit of a more weaning into it rather than a no more work.

**Jacob Wrasse** 42:58  
sit at home do nothing

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 42:59 What you Yeah,

**Jacob Wrasse** 43:02  
yeah, it's kind of a slow burn. Yeah.

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 43:04  
Which is kind of nice. I'm moving though, that. So you moved places, and you were still working? Your relationships with your co workers, you said was very different because you're going out and talking to people? How did COVID change your relationship with your friends and family?

**Jacob Wrasse** 43:27  
I've never been good at remembering to text and call I and I have add the inattentive kind, which is I think not what people stereotypically consider, add to look like it's I spend time on the things I'm really interested in. And if you asked me to do a math equation, I'm going to walk away from you. And so it's but but texts and notifications and things that pop up in blip are like my brain is already bouncing around. So I don't need more distractions. And I think I noticed how easy I've made it for myself to not even think about Should I call somebody, and even as a pretty, you know, solid introvert. I remembered that because I also wasn't getting it in my job. And that I always felt better on the days where I got to go out and connect with somebody that finding a way to build that in where it wasn't something I bought was really important. So I think there are plenty of people that I've talked to more i don't know if i frozen on your screen I just froze on. Looks like my video froze here.

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 44:44  
Yeah, you're frozen on my screen as well.

**Jacob Wrasse** 44:48  
Let's see if we can restart that.

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 44:51  
See, the joys of zoom?

**Jacob Wrasse** 44:52  
always right. And this is this is normal now. And yeah, so that whole period of like, oh, it seems like people are doing things on zoom. I don't I, that all was like new information. And I just went back to phone calls. And, and that's been really nice. I'm lucky that my parents both live close to here. And so I'm able to visit their various backyards and, and do things like that. The biggest change, so my fiance and I got engaged February 11 of 2020. Again, right. Months later, my birthday is March 10. So I think March 11, I think was that dinner, March 13. You know, last person out, turn the lights off. Because we're working from home. Getting to spend that much time with my partner is such a gift, and also a really challenging thing. And it's not been good for everybody, I think to be cooped up with whoever their family, whatever living situation they're in. I'm very, very lucky that way. So it's been a, I think, a communication challenge. We're both good communicators, we met on the speech team. And I

think we're pretty empathetic and try to get where each other's coming from. She's an extrovert, so she was missing it a lot more. And she worked in retail. And so the job just stopped. And it took nine weeks for the first unemployment check to arrive. So that was, she had a very different experience. She also recognized that like, so I get down with work, and walk out in the living room. I'm still getting home from work, and there's like, my brain is trying to wind down and come back to Okay, you're gonna just let all that go. What's tonight about? And she'd be ready to talk and get into it. So it's like, What does taking some introvert time look like when you're confined to the same X amount of square feet. I think it's made us stronger and made us remember like there's it's work. You don't ever reach a point. I don't think of communication where it's like we've got it set, we don't have to try it all. There's always a need to check in and take stock of things. And I got to do that with a lot of different friends and family over this.

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 47:21

The introvert thing rings, rings very true. My family is half introverted, half very extroverted. Yeah, my dad was working in our unfinished basement on an old ping pong table. And he was like, I'm gonna go insane. Because it was the only place he could. Because how do you get confined to that one? space? And how do you? How do you map out your house. So like, if I'm sitting in this chair means I don't want to talk. But if I'm sitting in this chair means I'm like ready to go like it right.

**Jacob Wrasse** 48:00

Non nonverbal signals. And I think I think one positive that may come from this is just more empathy between introverts and extroverts, because I think we, we all experienced whatever the opposite was, and we're like, oh, that's, you really want to get back out there. You're really missing that. And experts said to me, like you really, it was that big of a mental burden for you to think about going out for dinner after work. I'm like, yeah, it's not your fault. That's just, it's kind of but I don't know how much awareness there was of that. And it's typically said, I think that it's an extroverted society that we live in or is built more for, for extroverts and morning people. And as a, as a introverted night owl. It's like, yeah, that contrast had kind of been clear to me. But I hope we all understand each other's needs a little bit better coming down on this,

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 48:54

there's a there's a fear for the future of I know, particularly with students I've been online, or half online, or like, sort of in person for three semesters. How am I going to go back to being around other people? How do we go back to how to introverts go back to work and like, rewire their brain and there is that level of communication of like, I need to go sit in my room and just like put my head down, or I am really in need of some social interaction. The especially no college students, our roommates are the only people we see. Um, yeah, I almost lucky that I live with four other people because that's for other people that I get to see.

**Jacob Wrasse** 49:43

Um, yeah.

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 49:45

So when these are kind of lifted, this is another one of my things that I like to ask people. What's like the first couple things that you're going to do or that you've really been missing, that you're excited for it to be a thing again,

**Jacob Wrasse 50:01**

I really love water. And I'm a Pisces. So if you're keeping, if you're keeping track, I'm a Pisces, and maybe that's why, but like, so I had a river out my window and the one place we lived. And then we moved and I don't have that that's like I've, I've so enjoyed taking hikes and walks that are about finding a spot to hang out. And when that happens, it's like, it's crazy how big of a difference that makes because I'll definitely fall into the trap of work, eat, relax, sleep. And it's like you've been inside for two days. And your, your level of anxiety has got to be correlated in some way to the fact you haven't heard of bird or wind or anything. It's like your, your perception of this hyper controlled environment is just not reality or the world. And I think water and the ecosystems that surround water, really remind me and put things in perspective. So it was three days ago, now I was walking to campus, cross the footbridge. And I saw for the first time in the season, some socks suckerfish sunning themselves in the shallows. And like walking across that bridge in the summer is the most beautiful nature. I mean, it's just such a almost unearthly, but it's like also the epitome of Earth, it's a gorgeous place. I'd like to see more of the Great Lakes or an ocean or I think just pursuing those little things that I've tried to keep in my life like the go find a pond, I think so if that's a lake vacation, or it's just appreciating more in different kinds of nature, I think it is going to be important because with winter, there is a limit to how much you can enjoy outdoor stuff in winter. And I'm, I'm a winter fan. But it did, it did limit and it did confine folks inside in a way that made it Yeah, all the more dangerous to try and see friends. And so we're planning a party, it's a wedding. And so that'll be coming in the near future. We're very excited to see people then and I think reconnecting with people in those spaces where we just have nothing to do but be ourselves and kind of rediscover who we are in relation to each other. And I think that's going to be really satisfying and necessary and, and good. But it's a lot of the folks I talked to like just getting to their point of immunity, or are also in in academia and are just like this, they'll see after the semester, but like all the and I think there's a recognition of some of those emotional and physical needs there. It's like, yes, it's weird. And yes, we can see people again, but I can't right now. And I hope people maintain those boundaries as we transition back to whatever the what transition back to normal or just, you know, evolve forward into into whatever reality looks like continuing to take care of each other's emotional and needs for rest and breaks. And all of that I think is going to be good. So as an introvert, I'm battling the it will be nice to see people again, with here's a list of 60 people that you should, which is bad that you should be talking to, you should catch up with all these people. Well, this list of 60 I can't do all these, so I'm not going to do any of them. I hope we're not too all or nothing. And I hope people show themselves. Grace and kindness as they try to navigate this, there's not going to be a perfect way to come back together. And we'll see ups and downs and setbacks potentially. But if we are more aware of our own humanity, I hope we can be more aware of others too. And so humans and nature is just kind of a back to basics, I guess is what I'm looking forward to. Live music is the other big one that was like shows that Pablo center outdoor concerts which is another like uniquely human like you're sharing that experience of this music that these people made together at this one time once and you felt it and there's a lot of intangibles in that kind of connection where you're also just part of a crowd. When mind being part of a crowd again, I think that might be a bit

**Luloff, Grace Reine 54:48**

I, the introverts that I'm related to all I really like being in crowds, because it's a way to be around people but not have to talk to anyone. It's kind of like the best way to be an introvert. So some of my family is just waiting to like, go take a lap around the Mall of America just to be like, Oh, right, yeah, feel the energy. And I totally get it. When people talk about what they miss, it's usually live music or traveling. I just can't wait to like, not feel guilty about seeing people or to go outside or to take a small trip. It's not always that grandiose thing. Sometimes it's that really small thing that you did every day that brought you a little bit of joy. And now you can do that.

**Jacob Wrasse 55:31**

Yeah, so you mentioned Mall of America, my brother is a merchandising manager, one of the stores there, he worked somewhere else now, but as it hit, and then as they reopened, and there, there was just no joy in it. And I, I feel blessed to have been connected with people who had such a very different experience than me. Because also a very human thing to whatever I experienced is what everybody experienced. And if they didn't, it's their fault. And it's like there's this is just ruined and canceled everybody's plans. And I think, I don't think there's an easy point in life to have gone through this. Like, I don't know, if there's one group that really made out just really great because even like babies, that's socialization and that's, I think everybody's missed and lost something. I think it's especially painful when you're on the cusp for a transition of somethings that college students, high school students. There, there are so many different rude awakenings, I think that those groups have had to have, in addition to the disruption of all this because it's not just the world has changed. It's also a lot of the assumptions you made about the steps of how your life progresses and how you're planning your life. All those variables have to be re examined, and you didn't get to see people and discover things accidentally. And the contrast between a regular year and the last year is just heartbreaking. Because I know how much those years meant to me. And yeah, I don't know that there's a good time, but I think there are a few groups that have really experienced such a disorienting contrast. I'd say college students are very, very high on the list. If not, you know, I guess I

**Luloff, Grace Reine 57:35**

just celebrated my second pandemic birthday as you Yeah, as well as my I'm finishing up my third COVID semester. Um, it is. It is what I got three, it's I'm halfway like, I've had six semesters of college, half of them were pandemic, and half of them are not. It is odd to have feel. I feel like I lost something. But I don't know what I lost because I didn't. Being a first semester sophomore, you're just starting to kind of figure it out. And like, yeah, I'm, you grow so much. I'm a completely different person. I was 19. And now I'm 21. And it's a huge, a massive jump. I started the pandemic at 19 and now im 21.

**Jacob Wrasse 58:28**

It's, yeah,

**Luloff, Grace Reine 58:30**

it's just the feeling of having lost something that you don't even know what you lost. But you know, you lost something. It's weird. But I've I've had several people in my life that someone canceled a wedding, someone still had their wedding, people have lost people and not been able to have that celebration of life. High School, I feel really bad for high schoolers. Because there are only so many good things that you get in high school, I was a speech kid in high school. Had I lost that. That would have been gut wrenching, I think more so than some of the things I've lost in college.

**Jacob Wrasse 59:06**

That's a really, that's a really good point. I really feel that too. And I, again, that that empathy is so important, because people are experiencing this all over. And if you're a student, and if you're not around a group of adults, or if there's not somebody who's taking a higher level view and saying, okay, we need to live through this and not just explained it away in the simplest way possible. Like, I think there's going to be a big difference in what those formative experiences look like. We all have so little control, though, we think we do we look for things that are more certain than others and try to keep those constants. I think people will find their way through and I hope

people will find the help. They need to process whatever they've experienced. But it was it was just a Europe of kind of endless heartbreak. And right at the beginning, actually, I wrote an essay that did end up in volume one. And one of the things I think I wrote was just like, as we're all mourning, the loss of the year we thought we'd have. It's like, so you talk about losing that experience. It's like, I don't know what exactly I lost. But there there was so much loss associated with having to let go of some of these, these ideas. And the thing I loved about the place I moved out of was the view out the window, which was my first work from home office had a river. And watching that through the seasons, watching all this tall grass get just demolished by huge amounts of snow, and then come back. Humans can forget pain quickly, I think there will be parts of coming back together that really surprised us how instantly we forget things. And I think there will be things like there was a meme early on where it's like 50 years from now, Dad, why is Grandpa, why is grandma cleaning the bottle of Clorox wipes with a Clorox wipe? And it's like, so it, there'll be really long stuff. And I think some of it is again, that hundreds of 1000s of years of being this hyper social species. I think we're, I think people in general are more resilient than they give themselves credit for. But that's because we're thinking, oh, there, there are all these constants, and I'm just doing the bare minimum. nothing's really guaranteed, and you're making things happen if they're happening. So I'm, I usually surprised myself by like, oh, it sounds like you're an optimist. Which is not always how I feel about things. But it's that fundamental human energy. I, a long time ago, I realized things don't just work out for the better. The better explanation is that people don't stop trying to improve their circumstances until they've reached a point where they're satisfied. So everybody is as busy as they want to be. That's what busy means. And everybody is, right. So that energy, whether or not you think humans are doing the right things, or the wrong things, or whatever group you're focused on, I think humans are going to continue being humans. All the good and all the bad that that entails. But I do think it means that we will be finding ways to thrive as we emerge from this. And that's, that's what you have to focus on. You choose what energy you're letting into your life and how you're making your decisions. And I think there's plenty to look forward to. But we don't want to keep fooling ourselves into Oh, it's back to normal. It's done now. Because we're we're seeing in India that can, right, that can really have colossal negative effects, but very lucky to be in the part of the part of the world that I am. And with the support system, I have the job I have. And it's been so much harder for so many more people. And I think also finding how we can help people we don't know will be an important way to reconnect after this too, because there's those individual things, but just am I helping generally, knowing that there's this infinite number of experiences and nuances that people went through? So I look forward to getting reacquainted with all of us?

**Luloff, Grace Reine 1:03:40**

Well, that's a pretty poignant place. I think to leave it. I feel like you pretty much I did you pretty much covered all my questions.

**Jacob Wrasse 1:03:50**

And I did you did you ask more than one question, or did I just, I didn't just monologue. I

**Luloff, Grace Reine 1:03:55**

know I asked. I definitely asked a few more just guide. But I hope for a future in which especially Student Senate can go back to meeting in person with you all like that's been vacuum. It's been really hard. And I hope, I hope Congratulations on your wedding. I hope that goes well. Minimum stress and COVID stress is that's its own thing. And I've the Clorox something I think about at least once a week is you talk about people that grew up in the Great Depression and they're like, they're very, like, thrifty. And they there's a certain attribute for growing up and

every and I'm like, our generation is just always gonna get a little too excited. By fully stocked Lysol wipes. It's just always gonna be like a

**Jacob Wrasse** 1:04:48

Yeah. There's a lot of really excellent observations that I think the internet and being disconnected you person made us more open to noticing some of those fundamental things. And some of them are funny like that some of them. We were all inside when George Floyd died. And I think that helped. I think that made us better. Because no, there was no avoiding tension. There is no avoiding it. And I hope we can take the good of that. And also, just the chance conversations, the things you can't possibly plan will will spark a lot of creativity and we're just, yeah, if I have to schedule every zoom meeting, every time I talk to somebody, it's like, Okay, if I don't schedule it, it's not gonna happen. running into people, it's gonna be really cool. Possibly as we're buying Lysol at the grocery store,

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 1:05:47

I stand by it. I'm going to be 50 and see, like, a value pack of Clorox. And I'm gonna buy it like, it's just always gonna be, there's gonna be like an arsenal of Clorox wipes. Where I've

**Jacob Wrasse** 1:06:01

never Yeah, never caught without it again.

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 1:06:04

No, never caught without that hand sanitizer, like, toilet paper?

**Jacob Wrasse** 1:06:11

I guess. Yeah, that would be the other big, big one to stockpile

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 1:06:14

and like good toilet paper? Not like the seats that Yeah, you get it? Oh, yeah.

**Jacob Wrasse** 1:06:19

Yeah, you right priorities right now we know. Well, thank

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 1:06:24

you so much for your time.

**Jacob Wrasse** 1:06:27

I appreciate it. Thank you for listening. And I think this is a really great project to archive these experiences. And I'm always glad that there are when we're just trying to get through the moment that there are people noticing know, we need to collect this and recognize it. And even though this is such a departure from what we all thought this last year could have been. It is still the last year we have, and that's valuable. I hope we learn from this and I appreciated the chance to chat with you today. Well,

**Luloff, Grace Reine** 1:07:02

thank you so much. I will let you get on with your rest of your scheduled zoom calls.

**Jacob Wrasse 1:07:08**

Oh yeah. Yeah, back to fun. Thanks so much.