

Interviewee: Allison Christenson

Interviewer: Zach Hughes

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Abstract: Allison Christenson, a current student at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, talks about how the COVID pandemic has affected her and her community members. As she works closely with the elderly in a nursing home, she has to take special protocols and has a lot of experience on the frontline. Allison talks about how she has managed school during the Pandemic along with socializing and relationships. She talks about the vaccine and government related controversy during the pandemic.

Zach Hughes 0:02

All right, so currently in the United States, there are 32,403,259 cases of COVID 577,041 deaths. In Wisconsin, there are 602,260 5000 cases 6884 deaths. In California, there's 3,648,276 cases, and 60,927 deaths. The date is May 7 2021. I am Zach Hughes, and you are

Allison Christenson 0:39

Allison Christenson.

Zach Hughes 0:42

And um, what do you primarily do on a day to day basis like your job, your extracurriculars?

Allison Christenson 0:51

So currently, I'm a student at UWEC, on studying biology and psychology. So that kind of takes up most of my time, the studying and school work, but I also work as a resident assistant, or like a caregiver at Dove Healthcare Orchard Hills. So when I'm not studying, I'm working there, and helping the residents that we have there.

Zach Hughes 1:21

So you're living in Eau Claire then?

Allison Christenson 1:23

Yes.

Zach Hughes 1:25

And so when you first learned about COVID-19, what did you think about it?

Allison Christenson 1:30

Well, at first, I kind of had a little bit different experience, because I was abroad when it almost hit and I was in Italy, right before they got their whole mass thing. So when I came back to the US, I really didn't think too much about it. Until like, schools started shutting down. And then I thought, Oh, well, we're only going to be in quarantine for like two weeks, then we'll have to just go back. But then after that, it kind of started to ramp up and not go away. So then I started to be a little more concerned about it.

Zach Hughes 2:07

So did your trip abroad then get cut short? Because it COVID?

Allison Christenson 2:13

Um, no, it actually didn't, because I was only doing a winter course there. So I got out, I think a couple days before they got their first case wasn't too bad. I know, friends of mine who did get their trip cut short, which was sad.

Zach Hughes 2:33

How have your thoughts kind of changed since like the initial, like COVID-19 scare, like when it first really broke out.

Allison Christenson 2:44

Um, I would say when it first really broke out. And I was more concerned with it, it was more I was more cautious about my like, face, mask and all that kind of stuff like washing my hands. Now, we've been living with it for like a year or more or more than a year, my attitude is kind of been a little more lenient, which is probably not the best. But I think after the vaccine came out, I kind of was like more willing to go out and be around a lot more people.

Zach Hughes 3:23

Gotcha. And what issues most concern you about the pandemic?

Allison Christenson 3:32

I would say just from working with, like, the elderly population at my job, I would say the kind of death toll with them because it's like, it's a lot. And then I'm also what else I'm concerned about is like their mental health and their mental well being because they were in isolation for a whole year until at least we started opening up and having families come in. So I feel like after the aftermath of this like, pandemic is gonna take a toll on their mental health. And I personally saw a lot of residents go through a lot more depression, anxiety without being able to see their family members.

Zach Hughes 4:19

So like, I guess you're talking about kind of how it's the issue is, like physical obviously, because the pandemic can cause a lot of harm to the elderly population, but the mental side of things is also extremely, you know, concerning because of the isolation and

Allison Christenson 4:40

yeah, it's like with my psych degree, like, we look at mental health a lot and the self isolation and being alone is not good for anyone. So it's, it's just very concerning about, like the number of like, kids and like People in like elderly, that probably now have like some type of anxiety disorder or like depression disorder due to not being able to be out with anyone or see anyone.

Zach Hughes 5:14

And I guess you kind of touched on this already. But how is COVID affected your job?

Unknown Speaker 5:19

It affected a lot. So at first, I got this job, a couple or like a month before COVID actually hit and we started putting our COVID policies in place. So I only had like a month of normalcy. And then as soon as COVID hit, we were wearing masks. And at first, they were the surgical masks, and then we switched to the N95. But since we didn't have any COVID in the building, then we got to switch back to the surgical masks. And during the majority of it, none of our residents could eat together, they all have to be at a table alone and eat alone. And so we had a lot of issues with residents being upset that not everyone could eat in the dining room, because they would have to eat in their room, or else they'd have to get down there. They're hella early to find a spot to sit and eat. But um, then towards like the end of the summer, early like fall, we got these face like plastic face things that you see it like all the grocery stores and like stores like that. And then we were able to sit on two by two, and then we were having visitations. But they had to be outside and they had to be like, the social distancing six feet apart, I'm pretty sure that was farther than that. And then we had, then we finally got COVID in the building about November. So after that all the residents had to stay in their room and they weren't allowed to get out, or like come out at any cost. And that was kind of hard because we had a lot of residents with dementia, so they couldn't remember to stay in their room or anything like that. And after that, we've just had a steady decline in our residents.

Allison Christenson 7:36

What's it called?

In our population there? I can't remember the word I know it's on the tip of my tongue, census. That's what it is. Because we had I think it was five or six people pass away from COVID. So that was kind of hard. And now we're opening up since like, it hasn't the pandemic hasn't died down. But with all of our residents being vaccinated, now, we're able to have people come in to our building and visit with their family. So it's kind of more normal, but we still have to wear it like masks and try to social distance

Unknown Speaker 8:22

was the word for your for the residents. Was vaccination mandatory? Or was it optional.

Unknown Speaker 8:29

Um, it was optional, it was their choice to get it. And then it was also optional for us workers to get it.

Zach Hughes 8:37

So kind of remaining with the job. Have you has COVID changed your employment status at all? Are you still working this you know, the same amount of hours the same job or

Unknown Speaker 8:53

once we got COVID in the building and our census was low, my hours, reduced greatly. And then now I'm back to normal but we're shorter staffed on my hour, or like my position because of the census. So we have one less worker is how they decided to do it. So yeah, a lot of our hours have been cut and positions taken away.

Unknown Speaker 9:23

Right? Yeah, I guess I want you to reiterate what exactly do you do for your job then like you help residents take care of themselves or?

Unknown Speaker 9:33

actually perform all the basic needs that they're not able to perform. So that's like helping them go to the bathroom helping, like get ready for bed is what I do a lot because I work the pm shift. And then we also are medication certified so we pass out medications and take like blood sugars and get insulin and then we also help with dinner as well. Well, it's doing everything that they can't necessarily do anymore.

Unknown Speaker 10:06

And so moving on from your job, but how is like, how is the pandemic affected the employment of people you know?

Allison Christenson 10:16

well, my roommate actually had to go on unemployment over the summer, so she wasn't working at all.

Zach Hughes 10:26

What does she do?

Allison Christenson 10:28

Um, she works at Sacred Heart as a CNA there. And they had to close down all their elective surgeries. So she wasn't able to work there. Because they had to put her on unemployment. Because they didn't have any one in the building.

Zach Hughes 10:48

Did she receive any sort of like compensation when she was unemployed? Or

Allison Christenson 10:53

just the regular unemployment checks that

Unknown Speaker 10:55

gotcha. Okay, so moving on to like, family and household. How is COVID-19 affected you and your family's day to day activities?

Unknown Speaker 11:06

Well, I don't see my family too often. And I was very cautious at first of going home, because I was nervous about, like, spreading it if I did have it, and I didn't know. And my mom also works in health care. So she was kind of cautious, too. Because, like, she works in healthcare and stuff. But, um, I wouldn't say I went home a whole lot. I and then I wouldn't say I went home. Less than usual, because I, I'm not a homebody. So I don't really go home that often.

Zach Hughes 11:45

Is anyone in your family immunocompromised, or?

Allison Christenson 11:49

No.

Unknown Speaker 11:52

And, like, I guess, because COVID affects older people have you not been like, in kind close contact with your grandparents as much or?

Allison Christenson 12:02

um, at first, we, whenever I did go home, we would wear masks in the house and we try to social distance, my grandma's not very keen on the social distancing. And then my parents also offered to go like grocery shopping and like, shopping in general for like, like Walmart, shopping and whatever. But, um, I think once it got to, like, fall, by then we really didn't adhere to a lot of the measures.

Zach Hughes 12:41

So since you're already a college student, this is a that kind of mean that you kind of you don't communicate, or you do communicate kind of the same way as you have been, which is kind of over the phone with family members.

Allison Christenson 12:56

Yeah. No, yeah. Cuz I think I FaceTime my mom more than usual, over this past year, and then I've been calling my grandparents a lot more to because I haven't been able to go home and see them too often.

Zach Hughes 13:15

Alright, so I guess moving on what have been the biggest challenges that you yourself have faced during the pandemic?

Allison Christenson 13:26

Um, I think it's almost kind of struggling with like boredom. And since there's not a lot of things that I used to do, or like, open and like kind of acceptable to do. I've been struggling a lot with

like, keeping myself entertained and trying to find like, different hobbies around the house to do. And I've, like, tried to start like cooking a lot more again, I think everyone started making like sourdough bread at one point, and I think I kind of got on that trend a little. And yeah, I think it's just been struggling with like, the isolation and the loneliness has like been the biggest issue.

Unknown Speaker 14:10

about school related challenges, like, do you prefer classes online? Or do you want to be back in class? Or what do you feel about that?

Unknown Speaker 14:21

I prefer them in person because with my biology degree, it's really hard for me to learn that content by just reading a book or having someone voice over like PowerPoints, like detailed information that I'm not able to learn like that. All of my labs have been cut short to are like half the amount of time we would normally get so I don't get that full experience. Yeah, I enjoy labs a lot. That's my favorite aspect of like biology, sometimes. It's sad and it's it's been hard to get used to.

Zach Hughes 15:03

So how are the people around you responding to the pandemic, like your roommates are people that you associate with?

Allison Christenson 15:13

I feel like my roommates and I are very similar. And how we responded, I know one of my roommates is a little more cautious of the whole pandemic, when she's had friends over, they've come over with like masks on and stuff like that. So, other than that, we're all pretty similar. One of my roommate is actually on the track team. So she gets tested, like twice a week. So we would kind of know if anyone had COVID in our house. She's getting tested so frequently. So I think that kind of puts all of us at ease a little. Yeah, that if we were to get it, we'd know right away, almost.

Zach Hughes 15:57

Have you seen people around you change their opinions? Like the overall pandemic as it has gone on? Or has they stuck to their you know, guns, when it originally hit?

Allison Christenson 16:11

I'm kinda if I could give an example of like, my dad at first. He was very, This is dumb. Why do we have to do this? But now I think as like, my mom and my sister and I, we've kind of like, educated him on like, you don't necessarily have to do this for yourself, but you're kind of like wearing a mask, social distancing for others. And kind of just opening his eyes on it's not just an individual thing. It's more of a community like society, like you're doing it because it's good for like the public health.

Unknown Speaker 16:59

And regarding, like, self isolation and flattening the curve, do you? Have you been taking those that seriously yourself? Have you been isolating if ever expose? Have you been making sure to wear a mask?

Allison Christenson 17:14

Yeah, so whenever I go out in like, public, like public indoor spaces, I usually always wear a mask. Um, if I ever have had a scare, I usually go get tested right away, and then try to stay in my house or like, even try to stay in my room. But, um, our house has been very lucky. We haven't had really that many COVID scares, I had one at the beginning of September, but it just turned out to be the stomach flu. So other than that, everyone in the house has been a okay, like, perfect immune responses, I guess.

Unknown Speaker 17:47

So, um, then have you or anyone, you know, gotten COVID? Or what has been your, like, overall experience then with that?

Allison Christenson 18:07

Um, yeah, I've known people that have, like, gotten COVID. And a few friends have gotten it. None of my family members have really gone. It's all just been friends here and there.

Zach Hughes 18:25

Did they get pretty sick then? Or was it a fairly mild case?

Allison Christenson 18:28

Um, well, my future roommate, um, she was, I guess she was saying she was like, sick as a dog, like, very, like, out of breath and very tired. And then my friend from home, she had gotten it late August, and she said that she had just had a headache all day and was very tired. So when she was like, isolating, she just slept for like, a week straight almost, until she started feeling better that second week.

Zach Hughes 19:08

And then moving on to the vaccines. So do you or anyone you know, have? Have they had concerns about the vaccine? Or have they more or less, gotten it straight away when they were able to without any concerns?

Unknown Speaker 19:25

No, I think a lot of us were very hesitant at first. And we were very nervous about Oh, it's like, come out so fast. Like, is it going to work? Or is it going to like, do like harm to our bodies? And whatever. So a few people I know haven't gotten it, but a few other people have. So it's like almost 50/50 I think even at my work, it was like a 50 50/50 toss up of who got it and who didn't get it.

Zach Hughes 19:58

Gotcha. And did you get the vaccine?

Allison Christenson 20:01

Yeah, I got it. As soon as it was available to me, I had like, talked it over with my mom. And we were both like, yeah, might as well.

Unknown Speaker 20:10

And did you have like bad side effects from the vaccine?

Allison Christenson 20:14

Um, once I got my first dose, my arm just hurt a lot. Like it was really hard to like, lifted and stuff. So it wasn't honestly that bad after I get the first one. But once I got the second shot, um, the next day, I had like a fever, and I had chills, and I was just kind of like, down and out for like, 24 hours. And then the next day after that, I was fine.

Unknown Speaker 20:40

Did you was it hard to get access to the vaccine? Or with your line of work was it easier to because you work with elderly, so you would be eligible sooner than a lot of people to get the vaccine?

Unknown Speaker 20:55

Yeah, so um, since I technically work at assisted living, we were like, second after like the first responders and like CNAs and like, people that work in like, skilled nursing facilities. So as soon as it was like available to like, our section, it was super easy to get it. Or my boss and like, higher people were very, they had a lot of like good information about how to get it. And this is like the, the steps you need to take to go get it.

Unknown Speaker 21:31

in moving on to like, just larger picture things. Um, what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Unknown Speaker 21:41

I've been listening to NPR a lot for my source of news, just because with my research of news stations, they're the most neutral.

Unknown Speaker 21:59

a podcast then or?

Unknown Speaker 22:01

Um, yeah, it's NPR, it stands for something. I think it's National Public Radio, or something like,

Zach Hughes 22:11

something like that.

Allison Christenson 22:12

Yeah.

Zach Hughes 22:14

And then, so have you kind of used NPR the whole time over the course of the pandemic? Or have you switched new sources at all?

Allison Christenson 22:24

No, I've used that just because I find that most reliable and I sometimes use like ABC or NBC, but it's mainly just NPR.

Unknown Speaker 22:37

And what do you think, are important issues that the media is not covering with the pandemic? Or do you think there are any important issues that the media is not covering?

Unknown Speaker 22:47

I would say, um, mental health, I think should be covered a lot more. Um, I guess, if I'm honest, I don't know really too much of what they are covering and what they're not covering. So I think, honestly, it should be less about, like political sides of it. Like, this democrat didn't want this, this republican wants this. I think it should be more factual based and more looking at the hard evidence and saying, okay, so like, this is what we know. And then this is what we should do to mitigate the pandemic.

Unknown Speaker 23:30

So I guess, kind of going off of that with the government. Have your, like municipal leaders and government officials in your community have they how have they responded to the outbreak?

Unknown Speaker 23:43

Um, I thought back home because I live in my hometown is in Minnesota. I thought my governor did a pretty well job of like, putting out like, responses to negate it. I thought he did a really good job in trying to address the state as a whole. I listened to a couple of those like press conferences on like, my drives home or like, just like chilling in my room. And I thought he was very well spoken and was able to answers questions fairly easily. I don't know too much about how the Wisconsin governor responded, really, because I don't know. I just for some reason, I just listened to a lot of like the Minnesota stuff just to go I think it's just hometown, and I'm concerned about family and stuff.

Zach Hughes 24:45

Um, so then. Do you have any thoughts on how local state or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently? Or, you know, we saw like, we saw a switch from Trump to Biden. Um, Over the course of the pandemic, and do you think that they're both handling the way they handled things? You know, is it different from each other, and

Unknown Speaker 25:13

I think Biden's a little more for stopping the pandemic. But I think, overall, both parties should be doing a better job just because, um, even though like, Biden came in with these, like fresh new eyes, and whatever, it doesn't stop the fact that there are still people getting this virus and stuff. So I think both sides needed to respond a little different. I don't know how exactly that very political sciencey person. So I think, overall, that we just should have put our differences aside and look more at the greater good and public health if, because I just took this health psychology class, and there's this public health belief model, and it was more like putting the needs of others before the needs of your own.

Zach Hughes 26:23

And I guess, for the future, you know, how has this experience, you know, with a pandemic, transformed how you think about your family, your friends in your community?

Allison Christenson 26:33

I am a lot more. I think I. let me see, I feel like I'm very lucky for the people I do have. And I think the pandemic has just only like, furthered and strengthen some of my relationships just because I don't want to lose anyone. And I think the pandemic kind of scared me like, especially like with my grandparents, I kind of thought about them quite often. And I was like, I don't want them to get like, be hospitalized due to this virus. So I think if anything, it's just strengthened my relationships and add me reach out a lot more. Because if I can't see them in person, as often, I at least want to be able to FaceTime or video chat with them just to make sure we're still tight and friends.

Unknown Speaker 27:30

And then, I guess the final question I have for you is, knowing what you know, now, what do you think that individuals communities or governments seem to keep in mind in the future to maybe, you know, prevent something like this happening again, or to help mitigate it?

Allison Christenson 27:48

I think a faster response is probably what they should probably keep in mind is if we can isolate whatever comes next, if it's a new virus or whatever, to isolate it quickly, and effectively, put in my social distancing procedures, mask mandates and other protocols like that. Just kind of respond a lot quicker, I guess.

Zach Hughes 28:26

Well, I think that about wraps it up.