

Transcript of Interview with Bec Blaedow by Brice Benusa

Interviewee: Bec Blaedow

Interviewer: Brice Benusa

Date: 12/12/2020

Location: Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Abstract: Bec Blaedow is a resident of Eau Claire county in Wisconsin that is a full-time student at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. In this interview, Bec gives exceptional insights on how the COVID-19 pandemic can affect those with underlying health conditions and the problems that arise from it, along with additional inputs on the current state of events towards the end of the 2020 year.

Brice Benusa 0:04

The date is 12/12/2020, and it is 8:29pm. Could you go on and tell us what your name is?

Bec Blaedow 0:13

My name is Bec: B-E-C Blaedow: B-L-A-E-D-O-W.

Brice Benusa 0:22

And could you share with us some demographic information that you're comfortable stating?

Bec Blaedow 0:27

Of course, I am a 21-year-old female student from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I am considered immunocompromised during the COVID pandemic.

Brice Benusa 0:42

And what college are you attending?

Bec Blaedow 0:45

I currently attend the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, and I am a music education student with a Pre-K through 12 degree plan, and I plan on teaching choral education with an adaptive music certificate, meaning that I will be certified to teach students with intellectual and physical and emotional, behavioral disabilities.

Brice Benusa 1:09

And you stated that you're immunocompromised, could you go into detail with that?

Bec Blaedow 1:14

Sure, so I have different immunocompromised link diseases, so I have colitis, which is where the bacteria in my colon does not function properly. Meaning that it just attacks my immune system. I also have a severe heart condition that I've had to have three corrective surgeries in order to try to fix, but none of them have been completely successful. So, during this pandemic I've had to do a lot more isolating than the typical student

Brice Benusa 1:49

So, it sounds like the COVID pandemic has affected you greatly in that degree. Is that right?

Bec Blaedow: 1:55

That would be correct. Yes, I have not been able to follow my regular routine as I usually would. I have not been able to go out and see friends. I haven't gone to restaurants. I haven't been able to do anything that the typical student who is not immunocompromised has done.

Brice Benusa 2:12

So, before the epidemic, what would a typical daily routine for you look like in an outside of work and schoolwork?

Bec Blaedow 2:21

Sure, so on a typical school day I would get up, most of my classes usually start either at 8am or before 8am depending on if I have a school placement or not. This semester I was supposed to be going out to a local elementary school for an elementary school music methods course. Due to the pandemic, that was not possible. But typically, I would be at the elementary school from about seven in the morning till about 930 in the morning, then I would go off to all of my other classes inside of the Haas Fine Arts Center. Since I am a music student, most of my classes are either there or in Centennial just because that is where all of the education courses are would typically eat my lunch in that lobby area with my fellow students just catching up and venting about how our days are going. Since I am a vocal student choir has been quite interesting this year. But in a typical year, all 65 to 70 women who are in the limits of contract corral would get together at about two o'clock, four days a week and rehearse. Typically, we would not have masks on. We would be very close and contact. But this year, that is not possible. Just because we can't have more than about 25 people in the choir room at one time. So that was not possible. I'm also the vice president of an acapella group on campus. So, our rehearsals have changed greatly and we would usually rehearse three days a week usually at night once regular class work is over. I am also a teaching assistant for math 104, so, I would meet with students, twice a week for an hour and go over different math assignments and help them with their regular note taking skills, things like that. I would also go out and grade papers with ABA who is the professor for that course and due to the pandemic, that really has not been possible, as well. So we've had to do a lot less contact work. All of my homework sessions and teaching sessions have had to be through Zoom this year, just because I don't feel comfortable going out and meeting with students directly, simply because I don't see them every day. And I don't know what they're doing in their free time.

Brice Benusa 4:53

And we're going to go ahead and start off with a really broad question here, since you covered a lot of bases. What issues have concerned do most with the COVID-19 pandemic right now.

Bec Blaedow 5:04

What concerns me most is people who are not wearing masks and are going out to bars, to restaurants, just being out in public and not being cautious about how infectious disease can truly be for somebody who is immunocompromised and knowing how much this would affect my daily life, it is really, really important for me not to get sick because I know if I were to get sick I

wouldn't have to be hospitalized with around the clock care. It's just not okay for people to believe that, oh, I'm not immunocompromised, there's no way I can get anyone sick, I have never even gotten the flu before, the flu is more infectious and kills more people, when in reality this year, that is not the case. So I would say my biggest concern is for people who don't believe in the, don't believe in how extreme this disease truly is.

Brice Benusa 6:12

Do you believe there's any kind of political aspect revolving around the COVID-19 pandemic?

Bec Blaedow 6:18

In some ways, yes. Um, I believe that one side of the political spectrum is a lot more concerned than the other side and so that just kind of contributes to fear factors and to, I guess, different ideologies that come with the pandemic, um, I believe that our president definitely could have handled things a little bit better simply from the side of I am immunocompromised, and I know if I were to get sick I would be not in a good position. So, the thought of drinking bleach or doing things along those lines just doesn't seem quite right, so, I think that things could have been handled a little bit better, but at the same time, I think a lot of things were blown out of proportion. I think a mask mandate wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. Just because we have been living with this for almost a year now and I personally have just gotten used to it. I don't think it's a huge deal. So, but I can also see the other side of other people just not wanting to do it just because they think it hinders their day to day life.

Brice Benusa 7:36

And you mentioned there being a fear factor. What kind of fear factors do you think are arising?

Bec Blaedow 7:43

Sure. Um, I do believe in the thought of [it] starting to spread and just-because if you go out, you don't have a mask on and you just so happen to get antibodies that you can spread it to other people. But I just don't believe in the thought of everything needs to shut down for this to get under control. I think that if we were to just wear masks and socially distance and the second that this vaccine starts truly working, I think we're going to be in a much better spot But just the thought of it, what's the word I'm looking for? The thought of trying to put different ideologies into people's heads isn't the way to stop an international pandemic. I guess is the best way that I can describe that.

Brice Benusa 8:48

All right. And do you think that there are important issues right now that the media is not covering?

Bec Blaedow 8:56

Yes, there is a lot that the media is not covering right now. Um, for instance, human trafficking is a lot more prevalent now on just because traffickers know that people are staying home. And so when people do go out, they already have this kind of gloom look to them and so then it makes people a lot more susceptible to be trafficked. I think that because of this pandemic people also aren't thinking of the other consequences that could come with shutting things down like economy wise. There's also a lot of different companies that are definitely taking advantage of

people staying at home, such as Amazon other food delivery services, things like that. They're just really, really taking people's money because people are too afraid to go out and do things. Again, I fall under that category, just because I don't have much other choice. If I wasn't immunocompromised, yeah I would go to the grocery store, but I will be safe about it. Yeah, I think, more young adults and children are falling more susceptible to living their life more online than talking to their friends and finding other social aspects, because they're not getting that social socialization from being in a classroom with their peers and being in school. They're not learning in a way that every other generation has learned, they're forced into this bubble of, oh, I have to do class through Zoom every single day. Well, I don't, I'm not learning the skills to grow up and be a quote-unquote high functioning adult.

Brice Benusa 10:54

And because you're familiar with the education field, could you give more insights to exactly what will happen to students potentially because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Bec Blaedow 11:04

Sure. So there is a potential that students are not going to learn their social skills as I was just speaking of before. I have seen this happening with my two younger cousins who are six and eight years old. They're not completely learning the skills that they need to develop with their age group. For instance, my six-year-old cousin is having a hard time learning how to share because the only person who is around his age is his older brother. And so, learning how to communicate what he needs and that sharing is what you have to do, he, he can't figure that out for himself because he can't watch his other peers doing it as well and learning the same skills. My aunt has talked about holding him back for that specific reason if students aren't able to hit these benchmarks, it's hard to pull them into the next grade level above.

Brice Benusa 12:10

All right, so now that we've covered those kinds of political aspects of it going in into more of your personal life. Are there any potential fears that you have with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Bec Blaedow 12:23

Um, I am personally afraid of friends and my family getting sick. Most of my family members aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents are all over the age of 50, so just the thought of them getting sick is a very scary thought. I would never wish hospitalization on anyone just because I spent a lot of my teenage years in a hospital due to my heart condition. So, that is a large fear of mine. Same with my friends, getting sick or having my friends, pass it on to somebody who is in a similar position that I'm in, I think that guilt would eat a lot of my friends and family members, mental health, a lot along with their physical health.

Brice Benusa 13:18

And going along these lines again, so how is it affected your family dynamic with how it usually works?

Bec Blaedow 13:27

Sure. So my family is leans more on the conservative side of things. So they believe that. yeah, people need to be safe, but once it starts infringing on their rights, they don't want to be a part of

the situation any longer, if that makes sense. So yes, my parents will wear masks out in public, but they will talk badly about it behind closed doors, which I understand living life for what, 49 years without a mask. I can totally understand why they wouldn't want to do it anymore because it's just not something that they're used to because it, it's just not how life always was. So I can understand where they're coming from. But at the same time, if it were to stop the spread of this virus, I think it's important to keep doing what we need to do, so trying to explain that to them and explaining to them that my future career path could be in jeopardy because of this pandemic, it has gotten them more open minded to the idea of, okay, we should try social distancing, we should wear masks and public, so it takes, if it takes a 21 year old education major to get these 55 year old adults to wear a mask, so be it.

Brice Benusa 15:01

And you mentioned that one of the reasons why people on the conservative side don't want to wear masks or follow certain mandates, it's because they're infringing on personal freedoms. Do you think that if they do start becoming mandated, the masks and more of the freedoms been taken away from people, do you think they'll have any drawbacks or consequences?

Bec Blaedow 15:24

I believe that there will be a lot of consequences to it. I personally believe that if a mandate is what it takes for this pandemic to end, then we should just go for it and just get it over with. Because the longer that we stretch this pandemic out the more lives will be lost and the longer it's going to take for us as a country, and as an international community to recover is just going to be even longer. I do believe that there will be a lot, I don't want to say, violence, but I feel like there will be more marches against government officials, I believe that there will be a lot more dangerous situations for people like me to say if I wanted to go to a grocery store and somebody had just gone to an anti-masking rally, or any sort of rally, if we're going to be that broad. And they didn't wear a mask and they didn't do precautions and I were to go out be in contact and even if I was wearing a mask but doesn't mean I'm not going to get COVID. That's just what it's coming down to nowadays. So I think that if people didn't see it as their rights being infringed. I think we'd be in a better position, but in reality, I don't believe that it's infringing of people's rights. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are very different than wearing a mask and living your everyday life. The only differences is that you have a piece of fabric in front of your face. If more people saw it in that way, I feel like we'd be in a better spot as a nation right now. But that's just not the case.

Brice Benusa 17:14

So prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, if you recall, two of the growing concerns in in the United States and across the world was the fear of a growing economic collapse. Not on, not on the great scale, but it would be, it would be considerable and along with that with climate change. Do you think these issues are being talked about at all now?

Bec Blaedow 17:38

I don't think that they're being talked about enough. I think that the economic side of things are being talked about much more than the climate change side. Economically, I could see us going into another recession, like how there was in 2008 simply because people haven't been able to

work and more people have needed the government in order to sustain their everyday lives and to keep food on their families tables. I believe that climate change needs to be talked about more simply because yes, it has gotten a lot better with people not leaving their houses as much, so carbon emissions have definitely gone down a lot. I think they need to keep going down. And I think that even doing another stay at home could help with that, but I hope it doesn't have to come down to that. Looking at it simply from the climate change perspective, that definitely helped a lot. But I think getting more people on board with different sustainable energy programs and educating the public more on ways that they can help our environment, I think would be very beneficial.

Brice Benusa 18:55

All right, then you cut off a little bit there. So could you go in and kind of say that again, but in a different way.

Bec Blaedow 19:02

Of course, I believe that educating the public about climate change is the first way to slow down climate change. It's not possible to take it away entirely just because this is a very large planet with many people, many different creatures that are living on it. So, there's no way to stop climate change, but there's definitely a way to slow it down. And the way to start the slow down is through educating the public.

Brice Benusa 19:37

All right, and so now I want to kind of direct this discussion towards the future of things right now. So in regards to the future on a personal level and on the large scale level, what do you think it will be like, say, five years from now?

Bec Blaedow 19:53

Five years from now, I think that there is still going to be a high demand for things to be clean. I think that cleaning companies and brands are still going to be very prevalent. I think that classrooms in general are definitely going to be much cleaner and the janitorial staff is going to be quite a bit busier just because all of these students growing up through this pandemic and all of these teachers going through this pandemic as well are going to be so afraid of something like this happening ever again. We all know how flu season impacts the classroom just because we've all seen it before. Just students dropping out like flies because they are getting sick. Yes, COVID-19 doesn't affect children as much, but there are so many children like me that have these underlying conditions that I think parents and teachers and school officials and everything like that are going to be paying a lot more attention to when students aren't feeling well, simply because they don't want their schools to have to go on another lockdown like this. I could see these delivery companies still doing extremely well putting small businesses out of business, simply out of convenience. I could see a bit more government control, just because of our generation moving up and aging and moving more into politics, rather than just being considered young adults and teenagers. I can see a lot more advocacy for minority groups, with our generation. I could see a lot more outreach for climate change advoca-, climate change advocacy. I can see a lot more education on things that impact younger children and students, such as kidnapping, child trafficking, human trafficking, anything along those lines, just because we're now seeing the exponential growth right now.

Brice Benusa 22:25

Okay. And so going along with that, sort of, what do you feel like is going to be the, how do I, how do I want to put this, the biggest kind of lesson, the biggest moral that the world might learn from the COVID-19 pandemic or at least a group of ideas like that?

Bec Blaedow 23:45

I hope that compassion is the one thing that everyone learns from this. Learning the importance of people and of human connection just because a lot of it has been stripped away from us. Like, I didn't get to spend Thanksgiving with my family just out of fear of either getting them sick from being a student and passing something on to them or me getting sick from going home. So, not being able to spend that time with my family has really shown me the importance of that bond and connection to other people. I've relied a lot on my friends, being able to talk through video chat and through text messages and making sure that we check up on each other just because mental health has been absolutely atrocious over these past few months. So definitely compassion and consideration for other people through these times, I hope, is the number one thing that everyone learns from this.

Brice Benusa 23:47

And you mentioned mental health been atrocious during this epidemic, pandemic, did you want to go into more detail about that?

Bec Blaedow 23:55

Sure, so a lot of people rely on human contact in order to keep their mental health in check. Just being able to talk to other people can really help. They don't even need to be talking about the issues that they're having. Just being able to see other people can really help with happiness levels and everything like that. So I know a lot of friends who aren't living alone, but just being around the same three people isn't the same thing as sitting in a classroom or going out to a restaurant with your friends. So just the thought of being cooped up and not being able to do natural everyday things that you would typically do during the day can really, really drain people and make depression a lot more evident in people who didn't think that they struggled with mental health.

Brice Benusa 24:55

Do you think this is an issue that more people should be talking about?

Bec Blaedow 24:58

Definitely, um, our generation is finally being able to step up and advocate for ourselves in that way because a lot of us have grown up thinking "Oh, I shouldn't talk about this because it's going to make other people feel bad", or "People are just going to give me pity and I don't want that", or "Nobody's really going to care about my issues because everyone has their own things going on." When in reality, if we were to be able to talk about what's going on in our lives to people we trust, I think there will be lower suicide rates. I think there will be less instances of violence in school shootings. I was just watching a video actually that had came up on my YouTube feed about school shootings survivors, and they were doing interviews about what were the signs of the shooters and everything. And a lot of it was depression and mania and all of these different

telltale signs of somebody struggling. And in reality, if one person or a group of people or a professional or anyone would have just stepped in, so many lives could have been saved. So there's always repercussions of mental illness and mental health. So just being able to talk to other people can really, really help with mental health.

Brice Benusa 26:36

And since we're getting towards the end of this, we're going to go and steer this more, more towards a different direction with the question. So for one, I would like to know what do you feel like is going to be the new kind of standard across the United States in terms of its current climate? And what I mean by that is based upon the social climate, the political climate, and all the tensions that are arising, what do you feel like that, what do you feel like that's going to become?

Bec Blaedow 27:09

Um, I believe that the extremes politically are going to stay extreme, if anything, I feel like they're just going to keep getting more and more extreme, especially with ACAB, Black Lives Matter and then all of the other ext-, the opposite extremes are just going to keep getting a lot more intense until different things are brought forward and justice is rightly served. It doesn't matter, politically, where somebody stands as long as somebody believes that no one's life should be lost if the life is innocent. That's just something that we're, it's just becoming something that is more, I guess, conflicted upon because nobody can really know the truth unless you were there. So the extremes are just fighting against each other because they think that their opinion is right; when in reality, there's no way of knowing who exactly is right in the situation. So I can see the extremes becoming more extreme and the idea of being a moderate is slowly starting to become more and more taboo because if you say that you were politically moderate somebody on one extreme can say, "Oh, so you don't think that this is okay," and then somebody on the other side you be like, "Oh, so you don't think this is okay." When in reality, you're just happily in the middle, thinking, "Well, I don't know exactly what to do here, because if you agree with one side, the other side is just going to be even more upset with you. So it's all a matter of walking on political and humanistic eggshells right now. And I feel like it's just going to keep getting worse until we come to this agreement, which I don't see happening anytime soon.

Brice Benusa 29:08

And you don't see this agreement happening anytime soon it sounds like because there's no room to talk?

Bec Blaedow 29:15

Exactly; there is absolutely no room to talk. The second that you start pulling in other points from one side, the other side is automatically going to try to shut you down. Even if you do still agr-, if you still agree with the things on the other extreme, like I consider myself a moderate. I do have liberal views, but I also have many conservative views, but then I also have many Green party views and liberalist views and things like that. And so not being able to talk politics with anyone without feeling like I'm going to get shut out socially is extremely concerning because that should never be the case. You should be able to look at somebody and have a conversation with them and not have politics really matter, but when people are posting on social media, if

you vote for this person, you should just unfriend me from your friend list and never talked to me ever again because you believe this, this, and this, when in reality one politician could just align with more of your views on the other one. So, it's very scary right now, especially just trying to get through life day today, politically, is extremely hard.

Brice Benusa 30:41

Alright so we're going to stop this video here at 8:59pm, and thank you for your time.

Bec Blaedow 30:48

Of course, no problem.