

Interviewee: Wendy Vorpahl (With some comments made by Matthew and Aaron Vorpahl)

Interviewer: Stephanie Much

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Abstract:

Wendy Vorpahl is from Gillett, Wisconsin which is a small town near Green Bay. She has four boys: Matthew, Mark, Aaron, and Adam who all fall on the Autism Spectrum with Mark and Aaron having classic/severe Autism. In this interview, Wendy talks about the impact the pandemic had on her small business and the small business around her, her family's experience with all getting Covid at the end of 2020, as well as her thoughts and feelings about the vaccine and the handling of the pandemic. Matthew and Aaron also come into the conversation at a few points as Matthew answers some questions and Aaron can be seen and heard in the background.

Stephanie Much 0:00

Alright, here we go. Alright, so today is December 3, 2021. Um, as of right now, there have been 992,386 [COVID] cases in Wisconsin, 9,128 deaths, and 59.6% of the population has been vaccinated. In the United States, there have been 48,760-- 767,329 cases, 783,215 deaths, and 59.4% of the population has been vaccinated. Alright, so now we can begin. If you want to just introduce yourself, name, age, where you live, your family, job all of that.

Wendy Vorpahl 0:55

My name is Wendy Vorpahl. I'm 48 years old. I live in Gillett, Wisconsin, which is about 35 miles northwest of Green Bay. My husband and I have been married 26 years. We have four sons, all of them fall on the autism spectrum. I have owned and operated my own craft supply shop for five years and my husband has run his tubing business for a year and a half.

SM 1:26

Alright. So what were your kind of initial thoughts when you first heard about COVID-19 and like, lockdown and all that?

WV 1:39

Well, I guess when it first came about, it struck me as something like "Oh, one more thing the media is exaggerating about" I never could have predicted that it would be such a drastic change as it was. That seemed like stuff that didn't happen, especially here in in Gillett. Gillett's a very rural area, there's only about 1300 people in the whole town. And even now, there's people that are skeptical of just how serious the virus really is.

SM 2:29

Mhmm. So you say kind of your thoughts have changed since then, from kind of skepticism to understanding like, things are a little more serious than it might have seemed.

WV 2:43

Um for, for some people, I don't know if it was really something that the whole population, I don't think it was serious for everybody, but for those that have pre-existing conditions, I do understand the concern. And I think that's part of the reason why COVID hit me harder than it did the rest the-- my family because I am on immune suppressant medications for Crohn's Disease. So it did end up hitting me harder so I do understand some of the concern I just don't think it really fit everybody.

SM 3:28

And what would you say was your biggest concern when you like first heard about this stuff or kind of as we've gone along?

WV 3:36

What really freaked me out was the very first time that I had to do grocery shopping. Right when when we first locked down and the shelves at Walmart were just empty because the schools were shutting down so parents had to buy food for their kids and things that I would usually buy for my boys were gone.

SM 4:05

Yeah, I remember I remember at Festival [Foods] like one of the first shifts back I worked, going down the bread aisle and the whole bread area just empty nothing on the shelves. Definitely a crazy crazy time.

WV 4:18

Actually, I keep-- I was writing things down in greater detail in my diary when COVID first hit and I think in the one entry there were like 12 different spots in Walmart I put down the things were just empty.

SM 4:37

Just nothing there. Yeah.

WV 4:39

Yeah.

SM 4:39

That was it was definitely definitely a crazy time. Um, so you mentioned obviously you run a small business. Um, how has that effect how has you know, lockdown, guidelines, how is that all kind of affected you? Kind of from the beginning to now.

WV 5:01

Well, let's see. When we were first, when they first talked about businesses locking down, I wrote to, I forget the name of the organization, but there was an organization based out of Madison that businesses could contact to see if they could be listed as an essential business and not have to shut down. And because people were starting to come into my store more to buy elastic and fabric to make masks, I thought that we would qualify, and according to this organization, we did not. So, um so what I ended up doing is even though I was technically shut down, I would still be in the store. And the lights would just happen to be on. And I would just happen to have the register in and if people happen to come in, I could sell to them. And that turned out to be a good thing because people that were looking for stuff for elastic and fabric at Walmart. They were coming up with nothing.

SM 6:24

All out?

WV 6:25

Yep, so I actually did some very good business in that time and I even had people coming up from Green Bay just to buy elastic.

SM 6:33

Wow.

WV 6:33

Cuz they just could not get it anywhere else. So it, in a very warped way it, it helped my business.

SM 6:40

It helped. Yeah. Um, did you see people like coming in just for like things to do? Because I know what when you know, lockdown was done. Everyone was--or going on everyone was home, like, people picking up new hobbies.

WV 6:54

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Um, a lot of the I have some pom poms and glues. So kids were making like caterpillars. And, of course, the yarn was going out. And it actually took me nine months before my elastic supply was back to what it was pre-COVID.

SM 7:17

Wow.

WV 7:18

Because the distributors, they were actually getting a limited supply of elastic from their people. Because the government was sending the elastic to their people first.

SM 7:36

Like the bigger businesses?

WV 7:39

Mmhmm.

SM 7:41

Did you kind of see any other like supply chain issues? I think I know, a lot of businesses had issues with not getting as much as they were able to from their suppliers in the past? Or was it kind of just those highly sought after items?

WV 7:57

Um, I did notice it with the yarn as well, um, because people were cutting down, just like how many employees they had in their facilities at any given time. So they couldn't get as much out as they did before. So people had to wait.

SM 8:19

Um, and kind of with your business, did you-- what kind of modifications did you make? Or did you make any to kind of once, you know, businesses could open up again, and, you know, there's like social distancing, masking, that kind of thing? What kind of ways did you fix around the store to kind of help with that?

WV 8:41

Well, I had a note right on the front door "Only five people in at any given time" and I've made some masks of my own for Mark and I wear so we had some when we were with customers and to show where the six foot point is from the register, we had X's on the floor, denoting where that where those were, so people knew to stay safe.

SM 9:15

Did you like require masking or just kind of?

WV 9:19

Um, no, I-- I didn't. And again, there were a lot of people that were skeptical of the COVID. And actually, when it first came out, our County Sheriff's Department said point blank that they were not going to enforce the mandates the way they were in the bigger cities. So and I don't get a lot of people coming in at any given time, so it wasn't really a big deal for me.

SM 9:57

Yeah. Makes sense. Makes sense. Have how have you seen like other businesses in your area cuz I know your store's kind of around a lot of other smaller businesses, how have you seen kind of, have you seen a big impact on those businesses around you? Or?

WV 10:16

Um, yeah there were definitely fewer people out and about and the diner next door to my shop, they're kind of a hub for the Main Street here in town so they're closed everybody else feels it

and, during the shutdown, they were just doing carry out so there would be like very few people coming through on Main Street.

SM 10:55

Little decline in some ways?

WV 10:58

Yeah.

SM 11:03

Do you know anyone that was like severely impacted as far as employment goes? Like people who lost a job or anyone who like lost their businesses from from the shutdown and all of that.

WV 11:15

Um. Well, there was one bar and grill outside of town she was not really able to get back to what it was before. She ended up shutting down shortly after. Um, I'm trying to think where else. I know that there are a couple of other businesses that still have the shorter amount of hours and there's people around here that, well the diner next door, with the with the shutdown, they have fewer employees that they've been able to keep in so they've had to cut their hours down and actually the one bar and grill a couple blocks away will be shutting down at the end of the month because they haven't been able to get people in to work for them.

SM 12:26

Definitely seems like employment issues have been kind of the lasting impact from--

WV 12:33

Oh yeah.

SM 12:35

quarantine and all that. I guess kind of going off of that like have you-- is there any like other lasting impacts that you see COVID having on the economy that like worries you or like as far as your business goes or businesses around you?

WV 12:52

Well, it is really scary for me to see how little incentive there seems to be for people to go out and find work because if there's no one to work--

SM 13:09

Going to see more and more businesses--

WV 13:10

things can't run. Things can't run. And people that aren't looking for work they don't seem to understand just how big of a problem that's going to be in the long run.

SM 13:23

For everyone.

WV 13:25

Yep.

SM 13:29

Mmhmm yeah I suppose--

WV 13:29

And actually. What? Sorry.

SM 13:31

No, go ahead. Go ahead.

WV 13:33

Um, a lot of my stuff has even gone up in costs from my distributors. Um, in the five years that I've been here the one major yarn that I carry, it's gone up like 67 cents per skein so when when you buy like when you have like 1000s of dollars in in yarn in your store it.

SM 14:02

Adds up real quick.

WV 14:03

Yeah.

SM 14:09

I totally, totally going back on track you were talking about all like the businesses around you having to close down. How long were you closed for the initial when when non-essential businesses were told to shut down?

WV 14:23

Um like March 25. To like, the 11th of wait actually you know what? I can probably look it up here quick because I had to have that down in my spreadsheets and such.

WV 14:48

Okay from like the 25th of March until like May 11. That's when I was technically shut down.

SM 15:08

And you said you you kind of were still running a little bit was there anything else you kind of did in that time to try to help like sales and not be too far behind with customers?

WV 15:21

I did offer curbside pickup and I also added a delivery option to give people that possibility to them.

SM 15:37

To give them options. Did you see a lot of people kind of taking advantage of those or?

WV 15:42

Um, a couple here and there. But still people mostly, were willing to come in.

SM 15:49

Stop by.

WV 15:50

And I use that shut down time to rearrange, like all the shelving in my store. So it's not like I was just sitting there doing nothing and waiting for people to come in.

SM 15:52

Found time to make it useful.

WV 16:06

Yeah.

SM 16:07

Uh let's see where we're at. Kind of I guess business and personal, what's kind of some of the biggest challenges you've faced during, you know, shut down, and now still kind of dealing with the pandemic and things like that?

WV 16:28

Um, I guess challenge. I don't think it fully the whole concept of the COVID really registers with Mark and Aaron, especially Aaron.

SM 16:47

Mmm yeah.

WV 16:53

Well, Aaron, he understands that he has to wear masks, but I mean, he'll, he's the kind of the type that goes along with anything, because so much goes over his head.

SM 17:05

You tell him to do something, He's just gonna--

WV 17:08

Yep.

SM 17:09

go along with it. So I guess kind of going off of that, how has, you know, the pandemic affected your family? Cuz I know, like you mentioned, like, all 4 of the boys have some form of Autism. And I know, in that article, or that article you sent me, you know, in the very beginning, it was very hard for Mark and Aaron specifically to understand like, you know, routine is very important for them and it was just a change in routine. So kind of how, I guess, going a little further of how, how have they handled it, and how have you kind of tried to help them?

WV 17:48

Well, I think Mark, he's been able to find ways to cope over time. He's got his things that he enjoys and he's still able to come to the store if it's not open. So he's been good in that respect. I think Pete [husband] has been trying to find more things to do with Aaron to keep him occupied. I've noticed that he's been taking Aaron under his wing and having him help out with stuff more and even though Aaron doesn't always understand, he does want to do something.

SM 18:31

Mmhmm.

WV 18:33

And, Adam, I actually feel very lucky about because I know that a lot of parents, they had trouble with their kids handling school virtually. I've heard of many cases where the kids were failing out and I didn't have that with Adam. He has, he already has some sense of self discipline with things and that really helped out he actually got all A's.

SM 19:04

Wow.

WV 19:05

So.

SM 19:06

He's, he's a smart boy.

WV 19:07

Oh yeah.

SM 19:13

And I know you meant-- you mentioned a little bit like Aaron has kind of been able to understand like "Okay, I got to wear a mask". Like, did you have any issues with with especially like Mark and Aaron with with wearing the masks?

WV 19:26

Um, Mark, not really, because I would give him the masks that I made and he seemed like, he likes to wear stuff that I make. So.

SM 19:39

Yeah.

WV 19:40

So he was okay. And they did have some trouble at school with Aaron. He didn't want to keep the masks on all day because he sweats at the drop of a hat like I do and so he would just be drenched in and there was some problem with that with Adam. He actually got rashes from the masks.

SM 20:11

So they kind of made it uncomfortable.

WV 20:14

Yeah.

SM 20:17

Um, so, obviously, you mentioned like Adam was online. If you, obviously I kind of know a little bit about it, like, when it came when the pandemic first hit, obviously, Aaron was still in school at that time fully, kind of how did that work with him. So I know they kind of had a little bit of a special circumstances with with him.

WV 20:40

What the, what our school district did is they had, um, staff drop stuff off at the house. Like, like a couple of times a week, they would drop off, um, homework packets, and lunches from the cafeteria, that parents could make at home. So, and his special ed teacher at the time would drop off jigsaw puzzles that either they had at the school or she had from her home. So he had like, six or seven of them that he was working on at one time. Cuz like I said, in my article, he didn't really have regular homework.

SM 21:32

Mhmm. Not as much to keep him busy as Adam who had the regular classes and stuff like that.

WV 21:41

Yeah. Yeah, a lot of Aaron's curriculum is more of teaching life skills and there's only so far you can go with that.

SM 21:52

Yeah. Um, how long did your school district stay online for?

WV 22:00

Um, they shut down March 13th and they did not go back the rest of the 2019-2020 school year. And then at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, there were it was like one three weeks

stretch in September, a three week stretch in November, and then just a two day stretch in March.

SM 22:35

Where they went online or?

WV 22:37

Yep, yeah.

SM 22:38

Ok.

WV 22:39

What our school did is they for the last school year, they adopted the same curriculum that Acellus Academy uses for their online students. That way when they ever had to shut down, we could just jump right into that and then jump back when they go back in

SM 22:59

Was a little more organized.

WV 23:00

[Unintelligible] Yeah.

SM 23:02

Not as chaos is everyone trying to figure stuff out in spring 2020?

WV 23:07

Yep.

SM 23:09

Um, so obviously, like, Aaron and Adam had some bit of schoolwork to kind of help them out. Was there anything else you guys tried to do to kind of entertain them as there wasn't as much to do or like add you know, you said getting the boys involved with stuff like how did you kind of compensate for not having as much structure?

WV 23:32

Um. Well that's probably where addiction to electronics came in very handy. So we had that and something that we had done as a family was right around that time, every Tuesday Taco Bell would give a free taco per person. So it became a tradition after a while to go through the Taco Bell drive thru and we all ordered supper and we all got our free taco.

Matt Vorpahl 24:03

And then they stopped doing that and then we were all very sad.

WV 24:12

They stopped doing it and we were all very sad as Matthew so poetically put it.

SM 24:17

So just kind of little things to kind of add maybe a little bit of routine and structure where there wasn't as much.

WV 24:22

Yeah. And if it weren't for me and my yarn, I probably would have been in big trouble.

SM 24:30

Gone crazy yourself. Definitely know how knitting is a good way of passing time for sure.

WV 24:41

You notice that too, huh?

SM 24:42

Oh, yes. May or may not have started a blanket during this time. Definitely, it definitely keeps you busy. Um, has did the pandemic or anything kind of impact how you've talked to like friends and family or like your relationships whether it be just not being able to stay in contact with people or other things.

WV 25:03

Well, um I am involved with the committee that puts on a truck show here in town and when everything hit the civic club, they were normally in charge of the Fourth of July events, they canceled which upset a lot of people because Fourth of July was always one of the events that brought people into Gillett. And so one of the county supervisors asked the truck show committee if they would take over the Fourth of July stuff and that didn't sit well with some people. And I actually got a hate letter sent to my store mailbox.

SM 25:55

Wow.

WV 25:56

An anonymous hate letter that said, "Wendy spend more time at home and less time planning a parade."

SM 26:02

Wow. So kind of tensions were already kind of high and that whole thing affected it more. So you--

WV 26:15

People, um, but that was just, I mean, a vocal minority. There were people that were happy that we put something together. We did the parade, we were able to do the fireworks. We didn't have as much going on at the park so I added a vendor show. We did that to compensate.

SM 26:39

Um, so kind of going off that, obviously, you mentioned you're involved with that. Is there anything else really you're involved with in your community? And did you see that stuff change as well during COVID?

WV 26:50

Um, the Gillett Woman's Club, they only had like two things that they did over the whole year and we normally met once a month. But again, a majority of the club is people over 65 so they're more susceptible anyway. The trunk show committee, they were determined to keep things going as much as they were able to do. Unfortunately, tourism and marketing didn't meet. Gillett civic club didn't meet. But again, that's more older people involved with those. And the tourism and marketing meet at City Hall so they they have to be extra careful.

SM 27:40

The federal buildings or like the municipal buildings were more strict with guidelines than other ones.

WV 27:48

Yep.

SM 27:51

And kind of overall, how would you say your community was impacted by COVID?

WV 28:07

I think it was hard for the businesses to not be able to open. There is that sense of community with the people that come into town, everybody knows everybody and you didn't see people as much and it did take a toll on some and not being able to go to church even though they would do the online.

SM 28:36

Not quite the same.

WV 28:37

No. And a couple other churches, they actually got a radio frequency that they were able to get access to and people could park in the church parking lots, turn on this radio station, and that was their way of going to church.

SM 28:58

People got creative.

WV 29:01

Yeah.

SM 29:06

So you kind of already talked about this a little bit, um, how would you say kind of the majority of people around you in the community responded to it. Obviously you said a lot of people were a little more skeptical. Would you kind of say that was maybe the overall sense in the community was a lot of skepticism.

WV 29:25

Um more from the the younger to middle aged adults, like 20 to 50 that age group, more skepticism. The older ones, they were more worried.

SM 29:44

More at risk so they kind of took it a little more seriously.

WV 29:48

Yep.

SM 29:54

So kind of shifting a little bit. I think you mentioned it at the beginning. Um, you and I think everyone in the family got COVID at one point, if you want to talk a little bit about that, when that happened, kind of your experience, the experience as a family.

WV 30:11

Sure um. Pete, my husband, is on the Gillett area ambulance, he's an EMT, intermediate tech and we figure that he got COVID from one of the patients. They do have on protocol, they refer to it as advanced PPE and even with that we don't know of any other place that it would have come into the family. He, I took him to the emergency room one night because he was worried that he had it and while I was there I had the emergency room test me too and we got diagnosed and a few days later because the boys all had some symptom. They all just got tested and between Christmas and New Years all six of us had COVID.

SM 31:19

So how did that kind of go? Did-- did anyone have really severe symptoms or was it kind of just cold symptoms, not feeling well, feeling achy.

WV 31:30

Well, Mark, Aaron, and Adam. Theirs were the mildest. Go on Matt, refresh my memory what was yours.

MV 31:50

You want me to go through the whole list that I remember of like symptoms?

WV 31:54

You want the whole list?

SM 31:55

Sure. If you want to share.

MV 31:59

Okay, so let's see, there was the coughing that felt like there was a knot in my throat. I didn't feel like eating anything. It's not that my sense of taste or smell was gone, I just didn't feel like putting food in my mouth. I was extremely lethargic. Like, there was the one day where I figure I was like in and out of sleep for like 14 hours or so and it was never good sleep, it was always that like, you know, waving in and out of consciousness. And then like, you know, achiness, temperature swings, like, you know, I would go from needing an extra blanket to sweating and back again. Oh, yeah, and then for a month afterwards everything tasted weird, like salty barbecue.

WV 33:06

Yeah. Okay. And I was probably the only other one that really had the taste issue.

SM 33:17

Taste issue yeah.

WV 33:20

That's actually what started me on the eating better because all the stuff that I usually ate. Um like--

SM 33:30

Did not taste good.

WV 33:30

Regular, regular Mountain Dew tasted like seltzer.

SM 33:37

No thank you.

WV 33:40

A lot of the regular foods that I would eat, it just felt like mulch in my mouth and so that started out started me on that.

SM 33:53

Kept going with it

WV 33:54

And it paid off obviously.

SM 33:56

Yeah. So something good came out of the experience, I guess.

WV 34:02

Yeah. And I did end up with viral pneumonia. I-- I would get short of breath pretty easy and Pete actually took me back to the emergency room like five days later. And so I had to go on a steroid to build that back up.

SM 34:28

And you think that's because you were a little more at risk than than others that that probably?

WV 34:35

I think so.

SM 34:37

Hit you a little harder than maybe the boys.

WV 34:40

Yeah. The body aches were awful, that was probably the worst part because I-- I just hope I never repeat the experience.

SM 34:52

Yeah. Yeah, I've definitely heard the lethargy and just the achiness is very, very difficult to deal with. And how did the boys, like Mark and Aaron, how did they deal with the testing? And I mean obviously it was probably more just like oh they're sick it wasn't much different but like for the testing was an experience.

WV 35:16

Oh yeah. Aaron I think he kind of giggled a little bit because it felt weird. Um Adam--

MV 35:33

I was gonna say because I was in the van when they took us to do that and I think the only one that really had a problem with it was Mark.

WV 35:40

Oh, okay.

MV 35:42

And even then it wasn't that bad.

WV 35:44

Okay.

MV 35:49

But then again dad was right there to help them out.

WV 35:51

Yeah.

SM 35:53

So overall, they did relatively well better than probably would have expected.

WV 35:59

Yeah, I would say so.

SM 36:02

I know from experience it is not fun. Not not a fun thing to have to deal with.

WV 36:10

No.

SM 36:12

Um, so kind of did you have any really, do you think you had any really long lasting side effects from the COVID? Or, like Matthew said, the taste was only for like a month or so did-- was it kind of only for a little while or do you think you're still feeling any sort of lasting impacts from-- from that time?

WV 36:35

I don't know if I wouldn't say that I've had anything lasting.

SM 36:40

The taste kind of went back to normal after a while as well?

WV 36:44

Yeah, it did.

SM 36:50

And I guess like, have you seen with with you your family or in general too like how do you think you've seen COVID affect-- COVID and the pandemic and all that kind of affect people mentally or physically in other ways?

WV 37:16

Umm. Actually here, we're going to--

SM 37:18

Go on a little trip?

WV 37:19

Yeah we are. Okay. Matthew has been the hardest. He has been very almost paranoid about it. Like that note that I told you about before? He read it and he looked at me and said, "the guy's got a point mom" and I forget another incident exactly but basically there were these two people that came to my store to talk to me and Matt made some comment about putting people in danger because they came in during the pandemic and all that. So we've had a lot of butting heads with him because of that.

SM 38:48

Yeah.

WV 39:00

I might have to come back out later.

SM 39:02

Yeah. All good.

WV 39:07

Ok.

SM 39:12

And I know, I think you you mentioned at some point earlier too like, the isolation, have you kind of seen that maybe have impact on like mental health with anyone either your family or otherwise?

WV 39:27

Um. Well for my family. I didn't sense things out of the-- anything out of the ordinary? I would say.

SM 39:59

[Aaron pops up in the background] Hi Aaron!

WV 39:59

Can you say "Hi Stephanie"?

Aaron Vorpahl 40:02

Hi Stephanie.

SM 40:08

So, going on to I guess, what could maybe be considered a little bit of a controversial topic? What are your thoughts on the vaccine? Have you gotten it or?

WV 40:22

Um. Matt is actually the only one in the house that has gotten it. They've talked about it in greater detail at the ambulance squad meetings. They have a medical director, a physician, that have things up and so they are able to get information that others cannot and a lot of the people on the squad, well I guess I shouldn't say a lot, but I know like, Uncle Pete, he does not trust the vaccine. He doesn't feel that it's been tested enough. Because so many other vaccines, they go through years of study, whereas the COVID vaccine has not and he's heard so many cases of people that they have these bad reactions to the vaccine and he doesn't feel that that kind of risk for a condition that has such a high rate of recovery, that it's worth it. And actually, they on the ambulance, they've actually had people come in and they were able to test for antibodies for COVID. They had someone come in and do that for the people on the squad and from information that they've received, the antibodies that people have gotten from having COVID they linger for-- for months out and it appears that that level of antibodies is as effective as the vaccine for many cases. And he hasn't really felt the need and I trust Pete I--

SM 43:02

Yeah because obviously, you guys have all had it, so you likely have those antibodies and--

WV 43:11

And Pete doesn't go into stuff willy nilly. He, he's detailed to a fault sometimes, but Pete, he checks things out and, Matt you can fight with me on this later, but I know Pete has actually caught Matthew, um trying to talk Adam into getting the vaccine.

MV 43:49

No, I never get it with any sort of intent. I always kind of knew it wasn't gonna fly. It was more of a passing remark than anything serious.

WV 44:04

Serious or no, it didn't sit well, but anyway.

MV 44:06

Nothing ever sits well with him when it comes out of my mouth

WV 44:09

[Talking to Matt] Save it for after the interview. Anyway.

SM 44:14

But you'd say kind of right now just a little uneasiness about how new it is.

WV 44:22

Yeah, and actually at my last checkup my doctor brought it up and I explained to him why I had gotten it, about how there hasn't been a lot of studies the way they are--there are another vaccines and his answer was that basically that the study was going on as we speak. And the fact that people are pushing the vaccine so much I don't know that makes me want to get it even

less. It, I guess, it goes back to the-- when you're in school and they teach you "Just Say No to Drugs" and "No to Peer Pressure" and--

SM 45:22

Kind of feels like peer pressure a little bit?

WV 45:25

It does. It really does.

SM 45:13

I can see that. I hope you can't hear that. I have loud people upstairs. I hope you can't hear that. So do you think in the future, if more, you know, research and study is done and it is found that it is safe? Do you see yourself maybe getting it in the future?

WV 45:48

Well, right now--

SM 45:52

I mean obviously, you know, you can say anything now and who knows in the future, but.

WV 45:58

I've admitted this to Pete right out. Um, I want to go to Canada and if we have to get the vaccine in order to go to Canada, I could see myself getting it then. But even then, that's probably the only way I see myself getting it.

SM 46:27

Okay.

WV 46:28

It's like some people if they go to a faraway land, and they have to get certain vaccines to go to that country.

SM 46:34

Yeah.

WV 46:36

I would probably treat it that way.

SM 46:41

Necessary in certain situations.

WV 46:44

And that's probably the only scenario where I would see myself getting it.

SM 46:50

Okay. Okay. Okay, I guess shifting off of that a little bit, what has been kind of the access in in your town? As far as like, has it been pretty accessible for those who do want to get the vaccine to get it? Or has it been a little harder?

WV 47:06

Um actually.

SM 47:08

Given that it's a smaller town.

WV 47:11

It's been pretty easy to even here in Gillett. I know the school had it available and we have an adult program for disabled adults and they were offering it to families that had their loved ones attend their center. And I know we have the clinic here in town, people were able to get it there. I don't remember if the ambulance garage had it there or not? I think they might have, but in any case.

SM 47:56

A clinic at one point.

WV 47:57

Yeah. It's-- access to the vaccine is not a problem even here.

SM 48:05

Okay. And have you have you seen a decent amount of people in your community getting it? Or is it kind of a lot of that that hesitancy as well as kind of shifting over to the vaccine.

WV 48:19

Um, a lot of the older people. I think some that work in the medical industry, they've had to get it.

SM 48:34

Those more higher risk place-- like professions and people.

WV 48:40

And I do think some, they got the vaccine so that they could keep their jobs. Um, there's actually one story that we had heard about a gal that graduated high school with Mark, she's in the Air Force and she and her husband had a baby, and so she's nursing and she did not want to get the vaccine until she was through with nursing her baby. And the military basically said "No, if you don't get the vaccine, you will receive a dishonorable discharge and you wouldn't get your military benefits". Which doesn't seem fair, because it was just recently that kids 5-11 could get it.

SM 49:31

Yeah.

WV 49:32

And they had no problem subjecting a baby to it, basically.

SM 49:38

And it wasn't necessarily that she didn't want to get it ever it was just she wanted to wait a little bit.

WV 49:44

Right. So I guess that's another reason why there is the skepticism there's a lot of contradictions in in so many aspects of this.

SM 50:00

Mmhmm. As far as getting it or who's getting it and--

WV 50:05

Yeah. And the rules that people have had to follow.

SM 50:12

There are so many places requiring it for employment and that kind of thing.

WV 50:19

And even before the vaccine, there were so many contradictions to things.

SM 50:23

Masks and.

WV 50:25

Yeah.

SM 50:25

I can agree with that, for sure. Um, I think you, once again, I feel like I keep going back to things you've mentioned before. Um, as far as like news and the media during the pandemic, kind of what has been your main source of news and has it changed at all during?

WV 50:53

Um to be honest, I find myself watching less news. I do follow Fox News on YouTube and I'll watch the local news for the weather but other than that, I've been in the dark about a few things, quite a few things. I know the, the fact that the media pushes it so much.

SM 51:31

Like the vaccine or just kind of the pandemic in general?

WV 51:36

Both, both.

SM 51:44

So you kind of would say, and I don't--

AV 51:48

[In the background says "Hi Stephanie" again]

SM 51:48

Don't exactly. Kind of just your general feel about how the media has handled the coverage of the pandemic has not been great.

WV 52:03

And it's they've, they've become very biased and not just about the pandemic, but about many things. So.

SM 52:12

In general, how do you how do you feel about, you know, the pandemic becoming such a politicized or biased, you know, sided issue?

WV 52:32

I think it's made I think it's made life harder. The media, they're they're doing a lot of manipulating and I-- there's a lot of-- it's been a tool for hate really.

SM 53:02

Mhmm I can agree with that. Is there any aspect I guess, of the pandemic, you wish would have maybe been covered a little more? Like, obviously, you know, they talks a lot about the vaccines, but is there other stuff? Or I guess even other stuff during this time that you feel was talked about less because there was such an overarching, like, have to cover so much about the pandemic?

WV 53:31

Well, I do have to wonder if the media isn't using the pandemic as a way to cover up for stuff going on in the government that's--

SM 53:49

Less than favorable.

WV 53:51

Yeah, thank you.

SM 53:58

Then, I guess, like, going off of that, like, like I said, the pandemic has definitely seemed to become a very politicized topic of one side is against everything involved and, everyone's like, the other side is very masks vaccine. How do you feel about it being, becoming such a politicized topic? Because I mean, it's a pandemic, you know, it's a virus going around and yet has become all about which political side you're on about it. Do you think that you know, it should have been kept out of politics or?

WV 54:33

Oh, definitely.

SM 54:35

How do you feel about it becoming this politicized issue?

WV 54:44

I'm disgusted by it. It really, isn't it it's not an issue about human lives at all really. I-- It's just, it's control. It's I feel like that's that's what it's being used for more than anything, it's-- I don't think the people that are bringing it out into the out to the public like this, it's not it's not an issue about human lives for them.

AV 55:28

[Interrupts in the background by repeating "Hi Stephanie" again]

WV 55:28

I don't. I just don't think that really matters to those people that bring it up. For those reasons I I think it's about exercising control.

WV 55:39

[Talking to Aaron who is talking in the background] Go get it then.

SM 55:52

And kind of building, following either one way or the other. So. I'm like asking questions before I'm checking back. So, in general, how do you how do you feel that, I guess we kind of were talking more on a national level there, on the local level, how do you feel like government officials like in your town and like the state of Wisconsin, I guess, if you want to go a little more broad, how do you feel they've handled, you know, how they responded to the pandemic? Like as far as making it an issue or like, guidelines, and that kind of thing? How do you feel about how it's been handled? Maybe a little more on a local level?

WV 56:35

Local level, I'm satisfied with what they've done. They seem to understand that, because of the area we live in, that the the spread is not the issue that it is in bigger cities. They understand that. They want people to think more for themselves on this issue, I think. And at the state level, I don't see that. I'm seeing the same desire for control that

SM 57:31

See on the national level?

WV 57:32

Yeah, yeah. I do.

SM 57:39

I guess, what kind of restrictions if any, did they put in on the local level?

WV 57:48

Um, I know they cut the hours down at City Hall, for people to go in and pay on things and the councils and such weren't meeting as much. Other than that, I think the local government was letting people use their own discretion on the matter.

SM 58:14

There was no like mask mandates put in on the local level or anything. It was just kind of-- because I know you said like the sheriff said like they weren't gonna enforce the the state requirement.

WV 58:27

Yeah, they they seemed more willing to let people use their own judgment on it. Let them let people make their own decisions. If they weren't comfortable, they weren't going to go out.

SM 58:41

And you felt that was kind of a better handle of it at least in in your town.

WV 58:49

I think that was the better way to go.

SM 58:53

As far as like a bigger city, would you have wanted to see that kind of thing? Or do you think in the bigger cities maybe a little more would've been necessary?

WV 59:04

I do think in the bigger cities that the more restrictions probably were necessary. You had more people going in and out more--

SM 59:15

More chance of contagious obviously, like we saw like New York had the massive, you know, outbreak in the beginning and--

WV 59:22

Yep.

SM 59:23

Things like that. I guess is there anything else you feel like you would have liked to have seen done differently by like governments? Either like the initial reaction to it or even now, like, how do you how would you have liked to have seen things maybe handled differently by government on any level, either local, state or national?

WV 1:00:06

I I guess I wish they would have been more consistent with the information that they were giving out and maybe show other sides [Aaron can be heard talking and she says something to him] like-- he's [Aaron] making me lose my train of thought.

SM 1:00:35

You're good. You're good.

WV 1:00:44

It seemed like they were changing their do's and don'ts on down the line and--

SM 1:00:51

Wear masks, don't.

WV 1:00:54

Yeah

SM 1:00:54

The six feet works, doesn't that kind of thing.

WV 1:01:05

And even now where they're trying to put in restrictions, but there's still the problem with the open border and Mexico.

SM 1:01:20

Be consistent, on on what is allowed and what is not?

WV 1:01:24

Yeah.

SM 1:01:29

How do you feel is going to happen now? Obviously, we're hearing in the last week or so of the new strain being discovered in the world and now I think there's even cases in the United States. How do you feel? You feel like things are gonna go back or you feel like, we're kind of at a point now-- I guess, how do you feel like it should be handled?

WV 1:02:00

I'm not sure what they could do differently. I know that people that do have the antibodies and I suppose for those that do have the vaccine, um, it's not going to be this big thing, the way it was when the shutdowns first took place. We'll have a better idea of, even though there are the contradictions, they know there's some options out there to protect yourself and stores are doing more where, so if they are concerned about going out, they don't have to.

SM 1:02:51

Feel like we're better prepared to handle, if this does become a little more serious than we were initially.

WV 1:02:58

Yeah.

SM 1:03:02

Um, I guess you kind of made the comment about how like, you know, stores are are have all those options. Do you feel like anything positive has come out from this experience with a pandemic, of you know, there's the more, you know, all these stores are now like, having the pickup options for groceries and, you know, cleaning processes have definitely improved. Like do you feel like, as horrible as this whole experience was, maybe there was some good that came out of it either like in your life or in general?

WV 1:03:38

Um, I do think it is nice to have the other options. But again, there seems to be so much more hate and tension out there now, not just from COVID but from all the other political issues. So I don't I don't know that that good outweighs the bad.

SM 1:04:05

Things have become so much more divided since pre-pandemic time.

WV 1:04:12

It has.

SM 1:04:14

Do you feel like the bias of the sides of the pandemic has led to the more like hate forming and like other topics becoming politicized?

WV 1:04:27

I think so. I really do.

SM 1:04:30

Had the pandemic not happened, other issues might have not sparked as much?

WV 1:04:40

Quite possibly. People weren't going out, they weren't getting that social contact they--

SM 1:04:53

Were more in their bubble of, of hearing what they wanted to hear or didn't.

WV 1:05:00

Change it changed their mindset. Changes the way they are, the way they think about things, the way they act around the other people like. I think it had a lot to do with, with the way people are with one another today. I think it was a bigger factor than--

SM 1:05:28

Some other things.

WV 1:05:31

Some people realize.

SM 1:05:33

Have you felt like your view on the world or the people around you has changed at all from this experience?

WV 1:05:44

It's made me more thankful to live in a small town. We we are cushioned from a lot of the stuff in the bigger cities. A lot of the a lot of the tension, the unrest, you don't see that in little bitty towns like Gillett. I I do feel like we're in a bubble in that respect.

SM 1:06:13

It is definitely, like, nice to get away from from the bigger stuff yeah.

WV 1:06:23

There's a reason why people have cottages here.

SM 1:06:26

Yeah. Get away from the craziness and calm down, enjoy things a little more simple. Do you see in the future once maybe we've gotten a better handle on this and we're not necessarily thinking about it anymore, do you think there are any certain things in life that won't go back to normal? Like do you think life as we know it will forever be changed based on what we've experienced during this time? Whether it be mindsets, or like things that have been put in place, like I said, like the pick up options, and.

WV 1:07:06

I don't think we're going to go back to what to what things were before the pandemic. You wouldn't remember this, well you weren't born yet, but 9/11. That was just something that happened in America but that's changed so many ways things are handled now, here and in other countries, and that's just something that happened here.

SM 1:07:42

Airport regulations and all of that.

WV 1:07:44

Yep. That. But COVID that's been all over the world, so I don't see how it could go back to what it was pre-COVID. I don't think it's going to. Like maybe we'll go back to social gatherings where no one will need masks, but I don't think we're going to go back to what it was pre-COVID. I don't think I don't think it's possible.

SM 1:08:20

It'll be one of those events in the history books years from now of life changing, world changing moment.

WV 1:08:29

I think it will.

SM 1:08:34

I guess, knowing what you know now, after, you know, the last year and a half, almost two years of experiencing this. Is there anything you would've, you wish you would've done differently kind of earlier on or at any point during the pandemic?

WV 1:09:00

I think I wish I could have done more to maybe help Mark and Aaron cope. But even then, I'm not sure what I could've done exactly.

SM 1:09:15

Mmhmm. Kind of hard to go from full life schedule to like nothing going on.

WV 1:09:25

Yeah.

SM 1:09:28

And I guess, what kind of advice would you give to, you know, obviously, we saw like the 1918 pandemic, which was a lot of people have been compare-- comparing this to that. If this kind of event were to happen in the future, or even just a general like world changing experience like this. What kind of advice would you maybe give to future generation while going through either another pandemic or another world changing experience like this?

WV 1:10:02

Don't be afraid to trust your own instincts. Don't. Don't take media for gospel, do your own research, and and don't be afraid to come to your own conclusions. Just because no one else thinks that way doesn't mean it's wrong. So.

SM 1:10:36

Any other kind of thoughts on anything?

WV 1:10:45

Um.

SM 1:10:47

I know that's a very broad, open thing to say.

WV 1:10:50

Nothing I haven't really cover, nothing I haven't covered.

SM 1:10:56

Well, that is all the questions I had. That was very, very helpful so thank you.

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