

Transcript of Interview with Morgan Keena by Alex Hinely

Interviewee: Morgan Keena

Interviewer: Alex Hinely

Date: 07/11/2020

Location (Interviewee): Meridian, Idaho, USA

Location (Interviewer): Colusa, California, USA

Transcriber: Alex Hinely

Abstract:

Morgan Keena, a seventh-grade social studies teacher from Meridian, Idaho, reflects on her personal experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing several topics, ranging from politics to parking lots, Morgan discusses distance learning, life in quarantine, and the response of the local officials. Suddenly bound to the confines of her apartment, Morgan vividly describes the difficulties associated with teaching students virtually and provides insight into at-home entertainment, including running, puzzles, and video conferencing with friends and family. Morgan examines the response of government officials in both Idaho and her home state of North Dakota, including Mayor Robert E. Simison, Mayor Lauren McLean, Governor Brad Little, and Governor Doug Burgum. Morgan also reflects on the experience of finding out her sister tested negative for COVID-19 after possible exposure at a bar in Scottsdale, Arizona. Looking ahead, Morgan expresses concern about members of the public not wearing masks and the prolonged process of developing a vaccine.

Morgan Keena 00:05

Alright.

Alex Hinley 00:07

Okay, so I just want to start off by saying thank you for doing this interview with me. So, I just want to—like a caveat to start this, this is your story, this is your COVID-19 experience. So, I don't want to interject too much of my own opinions and beliefs and everything into this. I really want it to be your raw statements. So, don't be taken aback if I don't respond with too much enthusiasm or interest. I really just want you to tell your own story here.

MK 00:41

Alright.

AH 00:42

So, do you have any questions before we begin or...

MK 00:44

Nope.

AH 00:46

Okay. So, let's start with some background questions. Could you tell me the date and time?

MK 00:53

It is Saturday, July 11th, 2020, and it is 11:44am Mountain Time.

AH 01:01

And could you tell me your name, and the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis? For example, your job, extracurricular activities, and otherwise?

MK 01:12

Okay, my name is Morgan Keena. I am a seventh-grade social studies teacher. Currently, I teach summer school. So, I'm teaching sixth to eighth grade social studies classes in person. Otherwise, I love to read, I read a lot of books, and I like to do yoga, puzzles, that kind of stuff.

AH 01:38

Where do you live, and what is it like to live there?

MK 01:41

I live in Meridian, Idaho. So, we are a suburb of Boise [Idaho]. Boise right now is seeing this like—well, I'll backtrack. I'm from North Dakota. So, the entire Boise metro is actually like twice as big as the entire population of the state of North Dakota. So, it's a huge change. I've only lived here for about two years. So, it's very, like metropolitan, big city. And currently our COVID cases are like spiking beyond belief. I think we've topped Florida in percentage increase lately. So that's been interesting.

AH 02:24

So, when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it? And how have your thoughts changed since then?

MK 02:33

So, I think I started hearing about it in January, I saw a news article come across my Facebook page, and it had come from China and I was like, well, that stinks. [laughs] But as things went on, I remember seeing like coronavirus—like the common cold is a coronavirus. So, you know, it is what it is but then as more and more stuff came out about it, it was suddenly like, this is kind of bigger than we thought and I remember—like I was teaching, and I was playing CNN 10. And they were like comparing the flu to COVID-19. And they said, "Tons of people die from the flu every year, the infection rate's pretty high." Like, "It's not really any cause for concern." And then I feel—I felt like I like blinked and suddenly our schools are closing, and we were being told to stay at home and quarantine and all that kind of stuff. So, it was wild.

AH 03:29

What issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

MK 03:35

I think my biggest concern is like people just not taking this seriously. I don't—it's—it's been difficult just because, like, we—I'm a big advocate for like listening to the professionals in a field. So, if we have doctors and scientists and researchers coming out and saying, "Listen, this is not good. This is bad. This could kill you." I think we should listen to them. And it's concerned

me that it's become such like a hot topic for politics. Because I don't think that human lives should be a source of political discourse. I think that we need to remember that we're all human, no matter what our beliefs are, and we should value people's lives. [dog barking]

AH 04:22

So, switching over to employment. You stayed earlier, you're a teacher. Has COVID-19 affected your job? And if so, in what ways?

MK 04:32

Yeah. So back at the end of February, we started—our district like, canceled our—like once a month, we meet as a subject across the district and they'd cancelled that we had this like, I felt like a secret meeting almost, and they told us, they're like, "Listen, this virus, it could come here, it could close us down. We don't know. So, here's what we're going to do. We need to start thinking about two weeks of distance learning materials." And we kind of got like a crash course on—crash course on distance learning. We're fortunate enough that our district has been one-to-one for the last few years. So, all of our kids have had devices in their hands. Our IT [information technology] department had already distributed hotspots to kids, just so that they had Wi-Fi at home to do their regular homework. And then I was fortunate to be in a subject that our textbook and curriculum is already entirely online. So, we kind of started gearing up for that. And then March 16th we got the email saying, "Don't come in tomorrow, we're closed. We're meeting on Zoom at 8:00am." So, we all kind of met, and they said, "You have the next four days to kind of get yourself together and get your lessons submitted to us." Just in case anything happened to us health-wise, the district needed to be able to take over our teaching responsibility. And then the week after that was spring break, so we just kind of held off for a week. And then we jumped into it. So suddenly, I was spending eight hours—eight to 10 hours a day, really, in front of my computer, because I felt like it was really hard to just walk away because kids are popping in and out so often, I was like glued to my computer. But thankfully, like my classroom's primarily paper free. We're on our devices quite a bit. So, it wasn't so much like nerve-wracking, figuring out how to do distance learning, it was more or less like figuring out when we were going to make that transition to distance learning.

AH 06:36

Okay. Has COVID-19 changed your employment status in any way?

MK 06:42

Nope, I—still a teacher. The COVID-19 impacting our state education budget has been a little worrisome because it sounded like they were gonna freeze teacher salaries even though I felt like I was doing two jobs at once. But I think we've got that figured out. So, yeah, I'm very fortunate to be employed still and being able to work from home. [door opening]

AH 07:09

What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the economy more broadly?

MK 07:18

In terms of my employment, I'm worried that—not so much that I will or won't have a job, it's more or less that our schools aren't going to be funded in a way that we can function throughout this next year. Idaho came out saying that we're going to have a \$99 million budget cut to education. And one of the items that they were cutting funding on was technology. And this is not the time to be cutting technology. So—and at that point, I was like, cut my salary, like freeze my salary, I guess. Use that extra money to put technology in the hands of kids. Because we have 200,000 students across the state that don't have access to the technology that we do. So that's been an issue. Overall, for the economy... We were doing really well, and so now I just—I want people to wear their masks and do that kind of stuff. Because if we just do the little things like that, I think our economy is going to feel far less impacted because our businesses and such will be able to stay open without fear of being closed for weeks on end because our cases spike and spike.

AH 08:29

Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employment of people you know? If so, in what ways?

MK 08:37

Yeah, so my mom actually just started a new job at the end of February. And her company does the construction of hotels, which obviously, the hotel industry took a huge hit going into this. [dog barking] So it was basically like, she went from working 40 hours a week to working 10 hours a week and they basically— she basically said like, "Just keep me on at the bare minimum." Like that way she felt like she had a job that she could come back to instead of just being flat out laid off. So that's been—I mean, I don't think she really minded it, but it still probably wasn't great. And I know there were a lot of people who were laid off. My sister works in the service industry. So, she's—she was a waitress and she just was done for like four months and she's fortunate that she lives at home still, so it wasn't a huge deal. But she was—everything that she spent her days on was just gone suddenly.

AH 09:37

So, speaking of your—your mother and your sister, let's transition over to talking about family and household. How has COVID-19 affected you or your family's day-to-day activities?

MK 09:52

So, I live in Idaho with my husband, and he's a medical student, so he ended up going entirely online. They closed the school down, which meant he was just like holed up in his office all day studying. On my end, I obviously spent more time in front of my computer teaching. But we have like positive changes. Like we started going to the park for like two-and-a-half hours with our dog every day and just kind of like sitting outside because there was no one else there. So that's been good. I actually took up running, which is just bizarre. That's not anything that I've ever been interested, ever. Like sweating, nope, don't like it. But, yeah, I took up running. So that's been interesting. But other than that, like we used to, or at least I used to, like meet up with friends all the time, go out for happy hour, go out for drinks. And suddenly that was gone. And so that felt weird because I'm such a social person that not being able to see many people every

day. All sudden I was like, "Oh my gosh, what am I gonna do with myself?" So, it was—positives and negatives for sure.

AH 11:00

How are you managing day-to-day activities in your household?

MK 11:03

Well, sometimes I don't remember what day it is. [laughs] I feel like it all just—like kind of like went together. I started like writing down what day I washed the sheets because usually I do that on Saturdays but I don't—I don't remember what day Saturday was or I—you know, just like that kind of stuff. I started like planning out my grocery runs, and my Costco runs just because it was something to look forward to. Because there was nowhere else to go. The library even closed. I couldn't even get books. So yeah, it was—it was interesting. It's—I made a lot of lists of like things I wanted to do post-quarantine or things that I should look forward to each week. So that was—that was different.

AH 11:49

Has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate and communicate with friends and family?

MK 11:55

Yes. Like Zoom happy hours became a really popular thing for us. Like three weeks into our stay at home order, I think our stay at home order was like seven or eight weeks long, but three weeks in, some friends and I started like meeting up for like parking lot parties. We literally just like sit in a parking lot in a very large socially distanced circle and had some beverages and just hung out because that's all we could do. We used to get together like once a week and watch *The Bachelor*. We couldn't do that anymore because *The Bachelor* got canceled. So, it was—yeah, it was really different. And I actually like—I would just be sitting at home some nights, just doing a puzzle or whatever, and all of a sudden I'd be invited to a Zoom meeting and my—it would be my mom and like my five siblings were all on there, and there we all were. So that doesn't happen so much anymore. But definitely at the beginning it was—it was fun, I guess.

AH 12:58

What have been the biggest challenges that you have faced during the COVID-19 outbreak?

MK 13:04

I can't go anywhere. [laughs] I just—I love to travel, and oddly enough, like we went to Arizona, just outside the Phoenix area, on March 13th. And then we flew back on March 16th. And then the next day, we weren't able to go back to school. It's like, I feel like I got one last trip in. But yeah, it was just—I don't like sitting at home by myself. [laughs] And even though my husband's home, he's studying for his first round of board exams. So, he's kind of holed up for eight to 10 hours a day. So, it's just been me and the dog hanging out.

AH 13:49

So, you mentioned going to the park, you mentioned your—your virtual happy hours, puzzles. What have you, your family, and friends done for recreation during COVID-19?

MK 14:00

Well, we ended up buying an Xbox, which isn't for my use at all. My husband's been playing Xbox. I signed up for like Book of the Month. So now I get books delivered by mail every month because our library didn't open 'til like two weeks ago. I also started doing this like—I don't even know what to call it. It's called NetGalley. And basically, since I'm a teacher, I can get advanced readers copies of different books for free, and then I just read them and review them. So that's something I've taken up to kind of fill the time, and that way it helps me grow like my library for my classroom, but I also have something to do. We started baking. I feel like everyone started baking at the start of this whole deal. Like sourdough bread was very popular. I wasn't really into that but like lemon scones. Now I make lemon bars, lemonade, everything with lemons, apparently, I feel like making. So yeah, that's kind of filled our time.

AH 15:04

How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community?

MK 15:09

It's kind of weird, because Idaho overall seems to be more on like the conservative side of life. Which, I mean, a lot of like northern Idaho isn't super high population or anything like that, but where we are, we lean a little bit more like to the Democrat side of life, I guess. So, overall, people have been very responsive to what's been going on. They, for the most part—like wearing masks wasn't a whole—it wasn't really an issue right away or like staying at home wasn't an issue right away. But then I—as time has gone on, I guess that's kind of like shifted a little bit. People—we've had like multiple protests now outside the state capitol about having to wear masks or about stores closing down. So that's kind of been interesting to see. I don't know, it's a really interesting dynamic here because we have a really—kind of like a mixed bag of how people feel about this entire thing.

AH 16:23

Have you seen the people around you change their opinions, day-to-day activities, or relationships in response to the pandemic?

MK 16:33

Yeah, I mean, we're staying home primarily. Day-to-day activities, absolutely. In terms of opinion, absolutely. Like, some of my husband's classmates, right away were like, "This is nothing." Like, "Why are we concerned about this?" And as the information's been coming out, they're the ones that are staying home now and they're not going anywhere. So that's been interesting. And my mom was the same way. Like, my mom flew to Chicago—or flew to Texas right before—like, right as this was starting to hit and she was sitting in the Chicago airport. And she's like, "These people all have their masks on. Like what are masks gonna do? They're not going to stop anything. At least they like keep them from touching their face." But now she's the one that's been sewing masks constantly. And she's the one wearing masks everywhere and hand sanitizer like crazy. So that's been interesting to see as well.

AH 17:24

So "self-isolation" and "flattening the curve" have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. How have you, your family, friends, and community responded to requests to self-isolate and flatten the curve?

MK 17:41

So, Ida—there was like this group of businesses in Idaho that started this thing called Crush the Curve Idaho. And so, they worked really hard to get testing for essential employees or essential workers. So that's kind of been interesting to see that response to it. Like I got a message one day that was like, "Hey, you're a teacher, you're an essential worker, come get tested for COVID." And I was like, I haven't really gone anywhere. Like, that's—like self-isolation or like social distancing, we took pretty seriously. The only place I ever went was the store and, well, a parking lot every now and again. So, I just—I guess we just tried to do our part and I didn't ever get my COVID test because I didn't ever feel like I had any symptoms or anything like that. So, I didn't want to take that test from someone who did feel like they had symptoms or were at risk for it.

AH 18:31

Has COVID-19 changed your relationships with family, friends, and community?

MK 18:36

There's been a few people that like we've grown closer to, I guess, just because like they live in the same apartment complex as us. We see them more frequently. And I feel like even though we were told to like social distance or like self-isolate, if you try and do that on your own, or just like you and one other person, that is not going to be good for you, like in terms of mental health. It's just not gonna go well. So, we kind of picked like quarantine buddies, is what we call them. And so, there's like a group of us. There's only six of us, because that's all that was allowed at the beginning. But we just—we were together every day. We'd go to the park together, we'd go exercise together, we would have dinner together. And I feel like it just kind of like helped keep us sane.

AH 19:27

Have you or anybody you know, gotten sick during the COVID-19 outbreak? What has been your experience in responding to the sickness?

MK 19:36

I haven't gotten sick. My husband also has not gotten sick, thank goodness. My younger sister though... [laughs] She was in Phoenix for her 21st birthday right when this whole thing started to happen. And the news article came out of Phoenix, or Old Town Scottsdale, saying that someone had been at a bar and they—they'd been to three different bars and they had tested positive for COVID like two or three days later. So then, naturally, my sister starts feeling ill and spikes a fever. And this is all still really new. It was like the end of February, very beginning of March. And so, people weren't really sure about this yet. But my mom and sister just like quarantined at home, didn't go anywhere. Like my stepdad went and lived at the lake, just so he wasn't around them at all. So, she was actually like patient zero, in terms of testing in North Dakota. So, she like got a—they gave her an influenza test and that came back negative. And then like the first

COVID test that they did give—that they—like the state had their hands on, she was tested with. And it came back as inconclusive, which I don't know what that means but... And then the third one came back, and they said, "Okay, you have a COVID string, but we don't know which one yet." So, she stayed isolated after that, and then they came back and were like, "Nope, it's COVID-63 or some random one or 36, I don't even remember. So, they said, "Nope, you're good to go." And she went on from there. And I don't know, it—she spent a lot of time at home, [laughs] just because no one knew, and she wasn't going to be responsible for like spreading this to the entire state. So that was good on her part. But yeah. it was very—kind of scary, just because no one really knew how it impacted people or young people at that point.

AH 21:35

So, in what ways do you think that COVID-19 is affecting people's mental or physical health?

MK 21:43

Well, I don't think social isolation is good for anyone. Almost ever. I—you can't just be stuck with your own thoughts in your own head all day, every day. And in terms of physical health, you know, if you're not getting up and moving every day that's—you're gonna—I don't know, it's just not good for you, I guess. It's—sitting all the time isn't good. I went from walking 14,000 steps a day to having my watch reminded me once every hour like, "Hey, you haven't moved in the last 49 minutes." Like, "What are you gonna do?" It's like, "Oh, crap. Well, I guess I should get up." So now that I'm back to teaching, like my watch is like, "Wow, look at you. You're working, and you're moving, and this is crazy." So, yeah, I think if you—in terms of like physical health, if you like either couldn't go outside because you don't have the space or like you just didn't have any place to like, get your body moving, it was probably detrimental for your physical health. And that's not what you want when you're fighting a pandemic, right? Like, you don't want to have underlying health issues. So, it was not good for anyone.

AH 22:53

So, in terms of information, what has been your primary news source during the—during the pandemic?

MK 23:03

Well, a few different things. Social media is a big one. As a social studies teacher, though, I'm a huge proponent of checking for reliable sources and making sure that the information that comes from those sources is factual. So, I saw a lot of like random crap that was just being shared. And that bothered me because I knew that people were getting misinformation. And that's not what we need. So beyond social media, like the nightly news, the national news, our local news station, just like trying to gather whatever I could. NPR [National Public Radio] had a great—they did a great job covering it, and I feel like NPR is usually a pretty reliable source. So that was kind of my—how I started my day each morning, is just kind of checking in with them and seeing what they were saying. But then there were sometimes where I was like, this is too much. Like this is causing me anxiety. I don't need to be listening to this all the time. So, I'd just like to take a break from social media and the news and taking in that information.

AH 24:09

Have your news sources changed during the course of the pandemic?

MK 24:20

I think if anything, like I'm just probably more aware of how much politics plays into what they're reporting on, which is really unfortunate that that's the case. But, you know, they can take one statement and spin it one way or another. Just—I don't know, it's—as you—as you spend more time listening to the news or reading the news, you start to realize, like, how biased they are. And it's unfortunate that it is that way and that a lot of people just like feed into those. But no, I think if anything, I've just kind of like started to keep gathering information from multiple sources rather than just getting information from one.

AH 25:01

What do you think are important issues that the media is or isn't covering?

MK 25:09

I think overall, there seems to be like a disconnect between the fact that like this virus is impacting humans, like real life humans. They're not just numbers to be put on a bar graph and they're not just like bodies to be counted. Like that's—when someone dies, like someone is losing their mother or their father, their grandfather, aunt, or uncle, and I think that is what's being lost in the media. Like, you don't see a lot of that. You see, like, "Oh, the death toll today is blah, blah, blah." Like, no, we lost actual people, like US [United States] citizens, nonetheless. Like, I don't know, I just—I feel like there's not enough humanity in it.

AH 25:58

So, turning to the government now, how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

MK 26:10

So, in terms of like statewide, I wasn't really happy with Governor Little right away, just because he was just kind of like... [dog barking] He would give these meetings where he wouldn't really—he wouldn't really say a whole lot and that kind of upset me. I actually started listening more to like North Dakota's governor just because I trust him, and he had a news conference every day at 3:30 to talk about these different things that they were facing. But in terms of Idaho, wasn't—there wasn't a lot coming out in terms of information. Locally, like the city of Boise, their mayor has been very on top of things. She's been putting in like—kind of like mask mandates and like gatherings were limited to X amount of people. But where I live in Meridian, I think I heard our mayor say something once. Like, he just didn't do anything, he didn't say anything. So, I—honestly, I'm not even sure how he responded to it. I think I've been taking my cues more off of what Boise is doing, just because that's the only person that seems to be saying anything. And I—I don't know, it's—it's unfortunate. We're literally like right next to each other, and only one half of this area's responding to this.

AH 27:30

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

MK 27:38

So, I—I don't know, I—it's—it's tough. But I did see something the other day about how like Europe responded to this differently because each country like just came down with like, I don't want to say mandates, but like, "This is our plan of attack for this entire thing." Whereas the United States has left a lot of it up to like individual states. Which makes sense, right? Each state is going to be different. You can't treat North Dakota the same as you would treat New York. That's not gonna work well, but I wish that there was more like continuity across the board in terms of what it looked like, I guess. I don't know. I feel like there's a lot of pushback against the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and Dr. Fauci, which I think is very unfortunate that we are taking these professionals in their field and just kind of saying, "No, I know more than you." Well, I—I think they're in their job for a reason and we should listen to them.

AH 28:36

Okay, so looking to the future now, has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends, and community?

MK 28:49

Probably. Yeah, like I've—you know, I live so far away from my family. I've definitely noticed that like, I'm calling my parents more or my sister and brother and I are FaceTiming more. Just kind of staying in contact, just because—like you don't know what could happen. Like when my little sister had this like first initial scare of having COVID it was like, "Oh, crap." Like, "What do we do?" So yeah, that's—that's changed. And in terms of friends, like you don't—and even like coworkers, you don't realize how much you rely on your coworkers for your socialization or for like, just daily interaction until you can't see them anymore. And you realize, like, these people aren't just my coworkers anymore, like they're my friends, and I miss them, and I want to see them. So that's—that's been interesting. And now that I am seeing my coworkers since I'm back at school teaching, like my day just feels so much more complete, because I—I get to see those people and talk to them again.

AH 29:48

How does this pandemic compare to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

MK 29:55

So, like, the only thing that I can really kind of remember is in 2009, I think the H1N1, like the swine flu became a thing. And I don't remember a whole lot from it. I mean, I was in like eighth or ninth grade at the time. But what I do remember is that there was a vaccine or something available, and my mom took all of us kids to the Fargodome, which is like our local event place in Fargo [North Dakota]. And we all lined up and we got a shot. And I don't know if it was just like the influenza vaccine or if it was like an H1N1 vaccine. I don't know what it was, but I just like remember that occurring. And this obviously is far more than the 2009 experience. I mean, I never in my wildest imagination thought that our schools would be closed for months on end and that people would be saying, "Don't go anywhere, wear a mask." Like it's just beyond anything I think I could have imagined.

AH 31:01

So, what do you imagine your life being like in a year?

MK 31:05

You know, I don't know. My husband, he is starting his clinical rotations August—in August. So, he's going to be working in local hospitals. I'm worried that that means that I'm going to be spending more time at home now. Because if he has a COVID—COVID exposure and comes home, I'm not going to be the one responsible for spreading it further into the community. So, I have a feeling that we're going to be spending a lot of time at home. Yeah, I don't know. I—you know, I'm really glad that I'm in grad school at this point, because if I didn't have that to keep me busy, I don't know what I'd be doing. So, I'm just glad I have stuff to keep me busy. But yeah, I have a feeling that we're going to be pretty similar to what we are now because vaccines take a really long time to establish, and I don't think we're gonna have one by this time next year. And if we do, it's probably going to be in its trial phases.

AH 32:09

What do you hope your life is like in a year?

MK 32:14

Anything pre-pandemic. [laughs] I hope that I'm still teacher, I hope that we are both still healthy, that everyone that we know is healthy. That's my hope. I hope that we get to reopen and go places without wearing masks and not have to worry about staying six feet apart from people, but I don't know.

AH 32:38

So, one final question for you. Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

MK 32:49

Communication is key. We need to make sure that we're getting reliable information out to people as quickly and as seamlessly as possible. I also think that there needs to be—we need to acknowledge the professional experience of our scientists, our researchers, our physicians, our nurses, everyone that's been dealing with this. I think we need to listen to them and take their story for what it is and realize that this is a lot. Other than that, I think... In terms of like education and schools, teachers took the time to flip the entire education system upside down in a matter of days or weeks. And that's huge. So maybe, you know, realizing that we don't need state testing as much as we think we do. Our kids, you know, rely on these relationships with us. I hope that the education system changes for the better. Given what's happening right now with school reopenings and teachers are basically fighting the state governments and the federal government for that matter, I think we need to listen to our teachers more and realize that they're professionals in their areas as well. So, I don't know. I think we need to do a lot of communicating and a lot of listening and learn from experiences.

AH 34:11

Okay, thank you for taking the time to share your COVID-19 experience.

MK 34:19

Of course. Thank you.