

Transcript of Interview with Lisa Steig by Isaiah Steig

Interviewee: Lisa Steig
Interviewer: Isaiah Steig
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Abstract:

Lisa Steig, a guidance counselor at Memorial High School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, reflects on the social, economic, and political impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As students were required to learn from home, Lisa recalls the efforts made by local school districts to ensure access to adequate technology and educational resources. Lisa expresses concern with the shortcomings of the economic stimulus plan, sharing stories of local families in need of support. Turning to family life, Lisa shares the difficulties associated with having her mother-in-law located in an assisted living facility where physical contact with outsiders is prohibited and discusses the outlook for her daughter's upcoming wedding. Lisa also discusses several articles and news pieces featuring positive stories of hope, encouragement, and support during challenging times, expressing her pride in the American spirit and gratitude for living in the United States of America. With great optimism, Lisa looks forward to finding a cure for the virus and returning to regular life once the pandemic is under control.

IS: All right. We're live. We're recording.

LS: I want to make sure we're recording, Honey. Yep.

IS: All right.

LS: Wait a second. I gotta make sure we're recording.

IS: I—I—I think it's working. [dog barks] Oh, shoot. Dammit. Okay.

LS: We're working remotely. This is what happens. [laughs]

IS: I can always cut this out too, because—because I have a—I have a video editor on my—on my computer. So, I mean, I can just kind of—I can just cut the beginning until we actually start the interview.

LS: But you know, Isaiah. Honestly, if—if we're gonna talk about what it's like to work remotely, this is exactly it. I'm on the phone, dog barks. You know, kids are crying in the background. Not at my house, I don't have little kids, but teachers with young children, you know.

IS: Yeah, this is just part of it. Yeah.

LS: So, we'll do—we're all doing our best. So anyway, you have questions, go ahead.

IS: Okay. Yep, yep. So yeah, just to start, my name is Isaiah Steig, and the date today is Friday, May 1st, it's 2:20, and why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself, Mom, and tell us what you—what you do.

LS: Okay. My name is Lisa Steig. I am a high school counselor at Memorial in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I work with students in grades nine through 12.

IS: All right, awesome. And what do you think—what do you think's changed the most since—since classes moved to online?

LS: So many things have changed. It's—it's really difficult to kind of know where to start. But number one, we are away from our classrooms, we're away from our offices, and most importantly, we're away from our students. Students are the reason we go to school every day, students give us the energy and the drive and the motivation to—to do our work, and not seeing them is very difficult, but we are doing the best that we can from home. We're calling students on a daily basis, we're emailing kids, we're calling parents, we're emailing our colleagues. We definitely are working as hard as we can remotely but definitely miss the classroom, miss our resources, miss just being around our colleagues and students.

IS: Yeah. I mean, what do you think's the—the general attitude, do you think, of—of—of like students and staff like comparatively? Like, is there a general mood that like students kind of like don't like the online format? And I mean, I know—I know it's been stressful for instructors to learn all this new stuff.

LS: Yeah, I—I really do see—when we first started, I think everyone, we were all kind of in shock. Like, we have to do this, and we all are very dedicated as far as the staff perspective, so we were working long days, long nights. There really wasn't a separation between school and home those first couple weeks, because we were just always working, trying to get this set up for our students. And as the weeks have gone by, students are—are figuring things out, and I truly believe, and I say this to my students every day, I think they are doing the very best that they can. The top students are—are doing their work diligently, but I—I think some of them, through my emails with some of my students, they find it difficult to just stay fully engaged in the process, because they miss their teacher's instruction, they miss classroom labs, they miss conversations with their—with their classmates, they just miss the whole learning environment. So that is, I think, the biggest change. Students that struggle, I think, find this extremely difficult. So, you know, we have been reaching out. I made a home visit last week to a family trying to connect with—with students that have disengaged. I—I've learned through all this that students that, especially students that struggle, the classroom teacher and the classroom environment and everyone in the public school system, it could be private school system too, but I'm public school, those kids need—need all of us to keep them in school, to keep them motivated. We have those relationships with them, and I think that's key for most of those kids to keep coming back to school to learn. Parents have said to me of—of struggling kids, they don't really know for sure

how else to get them going and get them motivated, and they wish they could come back to school to be with us.

IS: Mm-hmm.

LS: So parents have been very supportive of us and like missing school and missing our involvement with their kids, because they think that that has been instrumental in keeping them going with school, kids that maybe find school more difficult. It's the relationships, I think, that keep them coming back. And now that is very difficult with us being away from school and away from them. So, you've got kind of two ends of the spectrum. You've got the high achieving kids, they are working really hard and doing everything they need to do, I think find it difficult, but they're doing it and then you have kids that struggle, and I know there's a bunch of kids in the middle and we want to meet all of their needs. And—and that's the challenging part, because we know there's kids out there that we hope we're not missing, but there could be, but we're working, you know, as hard as we can to reach all of them.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And I mean, you mentioned that you've actually got—gotten to go visit some students, you know, to—to talk about their grades and stuff. Like, is—is that something that's sanctioned by the school? Or is that something that you like do on your own time? Or...

LS: Home visiting?

IS: Yeah.

LS: No, it's-it's certainly not. We—we have to follow social distancing.

IS: Mm-hmm.

LS: And so, my—my goal with this particular family is I had reached out multiple times and hadn't heard anything. A senior student who's at risk of not graduating, who did not have technology. So that student had to have a computer to have even a chance to graduate from high school. So, I was able to book a computer, and then I found out where their child lives and went to the house. I went and knocked one time, no one answered. So, I went to another person's house, because I know the boy's friend, and no one was at that house. So, then I went back to that house, knocked again, and then someone answered. So, I stepped way back, and I left the computer on the front step. The mom came to the door, I left the computer, I left a note with handwritten instructions about how to start with remote learning, because some students we don't want to ever take for granted. I mean, some students really don't know how to begin. And I—I believe that to be true. Some other people might be like, "Well, what do you mean they don't know how to begin? You click on the course." Some kids just don't know how to begin. So, I wrote down one, two, three, four, a list of steps, very clear, in how to get started with remote learning. I think our teachers have been fantastic giving out those steps, but kids that struggle might need to hear it two or three times to actually kind of take that initiative and kind of get on the class and get working and make it work. So, in that particular case, it worked out well, and I—I brought some popcorn and some snacks and get that homework done. I want to see that kid graduate. When you're a high school counselor, you will see that we are all just, like when it's

seniors and it's graduation time, we are just like on them all the time. "Well, you got to do this. You're so close." And we get them. I only had one non-grad last year out of like, I don't know how many children I had, like maybe 90 seniors last year, only one non-grad, which was too many, but only one. This year, I fear we're gonna have more because of the situation.

IS: Yeah, I was actually gonna ask. I—I actually wanted to ask how many students do you oversee, like in total, nine through 12? How many kids do you think that is?

LS: You know, we have estimated, it's really not bad. We have four—there's five counselors at Memorial [High School]. Last year, the numbers were a bit higher. This year, I'm gonna guess around 375 to 380. But with that being said, we all have many extra duties, like I'm the scholarship coordinator. So that's a huge part of my job. I love that part of my job. I'm also academic and career planning lead for the building. So, I'm organizing all of the lessons each month for ninth through 12th grade students. We have over—I think over—20, 40, 60, 80—over 80 homerooms. And so, I organize lessons with all those homerooms, with all those teachers, ninth through 12th grade, with my partner from North [High School], which—Kendra Pagel, she's fantastic. So, we do work closely with North High School. I should mention that, because they really are wonderful. So again, those extra duties come in. I work with our school-aged parents. So if we have students at school that become moms or dads at a young age, I also work with those kids and make sure that they have the supports that they need so they graduate from high school. So, we have the caseload of kids, our alphabet, which I have SL through Z, those kids, freshmen through sophomore through seniors, and then we have those extra assignments that we do. I'm currently working on senior awards right now. So that'll be pretty special.

IS: Nice. Are there any—are there any special awards just for this crazy period? Or... [laughs]

LS: Well, I don't know. It's—it's so different when we talk about seniors' graduation. I should send you the letter that I—we as a counseling program wrote to our seniors. We just sent it out on Thursday and as soon as I sent it out, I had two parents and a senior girl write me a letter back. They were just so touched by it, because we recognized that the pandemic has really kind of thrown a wrench in plans as far as, you know, spring activities, prom, graduation, all those special things that make your senior year that, especially second semester senior year, really special. But we just said to the kids, we recognize all that, we hope that they see this as an opportunity in disguise, and we truly mean that. When—when students—when—you know this as a young college student, things happen in life that we get set back sometimes. We all get set back, we all have disappointments, we all have hurts, we all have, you know, pain in our lives at times, but we've asked our students to keep their heads up and keep fighting, because our country, we need them, we need your generation, our current college students and certainly our—our seniors that are gonna to be going off into the workforce, going on to school, joining the military, whatever it is that they do, we need them. And then we said at the end that they are the hope for our future. And so are you. You know, so we tried to end it that way. And one of my senior girls wrote me the sweetest letter, and I thought, you know, we did something right with that message, Isaiah. I think that the seniors really appreciated that, because we—we don't want to act like—we acknowledge the sadness and loss without having graduation ceremony, because Isaiah, in my whole career, last year graduation, and I—it was one of the happiest days of my life. This is my 24th year as a school counselor. I wish Stephanie could have been there too, you

could have been there, but I was an usher last year. And so, we have it at Zorn [Arena]. You know Zorn, it's UWEC [University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire]. Go Blugolds, right? I'm an alumni, I'm a Blugold, my undergrad work. But the kids will walk across Zorn Arena in their caps and gowns. I was ushering, so when—when we hit SL through Z, the end of the alphabet, my students walk across the stage, and they're walking down past the chairs where the graduates were the center of the Zorn Arena, and my kids, I mean, they skipped to me, they ran to me, they hugged me, their little tassels were swaying, and—and they said some of the nicest things to me. Like, I knew at that moment that my work with these kids, it's really what I am meant to do, even though it's so extremely difficult, you know, that graduation time is so important. So even though we can't give this—the Class of 2020 that experience at Zorn, we are working so hard on preparing a virtual graduation. And again, it's not the same, that's part of this whole pandemic and what we're forced to do, but we want to honor them in some way. So, we're working with the administration, with community, with parents, with our students to create a virtual graduation and a senior awards program too. So, again, just so different from the traditions, but we're hoping that we can make this new kind of a reality right now still something special for them. That's the goal.

IS: Mm-hmm. Nice. I kind of want to back it up a little bit. I know you mentioned that during the first early weeks that work and home like really blended together quite a lot. Like, do you want to talk about—more about that? How it's affected your home life, having to work from home, and how that's gonna change things at home, like on your off time.

LS: Yeah, I could even talk about your—about your little sister too, and what it's been like for her, being a 17-year-old working remotely. But from my perspective, those first two weeks of school—even now I still really struggle with it, because I'm working at the dining room table. And when I'm working, I get up and I am on—I'm on my computer from very first thing in the morning—I work all day, and I would bet you almost the entire staff does the same thing. And then at 3:30, 4:00, 4:30, you know, I always worked long hours anyway, but I would leave school 4:30, 5:00, and I'd come home, and for the most part, I was done. And then I'd maybe do some work on the weekends, or I might come in early or stay an hour, and I'd be done. Now, and I would bet this with a majority of staff, we are working all day and many hours at night and many hours on the weekend. And you'd think, how can you do that when you're not with kids in the building? It's just so incredible, the amount of emails and phone calls that we're getting now, because our kids aren't with us. So, it's like—it's just so much harder. So that's why, and I can't—like we had the distance, like we had a short commute between school and home, and there was a little transition. You know, there's no transition now. It's—it's like school—school is like—it's all school. And I've had to work really hard to separate that. So, I make sure that I take time for my daughter that's at home. And my goal was to make sure I've taken care of, you know, family and home as well. So that's been—that's been hard. And I would bet you everyone's feeling that same... I feel for the teachers that have young children. I know some of my colleagues have young children, a one-year-old, a six-year-old, a three-year-old, and they're trying to teach and do all of this when—with small children, you know? I can't imagine, but they're so dedicated, you know. They're—they're doing the best—and they're doing a good job.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. If you had to guess—if you had to guess, how many emails do you think that you're getting a day now compared to like what a normal school day was like for you? How many phone calls now compared to what a normal day was for you?

LS: Well, normally, I get a ton of emails. I would count—normally, I would guess I probably get 60 emails a day, sometimes more. And really, during busy times, I—I would get—I—I count maybe 100. And I get so many emails, and I think a lot of the staff do. But as school counselors, it's a little bit different for us, though, because we work with all the teachers, all the administrators, who work with all staff in a—in a variety of ways, and then all of our kids and our students—our parents. So, we get emails from students, we get emails from parents, we get emails from colleagues, we get emails from principals. I'm the scholarship coordinator, so I get emails from businesspeople, scholarship people, foundations. It—it's just really—and it—it's good. I mean, I like every part of it, so it's not a complaint. I mean, you know this, I love my job. But just working from home has been very difficult because a lot of things you could just answer quickly at school, if you see your colleague in the hall, or you see your colleague in the office, or you see your colleague in the commons. You know, you answer these questions throughout the day. And now it's all done with emails and phone calls. It's just not the same. The other thing that I think that has been really difficult too is, we just can't see the smiles and the laughter and hear the laughter. Like, you get that camaraderie with kids every day. You know, that's been such a huge change. So, I think I missed that most. Like, I have kids, these kids—like, for example, next week, kids are having dress up days. Isaiah, you're gonna love this. They came up with business on the top and party on the bottom for dress up days. So, like kids have to wear a suit on the top and then they can wear their shorts and their sandals on the bottom. It just makes me laugh. Business on top, party on the bottom. I mean, how cute is that?

IS: I wouldn't know anything about that for my video meetings.

LS: Isn't it just a hoot? I mean, I just—it—I miss—I miss that part so much. And—and that one of my senior girls, that was before school let out, I—I said—I put—in the Student Services, I always put kindness quotes up. And I had a kindness quote, and I had the heart shaped, or the dots of the eye shaped like a heart. And I said to one of my senior girls, "I—I wrote that quote." And she's like, "I figured you did, Mrs. Steig." And I said, "You like my heart for the dot?" She's like, "Oh, yeah." And I said, "You know, I've never claimed not to have issues." And then she goes, "We love your issues, Mrs. Steig." And I'm just like—you know, those are the things with kids, Honey—you know, that's what we miss. You know, so here I am at home, I'm sitting at the table, you know, and I'm emailing and I'm calling, you know, but you just—that's the hardest part. And I think our kids, our students feel the same thing that that's what they miss too, besides just the instruction and the classroom resources, but that relationship part.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

LS: We're making the best of it, you know. We're—we're strong, we're fighters, we'll get through it.

IS: Yeah. Is there—is there any—is there any like one or two questions that like you've been getting a lot from students or staff? Like, is there anything like a lot of people are asking, like kind of the same question? Like, what-what are people concerned about?

LS: I think keeping kids motivated is the biggest concern. It's been very hard keeping kids engaged with online learning. A lot them. I can't say for all children. I'm sure some students enjoy remote learning and are excelling with remote learning. But to answer your question, the most commonly—common email I get and phone calls I get is, "My—my child's struggling with this. They're struggling to stay motivated, struggling to get the work in. Can you help us?" You know, so I try to help. It's hard again. You know, I'm here. If I could sit down and have a face-to-face and share resources and talk with a student, it's much—and then I could follow up with them at school during study hall. You know, I can help or send them to the tutoring center or to—Blugold Beginnings has tutors at school. There's things that we can do at school to help with that, but it's much harder when we're not in school. But that's the most common question and concern I get is keeping kids motivated with the online learning.

IS: Yeah. So, let's see. I'd actually like to talk a little bit now just about—about the whole—this pandemic in general. Like, when do you think that—when you think that you first heard about it? Like—like, did you first hear about it in March or—or late February? Or like, do you remember where and when you first heard about what was going on?

LS: Yes. I remember hearing about the virus in a staff meeting, and I think it was probably—well, it would have been—I can remember this. February 24th, I had a presentation in front of the whole—I had to present a suicide prevention seminar in front of the staff on February 24th for in-service. So, nothing—nothing of the virus was talked about on February 24th. It wasn't even in the radar at that point. But then the following week, during a staff meeting, someone had mentioned the virus in China, and that they were concerned that it was gonna get to the United States. And at that point, I don't think any of us really thought how serious this could be. We thought, "Okay, well, we have great scientists, we have great people, hopefully we can keep this out or keep it under control." So, that's kind of when I first heard. I would say it was the last week in February, first week in March is when I first started—I mean, like having it on our radar, like, "Oh, this could really impact us. We need to start thinking about this."

IS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, do you want to talk a little bit more about like—kind of like, what's your—what's your early thoughts were about it? Like—like, did you think like in that early stage, like—like, it—it could be serious or like you weren't super worried about it at the time? Or, like, what kind of information was out there that had you thinking about it?

LS: When I first heard about it, I was concerned for the people in China, and I was concerned for people overseas. I thought this is very serious, I'm concerned for them. I wasn't quite as concerned early on for the United States until we started getting cases in the United States. And then when the scientists started talking about the cases, and how those cases went from one to nine to 13 to 98 to 100. They just kept growing and growing and growing. And that's—that made me feel frightened, like, "What is happening?" That this is something that could impact our country significantly. And—and I just thought, you know, "I'm gonna listen to the scientists. I'm gonna be watching the news faithfully and paying attention." And it did—it just—it just quickly

evolved into closing the school down. I think we had the first notice of school closure, I think it was March 15th or March 14th, because our last day with kids was March 16th.

IS: Mm-hmm.

LS: So, like I said, now today, it's—it is frightening. We just need to be very careful and listen, in my opinion, listen to the scientists and listen to the experts, the physicians, the scientists who are giving us, I think, honest information, I hope, so we can stay safe.

IS: Yeah. How do you—how do you think the state's been—been handling it so far then? Do you agree with—with—with the—with the extension of the stay-at-home order until like the end of May and the school closures through the end of the year? How do you feel about those things?

LS: I've thought—I mean, actually I've thought a great deal about that, because I do watch the news and I see—I see two sides of that—that the perspective on that. Some people want people to go back to work, and they want people to, you know, make money, and grow the economy. And then the other side, what I look at is, again, what the scientists say. And—and to me, I think life is the most valuable part of all this. We have to value life—all lives, whether you're, you know, 25 or 90. You know, I—I think all lives matter. And when I think about what the scientists have said, I do agree with the school closure, and I do agree with a safer-at-home order. And people will say, "Well, we only have 25 cases in Eau Claire County." And my response to that is, "Because we are safer at home." If everybody was—and that's, again, my professional opinion, and people can disagree, but I believe if we were all together in close quarters—you know, there's 1,600 kids at Memorial with hundreds of staff—if we're all in close quarters doing these things, looking at the virus and how it spreads, I'm almost certain we'd have hundreds of cases of COVID-19, not just 25. So, I—I do agree with Governor [Tony] Evers and—and the administration, our administration, fully of what—what they've done and how they've done it. As far as the federal government is concerned, I get—in my—again, my opinion, I feel that there's mixed messages coming out. I see like Dr. [Anthony] Fauci and Dr. [Deborah] Birx and those people, and I think they're honest, I think they're giving us accurate information. And then I see President [Donald] Trump, who will say one thing on one day and another thing on another day, and I don't know how to follow him. I don't know what's accurate and what's not accurate. And again, that's my opinion, other people can disagree with that. But I do—I do trust the doctors. I—I think that those doctors are—they know what they're doing, they have strong reputations, and they're educated people. So—and they're working with the whole country. So, I—I'm trusting those people. So—so, state government, local government—our local government too, I should say, I think our local governments, like our Eau Claire County people and our—our local county governments have done a wonderful job too. They emphasize keeping us safe and keeping our elderly—I—I worry too, like some—some people were saying early on that, "Oh, well, you know, it's the elderly people." You hear comments like that, how someone made a comment that was like, "Well, I'm just going to go do this and you just—it's all gonna be okay." But it's not okay when you have 60—I think we're over how many deaths now? 60,000 deaths?

IS: Over 60,000, yeah.

LS: We need to be careful. So—so, yeah. So, I support the local state government, yes. Federal government scientists, I do. The president, I just see a lot of mixed messages, and I—I don't know what to believe sometimes with him.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Is there anything that—is there anything that—that you think that they could be doing more of, like whether it's state or federal government, that—that that you aren't seeing? Like, is there anything that—that—that you think they should do that would make the situation better as like—like in regards to maybe like more stimulus for regular people or maybe more assistance to small businesses or something like that—that—that that you aren't seeing that—that you would like to see?

LS: Yeah. Well, number one, I think the food issue is huge. I mean, the school districts are just, I mean, I think they're working night and day to provide food, and I think the community is doing the best that they can. So, I think people there, as far as the food, everyone is helping and doing a wonderful job with that. Financially, I know of families who did not get that stimulus check that really needed it. So, I just—and I don't understand how some families didn't get it. I mean, you know, we have—I have a couple different examples where one person was at a temporary position or work position and didn't get the stimulus check because he hadn't worked enough hours and that makes no sense to me whatsoever. You know, if you're an American and you—we are all dealing with this pandemic, every American should get that stimulus check, in my opinion, but there are people. And 17-year-olds can't get that check. I have 17-year-old students who are on their own. And—and I don't understand. You can't get it—you can't get it when you're 17. I—I just don't—I don't understand it. If you're an independent, I still think 17-year-old—there should be either a child credit for families that have a 17-year-old or a kid who was emancipated should get it.

IS: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, yeah. If you're 17, then you don't get the \$500 that the—that the Trump Administration guaranteed for children, and they don't get the \$1,200 that's guaranteed for adults, right?

LS: Correct. And so, we have a lot of families that have 17-year-olds that get no support for that child. And then I have some that are emancipated, that they're just struggling, they've lost their jobs. They have no money and it's—it's scary. It's scary for them. So, the county—I think the county, as far as additional supports, I don't know what else the county could do. I think the county and the state has done well. I mean, the—the stimulus package is more for, I think the federal government to address some of those issues. But as far as the—the meal planning and the emergency care, I think our local and state governments have done a really good job with that. Helping people with rent. I know some of the colleges are helping students with some financial support. But I really do, and that's the honest answer. If I thought something different, I would tell you. I do think the local and state governments are doing a really good job. And even though the stimulus package helped a lot of people, I wish it would have helped all Americans.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

LS: Everyone.

IS: Yeah. Do you think that—do you think that the—the attention of the federal government is focused more towards like—like regular people or do you think it's—it's focused more towards like—like bailing out maybe larger industries and corporations and things like that? Do you think that the resources are being distributed fairly? Or what do you think?

LS: You know, I just haven't read the numbers on it. I mean, that's the way it appears to me. I haven't studied that, so I don't know. But I—I—what I do know is I just wish there was more money and support coming into families that are living in poverty. I just wish there could be more we could do for—for those families. But I've heard that, so I—but I don't know. Like, I haven't looked at how much money—how much money I—I don't know. I mean, I've read studies where money was going so much to the top and not enough to the average American, but I just don't—yeah, I don't have the numbers in my head for that. But I would bet there's numbers out there if you looked it up. [laughs]

IS: Yep, yep. Financially-wise, though, you—you and dad and—and your family is doing okay, financially, though? Have you received your stimulus check?

LS: We did. We did. And that's a blessing. And I want to tell you that I've thought about this so much. I'm—we are—we are the lucky ones. You know, I—thank God I don't work, you know, in a restaurant, or some restaurant people are able to do some to-go work, but a lot of my families that work in restaurants, they've lost their jobs, and they have no income. I—I can still work from home, I am still earning a paycheck, so I'm—I'm the lucky one. And I—I am so thankful because I thought about this, "What if I lost my job?" You know, how frightening would that be? And this is what families—my families are going through that have lost their job. Where's the next check? There isn't a next check. You know, I get the \$1,200 and that's it, you know, and I just worry for these families. At the same time, I don't want them to go back to a situation where they could get sick and die too, because people are getting sick and they're dying. So that's where the government has to come in and make sure that, until this is over, or at least safe, people have money to be able to at least meet their basic needs, their rent, their food, their healthcare, those kinds of things.

IS: Yeah, yeah. It's hard for people to be okay with staying at home and not working if—if they don't have enough money to, you know, pay their rent and things like that.

LS: I know, it's frightening. But no, it is. I hope—I mean, we are Americans—this is the good thing about being an American, because through this—and I'm 51, I don't know if you know that, but I'm getting old. I'm getting older. I have seen time and time and time again—I mean, not a crisis like this, but many crisis in our country and—and devastating, you know, whether it be a hurricane or tornadoes or just horrible things that can happen. Oklahoma City Bombing, you were—you weren't even born when that happened. But all these things have happened in life that have been tragedies, people come together, and that's what—what I've been sharing with my students and my daughter, my one that I have at home yet, is that there's still so much love and goodness in the world, and that's what I try to—so, that's kind of the silver lining in all this. And I created a video—I have a Student Services Canvas course that I—I built, and then my colleagues are building it with me. And I put a video, like I have a Dear Students series in this—in this Canvas—Canvas course. It's not like technically a course with homework, but it's a course

where it's a platform where seniors, juniors, sophomores, freshmen, and families can go to get information on the pandemic and school information. So, I have a Dear Students series, and I talked about that, like, how are my students? How are you, kids? How can we help you? That kind of thing. But just ending it with, even though there's a lot of loss and grief that we see right now, there's still so much goodness, and we have to make sure we look at that, because I worry with the mental health concerns that we had before the pandemic—we had a lot of mental health concerns before the pandemic. With the pandemic, I think many of those concerns have been—the symptoms are much worse for a lot of families and a lot of kids. So, it's important that we are balancing our time. If we think about the worry and stress, we have to look at the positives, because they can kind of help you get out of the kind of the darkness. And that's really important for a person's mental health. So, that's what I've been trying to share. Acknowledge the sadness. You don't want to, you know, not acknowledge the worry, because it's—it's real. And we want to acknowledge that worry, it's important to talk about the worry and the stress, but after we talk about the worry and the stress, okay, what's that next step? How can we help you feel better? How can we support you so you can still go on and—and live a fulfilled life? And what can we learn from these experiences? So that's kind of that mental health side of things that we've been focusing on too with our students and families and with each other. You know, it's hard for all of us.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I mean, I know you mentioned the—the—the Oklahoma City Bombing. Like, is there anything in your lifetime that you can think of that's like—like something outside of your control that's personally affected you in such a way like before this? Or is this just completely unlike anything? Like, I know like 9/11 and stuff, but like does anything even compared to...

LS: I—I think that's a really good question. That's a really good question. I would have to say, I think this has probably been the most frightening experience for me, because it really hit home that my kids could get this. You know, young people have died from this. And so, I mean, I don't wanna get emotional, but that's hard when I think, you know, there's a 27-year-old girl, healthy, that died from this. I have a 27-year-old daughter, you know, I have a 25-year-old, I have a 22-year-old. Oh, you're getting there. You know, and I think—and then the other side of it I've been thinking about, you know, my sister, and your parents, but your dad. You know, Dad's—men—middle-aged men have the greatest—it looks like—and African American men, but—or African American people. I don't know if it's just African American men, but African American people have high rates of the COVID virus, but also middle-aged men. So, I've been worried about your dad more than anything, you know. So that, and I always tell him, "Wash your hands." And you know your dad's like, "I don't," you know, and he doesn't need to. He's still careful, but I just don't think he realizes how much I worry about that. So, to answer your question, I think this has definitely hit home and—more so than what happened in Oklahoma City or Waco, Texas or Hurricane Katrina or 9/11. You know, all these things have happened in our country that have been devastating. But yeah, this really hits home, because it—it could get any of us.

IS: Mm-hmm

LS: But you don't want to live in fear either. You know, so you have to be—it's a balance of being careful and not living in fear. You know, so that's what we're looking at. But yeah, good question.

IS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, do you know—I mean, I didn't talk to grandpa a lot—like do you know how much—how much different like life has changed for like—for like your parents or like—or like for your—for your mother-in-law or, you know, things like that, how they feel?

LS: For the—for the elderly generation, I think for my parents, it's very much the same, because they weren't very active, very social people, so they mostly stay home anyway. So, I feel like they're—it's almost no different for them, I don't think. Now, for your Grandma Alice, Grandma is 87 and living in assisted living. And—and I guarantee you—and I'm really glad you brought this up too, because when you look at this pandemic, our older—our elderly generation, so many elderly people have died from this disease. And for Grandma Alice, we can't see her anymore, because in assisted living, they cut off all visitors. So when we go see her, we set food and this is—we set her—she likes the fish at McDonald's, so we just set it by the door and we have to leave, you know. It's really kind of sad, you know, but that's it. You just can't—you can't go see her or they cut off all services. And so, I just feel like a lot of the elderly people are just so incredibly lonely. Like for my parents, they have each other, which is nice. They still have each other. But for people like Alice, who is alone, widowed, you know, she doesn't even have a pet, she doesn't have a cell phone, you know. So I think for—for the elderly generation in assisted living and nursing homes, I think it's especially, especially difficult, and I just think we just need to wrap our arms around those people and do the best we can to support them from afar. I think people are trying to see images of like—you see images of like the 90-year-old man that will go up to—he was like in a forklift, and they lifted him up to his wife's nursing home window. I mean, some of those stories just touch your heart. You know, and that—those—again, those are the sweet things that we need to remember. You know, there's—that love is still there, but gosh, it's hard when you can't—you can't be together.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. How do you feel about—

LS: We'll get through, right? What's that?

IS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we'll get there. I was gonna say, how do you feel about—about—about progress towards like—towards a solution to like all these problems? Like, have you heard anything about a cure? Like, do you think—do you think the methods are working so far? Or...

LS: I think—I've been watching—every time I see a news story or an article on a vaccine, I read it. I read it from all different sources. It sounds like they're making progress. I don't know what—what that means, as far as, is there gonna be a vaccine in a year from now? 18 months they say. So gosh, that's—that's the uncertainty. You know, I don't know. I—I hope that they can come up with something sooner than later. I did read that this process for the COVID-19 or the coronavirus vaccine is going quicker because more people are volunteering to be a part of the study. Like, they have to find people to like be a part of the study I was reading.

IS: Antibodies.

LS: And normally that's the hardest part. Yeah, something like that. But they were—they've been—you know, though people are volunteering left and right to volunteer to be a part of their studies to help make this process go quicker. So yeah, I don't know. I—I worry about the fall. You know, if things come back in the fall, what does that mean for school in the fall and for our kids in the fall? Are we gonna get back to school and then have to close down again? I don't know. We need that vaccine. And I think until we get the vaccine, we just have to trust our state, local, and federal leaders that they're gonna guide us in the right direction. But we also have to use our own sense too. And if we need to—we need to be washing our hands and the social distancing. And I have masks now. Do you have a mask?

IS: I have something made for me. Yeah, a—a friend is stitching some for me.

LS: Make sure you wear them. I've been wearing them. I have two. I got one from Alice. When Alice went to the doctor to get a checkup, she gave me her mask and then I have another one that I've had on top of the fridge for about six months, so I don't even know where that came from. [laughs] I have two. So, I've been—I've been keeping those just in case we, you know, have to go buy groceries or whatnot. I did wear one the last couple times. So, yeah, we just have to be careful.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So—so you aren't—you aren't necessarily—so—so sure then? Like—like, you can't really see like a light at the end of the tunnel right now? Like, do you see like the end in sight? Or are you concerned about like the long, you know, like the months ahead—the long-lasting repercussions?

LS: Yeah. Oh, I—I am. I mean, when I see those death numbers at over 60,000 people that have died, I don't know how this is gonna turn out. I—we have your sister's wedding in August. I hope that we can gather for her wedding. It might just be immediate family if we can't have a larger ceremony. There's just so many things that have been—have been impacted, you know, by this. I mean, think of all the young people that want to get married and they can't get married or, you know, all the funerals people can't gather because of this. And—and it's the right thing to do. We can't gather. I mean, I think about some of those stories where people did gather. Some families lost three or four family members in the same family. They had gathered and someone had it and it spread to other family members and they died. You know, so this is not something that we can take lightly, I don't think. And then there's people in this country that—that don't believe it. I've seen stories where people just don't believe it. And I—I have a hard time understanding that because people are dying from something. 68-65,000 people, whatever it is now, are dying. There's a concern someplace, and we have to be respectful of all people, not just do what we want to do. I'm all for, you know, people to have freedom and their rights and all of this, but I also need government to say, you know, we need to—like you can't drink and drive, right? You can't text and drive. The laws are made to protect people. So, if the laws are saying you need to stay home to protect people, I think, as Americans, we need to follow the law. And there's some people that feel that that's taking their rights away, and I just don't see that at all. I don't see it as any different than you don't drink and drive, you don't text and drive, you don't go with a group of people when there's a pandemic and possibly spread germs, you know, and—and cause people

to die from it. So, I—I just don't see that as a—like taking freedoms away. I think it's like any other law that's made to protect people.

IS: Yeah, yeah. You don't think—you don't think someone else's right to—to—to gather in like large groups is like more important than someone else's right to be healthy?

LS: Right, to protect people from a potential—like so many people can be asymptomatic, but then you get—and all of a sudden you connect with these people and your—three people are dying in the same family, you know. I just—the laws are made to protect people. So—and that's—I trust that and—and some people don't. Some people are skeptics. They think, "Oh, they just want to take our rights away." I don't see that. I just don't see it. I'm trying to see it from other—the other perspective, like people in Michigan had guns out. Did you see the story in Michigan yesterday? They had—people had their guns out in the Capitol in Michigan, because they were gonna extend the safer-at-home order, and I thought, "My gosh, you know, this isn't about your gun rights or your—you know, this is about keeping people safe." But again, there's that other perspective. I try to see it, and I try to understand it, but when I see the death numbers, I—I just, I have a hard time seeing that other—that other side of it.

IS: Yeah, yeah. I mean—I mean, we—I mean, I think—I think we can all definitely understand though that—that you know that—that some people you know just want to get back to normal, and they might not, you know, think—didn't really think about, you know, other stuff. It's just the immediate like—I—like, "I'm so uncomfortable in like—in this situation. I just want things to go back to normal," even though that might not be, you know, possible right now, but they just want it—think they can make it that way.

LS: You're so—that's so true. I think everybody wants to go back to normal. But, you know, Honey, I wouldn't go to my—our bedroom and pull out my rifle and go down to Madison [Wisconsin] and walk. You know what I mean? And that's just not what I—I would not go and say, "Greg, go grab your gun. I'll grab it, and then we'll go down to Madison, and we'll say we disagree with this." So, I—when I have disagreed with our local government, and I have in the past, I've written letters to our representatives, and I did when I had a case where a student was sexually abused and the local paper put way too much information in the—in my opinion, in the paper. So, I thought the community knew who the child was based on the report. So, I contacted multiple people at the state level and said, "We need to protect these young people, we need to protect their privacy." So, I would definitely voice my opinion if I had a concern about something, but I wouldn't do it by bringing my guns. And, you know, this has nothing to do with guns, in my opinion. I just—I don't agree with that. Those people are doing the best that they can. But I do agree we all want to get back to normal, 100 percent. 100 percent.

IS: Yeah, yeah. I know you've talked a little bit about how, you know, some people are asymptomatic or, you know, like—like some articles say—I know early on they were saying, "Only old people are susceptible to the virus," but then later on it says, "Oh, yeah, well, young people die a lot too." So, like, how do you feel about the—I guess I should say the—the flow of information like regarding the virus? Like, do you think that we know—like, do you—do you think that we know enough about the virus at this point, or do you think that things are still so

fluid and changing like every single day that we still don't quite understand yet, like the—like the—everything?

LS: I think it—I think—I think it's getting better. I still think there's so much that is being learned through the scientific studies about the virus when people are dying and their symptoms, what that looks like to the hospital people and what that looks like to all those scientists that are studying it. So, I think it's getting better, where they've been able to say, you know, "Make sure you wash your hands, keep social distancing." They're learning how it's spread, and that's what's so scary about this virus is that it seems like it's just transmitted so easily and in so many different ways. And I think that's the scary part for people. Gosh, I—I don't know. I think—I think it is just—there's so many—still so much uncertainty. So hopefully over these next couple of months, hopefully by the summer and, well, even the next six weeks, I'm hoping to have like some more answers. Like, are we gonna start to get back to normal? And what—when that happens, I hope that more people don't start to die because we have to get out at some point. You know, I don't think we can have safer at home for a year and a half until we get a vaccine, you know, so there's gonna have to be some changes as far as when we do go back to work. They talk about contact tracing, I don't know how that's all set up, but I don't know, there's just a lot that needs to be learned and studied and people have to be careful.

IS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Well, since—I think we're kind of gonna wind down a little bit here. So—so, I have—I have two more questions for you.

LS: Uh-huh.

IS: So, yeah. So—so the first one is like, what—what's—what's one story that like—that like you've seen that like—that like you really like—that you really enjoyed or like what you found inspiring about people—like how people are dealing with like this virus and everything in a positive way? Like, is there any—any—any stories or anything you've seen people doing for each other that—that you really liked or something like that?

LS: Yes. That's—that's a good question, because I'm an optimistic person even in the midst of darkness. There's that light, right? We always talk about the light.

IS: Mm-hmm.

LS: Oh my gosh. Okay. I—I don't know, I think it might have been New York City or maybe it was Los Angeles, all these people came out of their homes, on their balconies and in their windows, and they were singing "Lean on Me." And I started to cry. I mean, I literally was like crying in the living room, because it touched my heart. Like, you know, that song "Lean on Me" and they're singing it and they're—they're banging their pans and they're, you know, clapping and—and so much of that, it was, I think, a message to our healthcare people and all those nurses and those doctors and—and people that are in the nursing homes, you know. And our teachers too, even though we're not unsafe, but the teachers, Honey, and our educators. I mean, they are doing so much to take care of our kids with food and teaching and—and keeping—keeping them connected so they're not isolated. You know, everyone, parents, students, everyone is doing something to try and make this better because that's the best part of being an American, I think,

is that through times of crisis we do come together. But to answer your question, that touched my heart incredibly, when those people were all singing. And then I see—I saw an image of a doctor, who, you know, as far as the face masks stuff, he actually had like grooves in his face from just wearing all that protective equipment, and people that are caring for all of these patients, and the stories of—of people with their children that have been sick or with their parents that have been sick, people that have died, you know, there's just been so much of that trauma, but that was such a happy,—a happy story. And I—I will remember that for always.

IS: Nice, nice. And then I guess—and I guess one more thing is that what are some things that—that you miss the most or some things that—like some things that are like top of the list for you when—when—when we're able to go back to normal?

LS: Oh.

IS: Any restaurants or anything? Any activity--group activity you miss?

LS: Yeah. You know, number one, I absolutely miss—I mean, besides my family stuff—we couldn't get together for Easter, right? We put—I don't think we're available to get together for Mother's Day. You know, hopefully we'll get together for Haley's wedding and when Lindsay comes home, you know. So, it's been hard being separated from family, but we have to do it because I could be asymptomatic. I could give it to you, son. You might think the other way around. But there was a young father and son that died. You know, they both died. The dad died first, and boy died three days later, just around you and your dad's age. So that's why we just have to be careful, but I do—I miss that, and I can't wait to get back to see, you know, the laughter. And I miss—when people are in the store now, you notice people have facemasks, so you can't see people smile anymore. So, like I miss smiling at people, because I would always say hi to people, smile at people.

IS: Oh, yeah.

LS: You know, just make small conversation. You don't see people smile anymore, so I miss that. I miss talking to my students every day. I miss—I just—I miss having that—that ability to kind of just be free and not to worry about getting someone sick. Could I get you sick? Could you get me sick? You know, you're—you're going getting your groceries, someone's coming. Instead of saying hi, you know, you're like, "I gotta go the other way." You know, because you don't want to spread germs to somebody or get something, you know. So, you know, those are hard things. But I think once we get back definitely to seeing people smile, hearing the laughter again, having people feel at ease, because right now I—you can just feel people are worried and they're stressed and, you know, just having people feel healthy and happy going out to eat again. You know, high school kids. You college students too—they like to go out to eat, you know. So, they can't go out to restaurants, you know, all these kinds of things. But—but like I said that silver lining through all this, I really, really, really, really hope that people are going to have time to reflect on, "Gosh, we've been pretty darn lucky in this—in this world," you know, compared to other countries, we're really lucky. And so we just, you know—even though if we lost our job, we'd have—I mean, it's awful, awful, awful, but we still—we still are so blessed to live, I think, in this country and have the support of the healthcare system and just the values that we have,

even though there's—there's worries across the country. Overall, there's still, I think, a lot of goodness out there. So yeah, I just can't wait to be together again with family, hug my kid. [laughs] Hug all you guys. I can't hug you. I gotta do this. [makes heart sign with hands] [laughs]

IS: Yep. Oh, my gosh. All right. Well, Mom, are there—are there any closing remarks you'd like to give? Anything else you want people to know, if somebody 50 years from now is looking at this?

LS: I just—I really enjoyed this interview, Isaiah. And I—I really do believe, like I said, at my age, being 51, that I've experienced a lot in my life. And certainly, this is something new and different. But through crises, people come together. And that's what makes America, I think, one of the best countries in the world. And I'm not just saying that. I—I have seen through the crisis of people that have died, or people that were sick, people that recovered, so many people coming together to support people. And I really think that's happening still. I mean, granted, there's financial concerns, and there's, you know, food shortages, and we're doing all the things that help families. So, it's been hard. But through all of that, I guarantee there's so many stories of love and hope and inspiration. And that's what we have to hang on to, I think, to get us through. And be thinking of the good stuff that's ahead, right?

IS: Yeah, for sure. Yep. All right, well, I think our time is just about closed. So, I think we can wrap it up on the interview. So, thank you so much, Lisa, Mother, I really appreciate it.

LS: Oh, good to see you. Okay, I'll stop recording.

IS: Yep. Stop recording, yep.