

Interview with Abby Sobolewski by Elise Schrader and Kristopher Strebe

Interviewee: Abby Sobolewski

Interviewers: Elise Schrader, Kristopher Strebe

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This interview was recorded as part of The Covid 19 Oral History Project, a project of the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute associated with The Journal of a Plague Year: A Covid-19 Archive.

Elise Schrader (ES) 00:00

All right. So we are recording now. My name is Elise Schrader, and I'm here with Abby Sobolewski and Kristopher Strebe. The date is April 5, 2021, and the time is 2pm. This interview is being conducted over Zoom, and I'm currently in Indianapolis, Indiana, Abby is currently in Louisville, Kentucky, and Kristopher is in Janesville, Wisconsin. So Abby, I just want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gifts document that you signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open-source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. Recordings, demographic information, and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal the Plague Year COVID-19 Archive in the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Abby Sobolewski (AS) 01:14

Nope, sounds great.

ES 01:16

Okay. Taking part in the study is voluntary, you may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you're entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in the study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded in digital video and/or audio format and may be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcriptions of my interview, copy of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share, and the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive in the Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions? In addition to your signed document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

AS 02:25

I understand and agree to these terms. Okay.

ES 02:30

I'm also asking that you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under the following license, the COVID-19 Oral History Project, the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive, and the trustees of Indiana University acting through its agents employees or representatives has an unlimited right to reproduce, use, exhibit, display, perform, broadcast, create derivative works from, distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media now existing or hereafter developed in perpetuity throughout the world. You agree to that?

AS 03:07

Yeah.

ES 03:13

And then finally, I want to ask for a verbal confirmation that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

AS 03:23

Yes. Okay.

ES 03:25

And now we are on to the questions. Could you please tell me when and where you were born?

AS 03:33

I was born in Louisville, Kentucky on June 16 of 1995.

ES 03:41

Could you talk a little bit about what it's like to grow up there?

AS 03:47

So I grew up in a small suburb of the city, actually in a different district per se. I grew up in Oldham County from second through high school, and it was a small town feel; everybody knew everybody. Lots of close knit relationships. Lots of small town restaurants and shops and stuff, and everybody was well interconnected. Lots of family gatherings and friend gatherings. And then athletics were a big part of where I grew up and how I grew up, and we were always- there was always something to do and we were always doing something. So I am very thankful that I got to grow up here.

ES 04:35

Could you describe your relationship with your family?

AS 04:39

So it is my mom and my dad and my little sister, Josie. She is I'm 25 and- so she is 22-23. She just turned 23, and we are very close, but we are polar opposites. And we grew up doing similar things. We both played soccer. She was more into animals; I was more into, like, doing all the girly things. But our opposites, like the terms opposites attract. That's why we were so much closer because we were different. And my mom and dad are still married,

they've been married for almost, it'll be 27 years this month. And they have always been really close. And we've always been really close, I've always been able to talk to them about things and ask them for help and use them as, you know, a resource, or I've never been afraid to go to them, per se. And we would go on vacations when we could, but a lot of our time was spent together at soccer tournaments or, you know, walking with our dogs and things like that. So I like to say that we had a very active and normal family that did a lot of things together, per se.

ES 05:54

And what would you say school like was school was like for you?

AS 06:01

So I went to public schools K through 12, through two and a quarter I was in Jefferson County, which is the Louisville area. And then we moved in October of my second grade year. So then I went to Oldham County Schools, rest of two through 12. And that is the best public school system in the state. So I got a very, very good public education. And I always loved school, going to school, the social interaction of school. I wasn't always the best student until I really got to college. You know, I struggled to read until I was in about second grade. And it just kind of clicked. But regardless of the academic side, I loved to be there. And I loved to talk and, you know, ask all the questions. I'm still very inquisitive. So school was definitely my jam. I loved summer, but I was always happy to be in school. And I felt prepared to go to college, having been an Oldham County student.

ES 07:00

What made you decide to become a teacher?

AS 07:05

I when I was in eighth grade, at a school called East Oldham Middle School, I had a math teacher. And I was in, uh pre algebra-algebra, I don't remember at this point. But we had to do a project where with ratio and make it kind of elementary level. And so that was our one of our final projects for the year. And then we actually went to the elementary school and worked with the kids and taught the kids. And that was really the moment when I was like, all right, I think this is what I want to do. And I've always loved kids. And again, I loved being in school. And so I knew that this would kind of be the best of both worlds. So that one activity when people ask me that question, that's what comes to my mind of, that's when I knew. That's when the the plan started to go into motion, I guess.

ES 07:57

So when you were in college, did you ever question continuing with education? Or is that always what you plan to do in college?

AS 08:06

So I graduated high school in 2013. And then, like a month before I got to school, I changed my mind and decided I was going to do business. And the only reason I decided that I was going to do business because I knew what a teacher was going to make. And I knew that was going to be really hard for me financially to make that little of an income. So then my first whole year at school, I took like regular Gen Ed's that you had to take. And then I took business classes and sociology classes. And I don't want to say I wasted my time, but I realized very quickly, that's not what I wanted to do. And so the fact that I did Gen Ed's I didn't waste a year per se. So I was not behind

in any means. And then when I came back to start on my sophomore year, I was full go for it for education. So yeah, I thought I was doing something else. And it was very apparent very quickly that I number one didn't care, and then number two wasn't great at it. So you know.

ES 09:15

How would you describe your first few years of teaching?

AS 09:24

In less of a few words: complex, exhausting, and rewarding. Complex to the fact that you don't really know what you're doing until you do it. And teaching is not a one, like one model or one mold isn't going to fit every kid. So I mean, if you have 25 kids, you may need to adapt a lesson 25 different ways, and then if something doesn't work one day, do you have to fix it the next day? So it's like a puzzle constantly changing, and- or like a Rubik's Cube, like, you're- I may never finish that Rubik's cube by the time I retire or when I become an administrator because it's constantly changing. You know, you're constantly you're learning new things about your kids, you, you're getting new strategies, new curriculum to try. One day, this kid has a great day, the next day, this kid is doing this behaviorally like- there's just- it's never easy is not the word. And then for, I mean, exhausting, it's the most exhausting job there is, I would bet my life on it, but it's the best, it's the most rewarding job there is. You know, I come home, and, you know, Gus will say, like, "Are you done? Are you done?" and I'll still be sitting there working till, some days, we go to bed, because there's just stuff that I have to do to be ready for the next day. But then, you know, I have a week like this to recover, and then I'm ready to go again. But then rewarding, of course, now I've seen so many kids changed, both socially, mentally, academically. And I've had a hand in doing all of that. I would like to think I've played a crucial role in some of these kids that generally needed a role model, but don't have that at home. So mean, that goes back to the exhausting part as well, worrying about- worrying about them at home. You know, it never stops. So, but complex, exhausting, and rewarding is how I would describe my job, especially the first three and a half years. three and a quarter, three and three quarters. Sorry.

ES 11:40

So the COVID-19 outbreak made its way to Kentucky by March 2020. Do you remember what your first thoughts were when you heard about it?

AS 11:50

Yeah, I was actually in- So the very first week of March, I was actually in Alabama, Auburn, Alabama, with Josie for her vet school interview with my mom. And the week before that I had had the flu. So I was out of school, what we think was the flu, at least because we didn't have a COVID test. And so I was out of school every day, but one- or half of a day. And so I basically missed that entire interaction with my kids. And then I took off Monday and Tuesday to go to Alabama. And I remember on Monday, Gus texted me and said that there was a COVID case in the UK Hospital, which is right by his apartment. And I was like, alright, and so then basically, it just hit the fan. After that. We got home Tuesday night and went to school on Wednesday; Wednesday was normal. Thursday, all the chatter started to happen. And then it was that night that the press conference that- I can't- or Bashir came on and announced that he was not mandating, but school should be closed for the next two weeks, like COVID was here. And so then as soon as he said that, my district announced that we would be out of school for the next two weeks, then Spring Break would happen, and then hopefully, we'd come back to school after spring break. And so then I went to school the next day, which is Friday, and I sent my kids home with what they needed, like not every- all of their items, just like a few things. And I hugged them goodbye. And I said,

"Alright, I'll see you in three weeks." And then lo and behold, I never saw them again because number one, we never went back to school. And then guess when I moved here to Louisville. So yeah, I'll never forget that span of time. Monday, he told me I was gone. And then Thursday happened and then Friday happen. And then it was never the same.

ES 13:49

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

AS 13:56

In regards to school, or just in general?

ES 14:00

We can start with general, and then you can do school next.

AS 14:05

I guess when I- you know, I don't think I'm very anxious person, but I think just the fact that we didn't know anything about COVID was what really kind of made me worry. You know, I, I think I was also very naive about it. I thought we would go back to school in three weeks. And so at that point, we did not want masks, we just didn't know. So, I was like- we would just sit there and we'd be like, Can we go to the grocery store? Can we go out to eat? Like, what can we do? And I just remember, we just we just didn't know if- We would go round and round with our conversations about you know, how serious is this is, should we be out of school? All the things we just didn't know. And then with school, I mean, I would guess you're asking more questions about it, but just with my kids not being in school for even just that three weeks, I mean, it was detrimental. And so now we're a year and a half later. And some kids, like in JCPS, for example, they just went back to school in person, the high schoolers did today. So it's been a full year that they have not been in school. So I guess, initial worries with COVID, it's just we didn't know, we didn't know how long it would last. I mean, I'm one of those naive people that thought it would be over at just way quicker than- we're over a year and doing it's still going on. So if I answered your question, yeah.

ES 15:39

So what was the hardest adjustment for you to teaching virtually?

AS 15:46

Oh, I'll try. I mean, all of it was hard. But if I had to think about the hardest part- So I'll answer that two ways. So in Scott County, before we move to the beginning, when I was still- Last spring, the hardest obstacle was resources and accessibility. So for example, I taught in a Title I school, and we are a brand new school. And we- over half of our population did not have technology to be successful in virtual learning. So at that point, I mean, we weren't even virtual, really, it was paper packets. And it was just honestly, a disaster like it was survive and advance pretty much. Like get these kids done with the school year, and then we'll come with a plan for next year, so that the resources for the kids was extremely, extremely hard. Last spring, but then this year, being in Oldham County, I have, we are still a Title I school, but not nearly like what I saw in Scott County. And so every family has access to technology, whether it's their technology, or we were able to provide it through the school, as well as hotspots for families. So the kids have the technology, that has not been an issue, access to resources, but then the most- the toughest part has been, you know, getting kids to physically be there. You know, these kids are eight.

And then- so I mean, because I teach third graders now. So they're eight or turning nine. And I mean, I maybe have two that were responsible enough to know when they need to get on, know how to use the password, know how to get on the Google Classroom, if mommy and daddy weren't sitting right there, or they have divorced parents or- so that was extremely, extremely hard. And I can only handle- I can only call family members so many times to remind them that Fred has a meeting at 9:30 or, you know, send an email or send a text or all of those things. And if mom and dad have to work, and they need the computer, then Fred misses his meeting. And then therefore, he missed math for the day or doesn't know how to do his math. And so that was absolutely- I mean, there was no effective solution, except for if they didn't get on, they didn't get on. So I'm thankful to not be doing that anymore.

ES 18:13

So were there any benefits at all to teaching virtually?

AS 18:20

Um, so the second go around- So we started the school year, August- We were virtual mid August to early September, in school, September to basically the week before Thanksgiving. And then- So then Thanksgiving, until very early January, we were virtual again. So all of December, the rest of November, beginning of January, we were virtual. And with my school, now I have to be very intentional with something that's called RTI response to intervention. So you have tier one, tier two, and tier three. Tier One is like what everybody gets. So when I'm teaching a lesson to every single kid, no matter their ability, that's tier one. And then tier two, let's say I have five kids that are like missing the skill or maybe below grade level, then I would pull them at a different time of the day, and reteach that skill or reteach a foundational skill or something. And then tier three is like even more intensive instructions, even smaller group, but I'm not responsible for tier three. That's what an intervention teachers are for. So doing tier two was much easier, virtually, because I could set my meetings at a certain time on certain days of the week. And I- there were no interruptions except for interruptions at the child's home, but like I was sitting at my table or in this chair at home, and then I have those three kids, and I didn't have the other 15 around me talking, doing something else, needing my help. So that I said to my team and went back to school, I actually finally felt like a good intervention teacher, because I was able to just focus on solely on those kids and not worry about the rest, which kind of sounds terrible, but it was just like, for the one time, the first time, it was just them, and not me looking at them, and then me here and you know my behavior kid over here off task. So yeah, that was for sure if I had to say a benefit, that was the best part.

ES 20:24

So what was it like having to start out at a new school and having everything be virtual at the beginning?

AS 20:32

Um, I think it would have been worse if I was not familiar with the district, if I was not familiar with some of the people that I was working with, if I didn't kind of know how the district went, because again, this is where I grew up. So I was home in a sense. And then actually one of the women that I work with on my team, is good friends with- or not good friends, but friends with my mom, me and my sister and her daughter used to be on a cheerleading team together. And we were super tiny. So I knew her, which was really, really helpful as well. But the hardest part, honestly, it was not the new school, it was the new grade. I- because I had taught four years, or for three years in fourth grade, which I knew really, really well at this point. And then they decided, alright, well, we need you to teach third grade. And I was kind of like, Huh, so that was kind of the toughest part. But just, I

mean, me as a person, I think, you know this, I ask a ton of questions. I'm not afraid to ask a question, I'm not afraid to, you know, have my opinion or speak my mind. So I think that helped me not fail, like, think before you can swim kind of mentality, like I just did I what I needed to do and being able- to be knowing ahead of time, like I knew in April, that I was going to work for the school and be in third grade. So I was able to prepare over the summer and talk to my team. So it wasn't like I got hired in August and started two weeks later. So the preparation was key. But man, their virtual world was very different than my NTI experience in the spring with my former district. So that was kind of a learning curve. But it was a learning curve for the kids too. So I don't know, it wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be. And I had a good team to help me along the way. So, but I was definitely thankful, although anxious to go back to school when we did in September.

ES 22:37

So you mentioned that you have gone back to teach in person, could you describe what it was like to actually go back into the school to teach?

AS 22:46

So, I mean, if you think about elementary school, these kids are, you know, they've got germs, they're all over each other, you know, they're sharing materials, you want to sit together so they can work together sharing stuff. I mean, everything. Like they're still lovey dovey, like, I can hug them, I can hold their hands, you know, all the stuff. We couldn't go out and do any of that, especially back in September, when I was like, we are fresh, one of the only districts in the state going back to school, we had to follow strict, strict, strict, so I had to put my kids in desks, or like in rows, like we're doing state testing from day one, they have to wear a mask all day, as do I, except for when they are eating, they have to wear one outside of the playground, they cannot sit with a group of students for longer than 14 minutes. Once you hit that 15 minute mark it has to be documented, then if one tests positive for COVID, and all the other ones have to quarantine. Just all- we had to submit seating charts, line charts, I mean, everything. Like I'm supposed to submit seating charts for my kids, when they come to my table for RTI and like, I didn't do that; I couldn't keep up with it. You know, I mean, hand sanitizer go lower, washing your hands every five seconds, like scheduled bathroom time, because we can't just let kids go to the bathroom and just a whole new- I mean, it was insane. And like beings- I had, we were not vaccinated yet. You know, I have older grandparents, your family's older, really so like, just, you know, the struggle of that I have to go to work, but I'm around germs all day long, and you don't know where these kids come from, and who they've been around. And it was, it was a lot but um, from September to now, I would say it has gotten better now that teachers are fully vaccinated. And, you know, we've been doing this for a while. We kind of know what we can get away with and what we can't and what we have to take super seriously and what we can- Like now we know how to share manipulatives appropriately and all this stuff. So it was, it was absolutely wild. I remember going to- going there the first day back in September was a Wednesday. And just feeling like I was a brand new teacher all over again. And just, I mean, just having no idea. Like it was gonna go how it was gonna go. As long as the kids kept their masks on all day, and I got them home on the right bus, like, I didn't really care. Just making sure that they were safe, and I was safe. And it was just insane. Absolutely insane.

ES 25:33

Overall, how would you describe the effectiveness of your school districts response to COVID?

AS 25:41

Well, my district has been gung ho getting kids in school, unlike other districts, for example, JCPS, which is Louisville. They just- elementary went back to school. Okay, so rewind. So my district wanted to go back to school at the very beginning of the year, but Bashir recommended that we do not. So we didn't go back until September, which was earlier than his recommendation in the first place. So we were one of the only districts in the entire state that went back to school, because our district believes-not that others don't-but that in person learning is what's best for kids. And I can't say that I disagree. Um, they have had- I- overall, I would say it's effective. We have had- there have been some- I don't even want to use the word breakouts, but like kids have gotten COVID. That can't be necessarily attributed to the fact that they were in school. But other kids have had to quarantine. One of the big things that my district did that is different than almost every other district in the state is they created something called the Virtual Learning Academy. So for example- so kids, like if I were a mom, and I had a elementary or high school age student, I could have elected to enroll my kid in the Virtual Learning Academy. And we hired separate teachers, virtual learning on that end was completely handled by this group of people. And so when I came back to school, in September, I had kids that were on my roster, but they were VLA kids, Virtual Learning kids, so I didn't have anything to do with them. And then, so that took- so when we were in person that took the Virtual Learning aspect off of me as a classroom teacher, and they were- families were still able to keep their kids at home, if that's what they felt was safer for them. And so that took- that was helpful for those families. And it was helpful for us as regular classroom teachers, and that was available K through 12. Whereas in Scott County, my former district, the teachers right now are having to do virtual and in person at the same time. So my friend that teaches fifth grade, she has to zoom in her kids that are at home for her reading lesson while she's at school, and still work with them while she's working with our kids in school. So that has definitely been a huge blessing and well doing of my district, even though I know it was more money that they had to spend to hire teachers and all that stuff. It was just definitely better. To number one, give those people the opportunity about what they wanted to do, but also help us out. And then in regards to us being back in school, I mean, our surrounding district, the biggest district in the state just went back to school, mid March, and those-that was for K through five-and those kids still are not going to school every single day. They're only going two days a week. So the little girl that I nanny over the summer, she's only going on Thursdays, Tuesdays, or sorry, Thursdays and Fridays. And then she's virtual Monday through Wednesday. And then high school just started. Middle and High just started today. So they had been virtual for over a year. So I don't know, I think a lot of people were very frustrated by teachers that were older or had older families were frustrated at the fact that we went back so early, but I definitely think they've kept in mind what's best for kids, especially K through five. And being in school is what's best for them. So I would say they handled it pretty well for what was thrown at them.

ES 29:34

Yeah, teaching during the pandemic has definitely affected a lot of teachers and made them like reconsider if they still want to be teachers. So has the pandemic made you reevaluate future career choices?

AS 29:50

Um, no. If honestly, if anything, it's honestly kind of reinforced the fact that I want to be an administrator one day. I'm in school. I'm almost finished. Right now I see the light at the end of the tunnel for my rank one in administration. And there are several things that I've seen both positive and negative, that I would maybe continue to do or do differently as an administrator. And just knowing that teachers, teachers need an advocate, you know, every teacher needs an advocate, whether it is, you know, a team member, or your principal, your assistant principal, your guidance counselor, you know, I don't think that teachers get enough credit for what they're doing.

You know, when I was virtual, many- I know many families- you know, there were many people that thought we should not be getting paid for since we were at home. And that, you know, was really, really hard to hear as someone who, you know, busts her butt for these kids every single day, so it has not made me not want to be a teacher. There are many days when I wish I could have a break, you know, at once every other week, because it's, like I said that word in beginning, exhausting. But no, if anything, this has made me see that so many kids need a person in their life that not only supports them academically, but mentally and socially, like, you know, I'm not just teaching kids how to read and write, I'm teaching them literally how to be a good human. And that is going to be even more prevalent with what they've suffered from having to be at home and being stuck on video games. So no, it's- it's been hard. And there's been many, many days where I would love to just quit for a minute and maybe come back like a week later. But no, it's made me realize how important my job is. And sometimes you suck it up, and, you know, get over it, pretty much.

ES 31:52

So outside of work, how else has the pandemic affected your day to day activities?

AS 32:02

Day to day, so now it's pretty much- it's pretty much normal now. But like, back in the very beginning, you know, I couldn't go to the gym, which was really, really hard. We, you know, worried about going to the grocery store. We love to go out to eat. And so we really miss doing that. And like, at least in Lexington, where we used to live, the parks were close, so we couldn't take our dog Tucker to the park. And like that was super hard. Like, we'd go on like four walks a day, because we just had nothing else to do, you know, especially since I wasn't working and then, you know, Gus wasn't in school in person. So it just made I think that, you know, Gus and I were forced- forced is a bad word-but we had nothing else to do except for to spend time together, to watch TV together, to talk about whatever, to cook together, like, literally nothing else. But time together took place from March. Until, I mean, I guess even over the summer, that's literally all we did, and going to work was really, really good for him because he needed the structure and, you know, the separation, but just not being able to do those things was really, really tough. And I know he missed the normalcy, he thrives on, like, you know, a schedule and structure and stuff. So, but now, I mean, like, I have to wear a mask when I go to the gym, and that sucks, but it's normal at this point. It's okay. And, you know, now that we can go- we can pretty much do everything at this point with, you know, still precaution and things. But not being able to see our families was really, really hard. I know that was really hard for him. And all that stuff. So just the the non normalcy and the lack of routine was really, really tough. But it was honestly probably better for our relationship because we were forced to, you know, we- like I said we had nothing else to do but be together, and so we talked about so many things and you know, we moved up here together officially so. Who knows? May have been a blessing in disguise. I don't know, but it wasn't all bad.

ES 34:24

Yeah, um, you mentioned not being able to see family a lot of the time. So what was it like to celebrate the holidays during the pandemic?

AS 34:36

How did I do that? Is that what you said?

ES 34:38

Yeah, like, what did you do? What was it like?

AS 34:43

So for- I guess I'm thinking primarily, so Easter, and then, um, Thanksgiving and Christmas were- were different. Especially I'm thinking primarily Thanksgiving last year, it was literally just me, my mom, my dad, my sister. And then Gus was there too. And especially, we- I mean, I have a bigger family, but not as big as your all's family, as Gus's family. And it was just the five of us. And it was, I mean, it was just surreal. Like, we just sat there and like, we Zoomed. We Zoomed with, you know, his aunts and uncles and cousins. And that was, well, I think that was really helpful for him. I think that also made him really, really sad to know that, you know, he wasn't doing his traditions and spending that time with his family on his favorite holiday. I know, that was really, really hard. And then, you know, my, I'm still very fortunate to have all four of my grandparents and two of them actually live, you know, 20 minutes from my parents, but with them being older and not, you know, in great health anyways, like, we didn't even go see them, and we dropped food off for them on their porch. So well, you know, there's still joy from celebrating the holidays and being thankful. And, you know, as much as I love Christmas, it was still just different and hard, knowing that you couldn't see all the ones that you loved and wanted to hug and give gifts to and all that stuff. So still little bits of light in the hard time, but it was- it was tough. And I'm looking forward to you know- I'm vaccinated, Gus is halfway vaccinated. Our grandparents are, our aunts and uncles are. So I'm- I think Thanksgiving is going to be really special this year to have all of us back together. So.

ES 36:51

How have the people in Louisville responded to pandemic?

AS 36:58

Um, I don't want to- I don't want to say terribly, but I don't think it's been a very pleasant experience. You know, I- you know, not speaking politically, but I personally think our governor has done an okay job, you know, he literally got elected, and then, you know, all heck broke loose with COVID. And he had to tell people that he had to wear a mask, and nobody wanted to wear a mask. And I mean, people have been not very pleased with what has been put upon them, I guess, or what has been asked of them. And then all the things with, and I know, this is not just in Kentucky, it's nationwide. But people were not pleased with the education situation and how some districts were in person, and some weren't. And, again, that teacher shouldn't be paid and masks are stupid and COVID isn't real. And there's definitely been a lot of negative- towards I think, COVID-19 in general. But I will say I think COVID has helped a lot of people exercise more and be outside more, like our parks have-every weekend-are so full of people, because they can be outside and not have to wear a mask. So I think that's been really, really good for the city of Louisville. I'm like looking for things to do. And I think a lot of people have stepped up and supported local businesses such as restaurants, you know, not many have, you know, had to close and stuff. And so I think that's been really awesome as a community of people, but in regards to like, believing in COVID, and wearing masks, I would say that's been not great for the city of Louisville. But then I know, at least like last week or something or two weeks ago at already 40% of the state is vaccinated. So that's been pretty awesome. There are going to be, you know, people who believe they should get it and people who believe they shouldn't get it. You know, you can't- not everybody's going to, people are gonna do what they want to do. But so I would say both positive- positive response and a negative response has happened. It hasn't been all great, but it hasn't been all bad.

ES 39:16

Yeah, um, so in Louisville The Kentucky Derby is typically a large event that the city celebrates, and especially with families like yours. So what was it like to have it postponed?

AS 39:30

Oh, man, it was so sad. It was so sad. And for the first time in years, it was beautiful. Like, I mean, sunny skies, not a cloud. And I mean, it's the past couple years it has rained or it's been cold and you know, that hasn't stopped people from going and celebrating. But I mean for the first Saturday-and first Saturday of May for literally as long as I can remember-there- like we didn't have family here to celebrate the Derby. You know, my dad wasn't, you know, trying to place bets and you know, we weren't making lilies and like we just weren't, it was just sad. Like, that may seem super dramatic, but it was hard. Like that is- it is a huge thing, and like having the mini marathon canceled and thunder over Louisville, and just- That is a huge month for not even just local, but the state of Kentucky. And it was really- it was hard. I know a lot of people really struggled with not having that. So it just made it into having it in September even sweeter, because we got to have that little bit of normalcy. And I know, rain or shine in a couple of weeks, people are going to be absolutely ecstatic that May 1-first Saturday in May-the horses are going to be running at Churchill Downs. So yeah, may seem super dramatic, but it was devastating. It was really, really sad to not have that happen. So.

ES 40:55

So you're also currently coaching a youth soccer team in Louisville. So what has been your experience with that during COVID?

AS 41:04

So it is actually a school team. So that's made it even even crazier, that I- I guess it's been helpful with knowing kind of what's expected of the schools. But I mean, the girls can go on the field without a mask, but the minute they come on, they have to wear their mask. You know, we can't wear pennies, which has made practice like nearly impossible. As girls don't know what color or like what team they're on, they get confused, they pass to the wrong team. You know, we can't- if a girl forgets water, we can't share, you know, we can't get into team huddle, they have to be spread it on the sideline. Just like all the things that you would normally think a team would do like we can't do. You can't ride- you can't ride the bus. So parents have had to get their kids there, which has been an issue. You know, nobody is there on time. Because if mom and dad can't get off work, or you know- I mean, it's just been it's been what it's been. And I've tried to be positive about it. Because I know, especially for girls that don't play club, like it is an outlet for them. It's fun for them, it is something else to do besides being in school and being at home. So, I mean, it's been wild, never in my wildest dreams that I think I would coach a soccer team and have to- Like for me personally- So I, you know, wear a mask from seven to three most days. And if I have a meeting after school, I still have to wear my mask. And then I go to soccer. And I'm outside, but I still have to wear my mask. So some days, I'm pretty much wearing a mask for 12 to 14 hours a day, depending on when I get home. So that has I kind of- sometimes I forget it's even there. So I'm just like, just on my face all day. So soccer has been very weird, very weird, to say the least. Very weird. But they've had a good time. So I guess that's a positive. They didn't even get to have it last year. So they said no matter what they, they want to do it. So

ES 43:13

Yeah, so through your work as a teacher and a coach, you interact with a lot of young kids. How have you seen the pandemic affect them?

AS 43:24

Um, so I'm gonna give an example of the little girl that I actually nanny, but I still think- I mean, she's a very- I'm with her all the time. She's a very crucial part of my life. She- she's only- she's almost six. So I mean, she's a little kid. And she's one that- she's in JCPS. She just went back to school. But she, for the first time, she said, she, like looked at a picture of herself, pre COVID and she said, "Miss Abby, I wish I was happy. Like I was in that picture. Like, I wish I was happy right now. Like I was in that picture." And I mean, this little girl has a great life, like mom and dad both have great jobs. You know, we can go do literally whatever we want. Like she's been to Disney World; she does not have a rough life by any means. But her parents are just taking the precautions. And she hasn't been in school, like, she didn't get to go to the pumpkin patch in the fall for Halloween or, you know, exchange Valentine's with her friends at school. Like she's missed all those things, and it's just insane that an almost six year old made that insightful comment of like, I- I wish it were this time. And so that was insane to hear come out of her. Just to come out of someone that young. But then at school as a teacher. I mean, my kids do not know what it means to be kind to each other. And I have to attribute that to the fact that they have been at home with their siblings, you know, with parents that are working, so they're not paying attention. I mean, they're so rough, they're so unkind, like, they don't know how to respect an adult, and like it is- I've never seen anything like it in my life. Like I would come home and say to Gus, there's one thing that as a mom I'm going to do is I'm going to teach our kids to be kind and what it means to, like- They don't know how to communicate with people, they don't know how to problem solve, because for the past year, their problem solving has been a TV, or, you know, going outside and roughhousing with their sibling, or- Oh, it's just, it's unreal. I don't want to, you know, sound dramatic, but some of these kids are, um, it's, it's been detrimental to them, and it's gonna take, it's gonna take a lot of hard work to fix some of the social issues that these kids have had an ingrained in their minds. So as a, as a teacher who, you know, cares so much, it's been really hard to see so many of them struggle with anger issues, and just, like, yelling at me, and I'm like, Why are you yelling at me? And they're like, I don't know. They just don't- they have no idea. So it's been really tough. I've seen more aggression with, like, boys and like, pushing each other. And it's just been, it's been wild. It has been. Yeah, it's been really hard. So some kids have been okay, you know, some kids are completely normal. But for the most part, they're either like, so worried about, you know, what's gonna happen next, or, you know- Thankfully, I think we're past the point of they know they're going to be in school the next day, which is good. Like, I don't think we'll ever go back to NCI. So that's really, really good. But so they have that security, but socially, it's really hurt them. If their parents were super cautious and made them stay at home for a year. So yeah, it's been really hard.

ES 47:15

So after living through a year of the pandemic, have your thoughts and feelings towards COVID-19 changed?

AS 47:25

Wait, say that one more time, you broke up at the end,

ES 47:28

After living through a year of the pandemic, how have your thoughts and feelings toward COVID-19 changed?

AS 47:36

Um, so I mean, I definitely was one of those people- Not one of those people. Not that I didn't think it was real, but I didn't think it was this serious. Like, I never would have thought that it- I would still be wearing a mask a year later, no way. And I can remember, before the mask mandate, I didn't wear a mask, like, at my former school, we were, as I mentioned, Title I, and so we were a feeder school. So one thing that we didn't have to do, but like we could volunteer at our school to go help, and bag meals, and then serve meals, like it was kinda like a carpool line, like anybody in the district could come and get as many meals as they needed for the kids in their house. And so, I mean, I can remember, I would go there and work. And number one, I wouldn't wear a mask inside. Number two, I wouldn't wear a mask when I was serving all this. I was serving bags of food to families. And this- I can remember this woman was like, so anxious, and she pulled up, and we didn't have masks on. And she like, gave us this bag of masks. And I looked at my staff and I was like, I'm not wearing this mask, like, you know, just not a thing. It was not a thing. And I think the only place I wore one was Kroger. And it was because people were looking at me funny if I wasn't wearing one. So, but then looking back, I'm like, Why? Why was I like that, like, and then my mom, like, didn't want to hug me at first. And I was like, Mom, I'm your kid. Like, why won't you hug me? Like, you know, just, I don't want to say I didn't believe it was real, or that I didn't believe it was serious, but I definitely didn't take it as serious as I needed to. And so then once you know, we moved here and all that stuff, I guess, you know, I was wearing a mask everywhere because the mask mandate didn't start here in Kentucky until I think July. And so we still have it. And I mean, like I said some days I'm wearing a mask for 14 hours almost consistently, like the entire time. So I mean, from a year ago, to now I mean it is real. Like people, people close to me have lost family members. You know, it has affected my job. You know, the people that I care about. So, definitely the severity of it has completely, you know, changed. And I was worried about getting vaccinated due to fertility issues, like there's no research with fertility. And, you know, Gus and I eventually want to have kids. And so that was- But then I realized how, you know, it's not just my life, it's other people's lives. And I would never-especially as a teacher, I have so many little lives in my hands-I would never want to, you know, be a cause of something to happen. So I got the vaccine. And I can't say that I would have done that a year ago, you know, back in, back in March or April. So, yeah, definitely realize that, you know, it's a real thing. And it's serious. And it's just the way it's just the way it is now.

ES 50:58

How have you seen family and friends respond to the pandemic?

AS 51:05

Um, so kind of like how I talked about just a minute ago, I would say it's been 50/50. Some people have been very serious about it from day one, not- You know, I think about our Uncle Richard and Aunt Marureen, like, they were-and Aunt Lynette-and like, they were hardcore or serious, like, they did not see people, even though it was hard for them, or, you know, they completely cut the ties with family gatherings and all this stuff. And even though that was really hard for them, you know. So they took it very seriously, as they should, and that's, you know, the older population, but then I have, you know, people my age, like one of my very best friends, and she's actually even a nurse, but like, she isn't wearing a mask anymore, she's not vaccinated, she's not going to get vaccinated. And so it's just been- it's been 50/50, that's the best way I can explain it. Some people still don't think it's very serious, like, had large gatherings. And whereas, you know, I would say, my family and Gus's family, both for the most part, you know, realize that we have to make this sacrifice. Whereas, especially the younger crowd, like Gus and I's age people didn't necessarily take it as seriously as they should have. And like, I actually had friends that were upset with Gus and I right around Christmas, because we didn't want to go to this party. And

because I knew for like, the first time, I was going to be seeing all four of my grandparents within a week span. And so I couldn't risk it, you know, and they were frustrated with us that we wouldn't come to the party. So that sucked, that they got mad, that they didn't understand why I couldn't go to a party and then go to a bar with a bunch of random people that I don't know, week before Christmas. So some have done well, some have done poorly. Everybody's choice is everybody's choice, but it definitely has not been the overwhelming, you know, following the precaution and the regulations that health departments and governors have suggested.

ES 53:20

So looking forward, what do you hope your year- your life is like in a year?

AS 53:24

In March of 2022 or April, I would hope that I am at school with my desks together in pods. I hope that my kids can take their masks off at recess, if not all day, I hope I can teach without a mask on if I'm at least six feet apart. Because another thing that I didn't mention earlier, and maybe I should have, another thing that's been hard with the mask is like- You think about it this is what they see all day [covers half of face with hand]. Like you can see some emotion with your eyes. But like, I especially, I'm a very hands- like I've been talking to my hand this whole time, like, you see so much emotion with your mouth. And so I hope to be able to- you- I hope that enough people are vaccinated. If kids- or parents are making the choice for their kids, enough kids are vaccinated, that we can sit together on the carpet and read a book. Kids can work together with manipulatives without washing their hands 500 times or using hand sanitizer every time they touch something. So I would hope in a year from now, two years into the pandemic that we're pretty close to normalcy, that would be my prayer that school for these kids is a little more normal. We're getting there, but it's- Yeah, that would be my hope.

ES 55:05

All right, so those are all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything that wasn't asked or discussed today that you want to speak about?

AS 55:14

No, no, you did a really good job with the questions. I think me mentioning a second ago, the- Like how COVID has affected me as a teacher, not being able to use my facial expressions has been hard. And so as, like, as of late even though I may not be supposed to, or allowed to do this, I have been like, stepping away from my kids, and pulling down my mask, like teaching them or reading to them was so they can see me, you know, pausing and starting and changing my, you know, expressions even as I read and all that stuff. So, but no, I think your questions are great. And they covered a lot of, you know, what I've had to deal with as not only a teacher but as an adult, a young adult in this past year. So it was great.

ES 56:10

Well, thank you Abby, for agreeing to participate in this project. Right with that-

AS 56:15

Welcome.