

Transcription of Oral History of Shawnda Kaeding

Interviewer: Julia Kaeding

Interviewee: Shawnda Kaeding

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Location of Interview: Fall Creek, Wisconsin

Project in Association with: University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Abstract: Shawnda Kaeding is a 46-year-old woman who lives in Fall Creek, Wisconsin. She works at TDK-Hutchinson Technology Inc. as a quality engineering technician. Since the pandemic began in March of 2020, Shawnda has been working from home. Shawnda is immunocompromised and provides insight into the fear she experienced at the beginning of the pandemic and her concerns for health has changed since March. In her interview, Shawnda discusses how her daily routine has changed, what her family has done during quarantine, and her opinions on news, social media, and the politicization of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shawnda hopes her community can continue to be safe and help each other during the pandemic.

Julia Kaeding 00:05

It is November 13, 2020, at 8:15 PM. As of noon today, in Eau Claire County, Wisconsin, there have been 5,557 total COVID-19 cases, there is 207 new cases today, 38 total deaths and one new death today. In the United States, there have been 10.7 million cases of COVID-19 and 243,000 deaths. So far today, there have been 163,000 new cases and 1,172 new deaths. Today, I'm interviewing my mom. So if you could say what your name is, and please share some demographic information such as your age, race and gender.

Shawnda Kaeding 00:46

Hi there, my name is Shawnda Kaeding, I am 45 years old, and I am a white female.

Julia Kaeding 00:55

What are some primary things that you do around the house on a day-to-day basis?

Shawnda Kaeding 01:00

I've been working at home for several months, so usually every day is about the same, I'll get up early, get out my laptop and get punched in, and then make breakfast for my husband before he heads off to his job. And then throughout the course of the day I work from home, I work on my laptop and have various meetings, stuff like that. And then I'll also find myself doing things around the house, so clean up the kitchen, or I'll do a load of laundry or run the vacuum or something like that. I try to walk on the treadmill for twenty minutes or so every day just to have a little bit of exercise, so I'm not sitting around all day long, and then interact with my kids. And then supper time comes around, make supper, and watch some TV and go to bed and then to everything the same way the next day.

Julia Kaeding 02:03

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

Shawnda Kaeding 02:07

I live in a little town just out of Eau Claire. Fall Creek, Wisconsin. It's a nice quiet little town, everybody seems to know everybody's business and what's going on, and it's -- it's pretty nice here. Um, pretty quiet.

Julia Kaeding 02:27

Yes, um, when you first learned about COVID, what were your thoughts and how have your thoughts changed since then?

Shawnda Kaeding 02:34

I first learned about COVID through work actually in the November, December timeframe of last year, because our -- one of our customers is over in China, and we were having some issues with shipments and when to ship and stuff like that, and they had actually started a quarantine. One of the engineer's family lives over there, so she -- she was talking to them on a daily basis and kind of had, you know, knew what was going on then, and would tell us on a daily what was happening over there and we were all like, "Oh, you know, how long until this gets to the United States and what's going to happen," so it was kind of scary, you were kind of worried about what was going to happen. Then when we finally started getting cases in the United States, and we were continuing to work, and people were scared, we didn't know, we heard about deaths, and heard about what was going on and didn't really know what to expect. And, starting I believe March 16th, I've been working from home since then, and it just, it was scary in the beginning, we, it was just unknown, so I mean with anything, you just kind of -- you worry about what's going to happen and what you have to do to keep yourself safe and if you're going to lose somebody that you love. So, it's a little better now. But those first few months there it was, it was different.

Julia Kaeding 04:25

How would you say that things have changed then?

Shawnda Kaeding 04:30

Things have settled down now. I think we have a better understanding of what the virus is and what it can do and that yes, people are getting very sick and people are dying and you know people that you will not expect to get really sick and die are dying. And it's just, it's, I think things are a little bit more relaxed, or not, you're not as worried as you were back in March and April, things, you realize that the that you'll probably survive, you know, the statistics and stuff that there's such a high survival rate and stuff like that. So it makes it a little easier, you know, not to worry so much about getting sick or what will happen if I get sick.

Julia Kaeding 05:25

Mmhmm, so would you say that worrying about sick is still an issue, something that still concerns you?

Shawnda Kaeding 05:34

I would, from the people that I know or have heard have gotten sick, it was more of just like a really bad cold, and they felt really icky for several days, and, like, the main thing was not being able to taste something. There's still friends of ours that they can't taste anything, so it I, I kind of have that hope that, you know, if I do get this and stuff, that it'll just be a really bad cold and that it'll, you know, it'll be okay. And I worry about it because it just, it's more of the inconvenience of working and quarantining, and how do I get my groceries, and what if I run out of something, or what if you know, somebody stops over and I, it's just "oh, you can't come in because we might be sick, or we were sick, and I don't want to get you sick." And so that's, that's more of the issue now I think with, with what's going on.

Julia Kaeding 06:44

Okay. How has COVID-19 affected your job and in what ways?

Shawnda Kaeding 06:50

Like I said, earlier, I've been working from home since about March 16th. I work at TDK-Hutchinson Technology, I'm a quality engineering tech, so a lot of what I do, I can do from home on my laptop. I do meetings every day, I basically ensure that the quality meets our standards before it gets shipped. Through the summer, we were pretty slow, it was pretty quiet, I worked mostly four 10s, so I would have, you know, the Fridays and Saturday, Sunday off, and that seemed to work pretty, pretty well. I would get up in the morning, around six o'clock, punch in and be done about four o'clock. And it you know, it was a lot of watching TV actually for those couple months. And now we're actually getting busier, so it's a little bit more things going on with more meetings and more trying to get things situated for this new product we have starting so it's working pretty well. I think if I had to go into work that I would, they've put up several different things at the place you have to have your temperature checked and all that stuff before you can go in. They don't, basically don't want people in the building, if we can help it if you can work from home, they highly recommend you just stay and work from home, so that's what I've been doing.

Julia Kaeding 08:44

Do you have any future concerns with COVID-19's effect on your employment, your employer and the economy in general?

Shawnda Kaeding 08:52

Um, as far as my employment and my employer at this point, I don't have concerns. As related to COVID-19, I don't think that would have affected us, per se more of the business ourself that we were having, you know, problems and in slow times through the summer waiting for a new customer. Right now, like I said, we're ramping up I mean, we'll probably within the next six

months be trying to hire people at an alarming rate and we're busy so it's, it's I'm not afraid of, you know, getting laid off or anything like that, definitely not due to COVID at all. The economy, however, is kind of hurting, those small businesses and stuff like that, or you gotta wonder what's gonna happen when, when this is all over. Or if this is, you know, over what's going to happen to those places, are they going to be able to sustain and that's really hard to think of those little mom and pop shops that have been open for years and years aren't, just can't survive this, and that's, that's the worst part of it.

Julia Kaeding 10:16

Mhmm, so how has COVID affected you and or your family's day to day activities?

Shawnda Kaeding 10:25

I think that having mom around all the time [chuckle] kinda— we've gotten into a routine in the last several months, and it's not that bad, I think, you know, Dad goes to work like normal every day, Julia, you work, off and on throughout the week, and now you have most of your classes are at home so you're hanging out with us, and we both have our own little offices that we have, and Jacob our son is, is looking for another job, and he's just kind of chilling and doing his thing, so I know, there's times where it's like, “oh, shush, mom's in a meeting” or “you gotta be quiet, mom's in a meeting” or something like that, or I don't have like a, you know, I don't have that one on one with the people at work. So sometimes they complain a lot to my husband about what's going on and stuff like that. But I think homelife is, is, you know, it's pretty, pretty reasonable. And it's not so bad. [Both begin to speak and the audio spikes] Sorry. I think too that having my kids— are older, so I think it'd been a totally different story if my kids were little, and they were trying to go through school, or they were in diapers and needed more attention. But, my kids are older, they're doing their own thing, so it's not really that much of an issue.

Julia Kaeding 12:10

So you would say that managing day to day activities in the house is pretty much like what it was before?

Shawnda Kaeding 12:17

Yep, I would say even now that I'm home all day so if I need to, you know, my kitchens a mess, and I need to go tidy up the kitchen before I need to make supper, or somebody got into something and I need to go run a load of wash or do something like that I'm here so I can do that. And it's not something that I'm doing it eight o'clock at night now. It's something I can do it 10 o'clock in the morning, and it's done. So. Yeah.

Julia Kaeding 12:55

So you've talked about how work and adjusting to home has been a little bit of a challenge, but it's not been too difficult to adapt to COVID-19. [Audio cuts out] challenges are that you've faced during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Shawnda Kaeding 13:13
Can you repeat that?

Julia Kaeding 13:18

Yes. What are some of the biggest challenges that you've faced during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Shawnda Kaeding 13:24

I think personally, [clears throat] in the beginning, it was scary. We didn't -- we didn't know what was going on, and with health and stuff like that you didn't know if you got sick if you were going to survive, and stuff. And then I think it was hard on a lot of people that restaurants were closed, you couldn't, you know, go get a cheeseburger at your favorite cheeseburger place. And you couldn't do this or do that, you had to wear the masks and you had to go to certain entrances in stores, and you had to wash your hands and just all this stuff, it was kind of full of pressure. I know there were days where it was so frustrating to think of how things had changed like that, and then those things that you couldn't do, and there was bouts of just sadness and depression and the feeling of, "I'm cooped up in this house. Now I'm going to work from home for how long?" And you know, this, like, scared, you're scared, you know, and I think that's the biggest thing was— was that emotional toll that it took on the big in the beginning and through the summer, when everything got canceled and you couldn't do things, you couldn't hang out with your friends. You couldn't do those things because you were scared to get sick, or it was against the rules to do it. I had a couple months there where it was just, it was pure depression. It was just sadness, you know, and it was hard.

Julia Kaeding 15:10

So adjusting to restaurants and places and stuff like that, that are closed, how have you, our family and our friends or community, how have we found ways to overcome that through recreation? Like, what kind of recreation have we engaged in?

Shawnda Kaeding 15:30

I know, those first couple weeks when it was, was like, Oh, you know, but shock, kind of, you know, I'm, I'm stuck here, and I'm stuck in the house all day, and I'm going to go crazy. I know, we took a walk a few times, we went out to Big Falls and walked around, or, you know, one day we went out in the country and drove around, and would stop and look at this bridge, or walk through this trail or something like that. I think we found ourselves through the summer, probably every night, we'd go for a car ride, and we just ride around town, and look at people's yards and go through the country and look for deer, it was just trying to get out of the house a little bit and do those things. My husband, who likes to do different things and stuff did--decided to, he got a race car and decided to start racing, so he started drag racing on the weekend. That got him out of the house, and that I think that made him feel better. That it made him have a sense of purpose, so he wasn't so depressed about, you know, everything he couldn't do. So I think that helps.

Julia Kaeding 16:55

How would you say that COVID-19 has affected our community?

Shawnda Kaeding 17:01

Well, Fall Creek is a small community, we don't have a lot of big businesses or anything like that, you know, we've got the gas stations and the bars and couple little shops and stuff like that. I know, I know, it was hard on them. Um, we've tried to support as much as we could, the restaurants in town, and things like that. We go get ice cream [unclear]. I know the Lions Club had chicken. In the summertime, they had--usually would have had their big fundraiser, Lions Fest and that got cancelled. So they instead they did chicken, and we drove through and got chicken. And I know a lot of little towns did stuff like that. I think it was, it's hard on the community, but yet I think we're a small enough community that everyone is looking out for each other, you know, the churches started doing some food bank type stuff and you could pick up food if you needed food, and I think neighbors started looking after the neighbors a little bit more too.

Julia Kaeding 18:22

So how have people around in our community been responding to the pandemic, other than helping neighbors and stuff like that?

Shawnda Kaeding 18:29

I think most of them, most people in our community are pretty good. You know, everyone wears the mask, and everybody's watching out for each other and, and stuff like that. I think, in our little community, they've responded pretty well.

Julia Kaeding 18:51

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

Shawnda Kaeding 19:06

I know in the beginning when that you know, "we're going to shut everything down and we want you to stay at home," and I think we tried our best. I know we would try, we'd go get groceries probably once every 10 days or so we'd try to get all kinds of meals that we knew that if we had to be quarantined or something like that, that we would be stocked and have stuff to eat. I think a lot of people in the community did that as well. Just sticking around home and stuff and then you would see a lot more people out and about you'd see a lot more people taking walks and a lot more people doing things outside and doing lawn care, and all that kind of stuff, that it was just a weird kind of sense of, you know, everybody's kind of staying in isolating, or, sticking to themselves, but yet, there was so many people out outside and so many people out doing things, you know, it was kind of a difference there.

Julia Kaeding 20:26

How do you think it's changed in the last nine months?

Shawnda Kaeding 20:30

I think people are still doing those walks and doing that outside kind of stuff, but I think people are more— I think people have realized more that, “if I do get sick, I'm probably not going to die from it, so it's probably okay if I have that campfire and have a bunch of friends over. Or it's probably okay, if I meet my buddies at the bar and go have a drink” or, you know, go and do, you know, do stuff that they wouldn't have been doing in April or May. And I think now that people are thinking, “I think it's, it's okay, if I go to this wedding, there's 100 people at and oh, nothing's gonna happen.” Maybe that's the wrong way to be thinking things right now, especially with the numbers on the rise and maybe that's not necessarily what we should be doing. But I think that's what has gotten into people's heads is that, you know, “Hey, uh, probably going to be okay, if I get this, I probably am not going to die,” so they've been just going about their normal, normal lives again.

Julia Kaeding 21:48

Hmm. So even though we are all likely to survive, if we get COVID-19— you are immunocompromised, so would you be able to share any information about that?

Shawnda Kaeding 22:00

Sure, I had a kidney transplant 11 years ago so I am on immunosuppressives. So basically, my immune system is not like everybody else's, it's a little weaker than anyone else's, so I would be in one of those high-risk categories that if I do this, I have potentially, do have a higher risk of this really affecting me, or really ya know dying from this virus. I know, we've looked up facts on the internet and stuff like that and it's shown over the last couple of months that those people that have had kidney transplants and stuff like that aren't really dying at any different rate than what someone, a normal person would have. I spoke to my doctor, and they even were like, “well, yes, you should take precautions and stuff like this. But, you know, if you get this, it'll probably be just like, everybody else gets sick.” I think everybody gets sick to a different level with this, that it's just, it's hard telling how your specific body is going to react so you just don't know until you do get sick and then you find out what's going to happen. So...

Julia Kaeding 23:25

When the pandemic first started, would you say that you were more concerned about your own health than you are now?

Shawnda Kaeding 23:32

I would say, yes. I was still at work in March. And we were kind of talking about, “well, what are we going to do at work? What's gonna happen? Why are we all still here?” Because, you know, you work in cubicles that are, you're right next door to people, and they're saying, “Oh, you need to be six feet apart,” you can't be six feet apart. And so we're like, “well, because of what we make, at this company, we were considered an essential business.” They're like, “well,

you're essential, so you're not gonna shut down.” So there was a couple days there where it was, well, you know, I probably shouldn't be here. And, you know, I'm one of these high-risk people so I had actually gone to HR [Human Resources] and said, “I believe that my doctors recommended, I am high risk, that I should probably work from home.” And they were like, “yep, yep, that's cool. We'll put you on a leave of absence, and you can still work from home if you want to, and that's, we'll go that way.” Then that was like, one o'clock in the afternoon and by three o'clock in the afternoon, there were emails going out that “we're going to, any people that did not need to be in the building needed to go and work from home.” So as a matter of, you know, a couple hours, and they had changed direction, and now, I've been here since then. So...

Julia Kaeding 25:15

You've talked a bit about mental health and how you've been struggling the last couple months with COVID and being stuck in a house, how would you say that COVID-19, and the pandemic is affecting people's mental and or physical health?

Shawnda Kaeding 25:31

I think it definitely has an effect on what's going on, you know, these, these people that have an emotional or, OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder] or depression issues already, and they've had been, had to be isolated from people, they've had to, you know, they can't get the care that they're used to, I think that's definitely affecting people. You see that the numbers are up for drug overdoses, suicides, even, like, marital issues and domestic violence and, and stuff like that. It's just so all those numbers are up and it's taking a toll on those people that had issues before. And it's just, it's making it worse, especially with having to quarantine or having to not go to work, if there's money problems, all that is causing issues, and it's definitely going to have repercussions coming in the next couple months, and along if continues, and even in two years, you know, there could be definite issues going forward with that.

Julia Kaeding 26:55

You talk a lot about different statistics, and like using the Internet as a resource, and numbers and doctors and things like that, so what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Shawnda Kaeding 27:07

I think in the, in the beginning, we watched, we watch the news a lot, because you were curious, you wanted to see, you have that kind of that gore factor, you wanted to know how many people were dying, and you wanted to see the pictures of the morgues that were set up and stuff like, we watched I think we watched the news a lot and you wanted to know those numbers, and I think that after a time, I know, like, in the mornings when we would get up and my husband and would get ready for work, we would watch you know, WEAU, we watch the local news, and just try to you know, do the thing, well, he would work leave for work at seven, and while at seven o'clock, the Today Show comes on, so for those couple months, there it was just doom and gloom, it was just horrible, horrible. And I would as soon as he would leave, I would turn the TV off, because I didn't want to listen to it anymore. I know that we primarily would watch NBC, it seemed to me

that everything was just so scary and so they made it out that it's just so deadly. Just the way they would present their numbers for things and, and stuff. It just it, it made it the media makes it seem like it's just so horrendous and just so horrible, and that's, I think that's part of the issue too, you know, getting information that way.

Julia Kaeding 28:53

What do you think are important issues about the pandemic that the media may or may not be covering?

Shawnda Kaeding 29:01

I think that the media, they do a good job telling you how many people were tested, and how many people are positive and how many people are in the hospital and have died, but they haven't told you or they never really tell you, "well, this many people tested positive, but this many people never needed medical care, any extra treatment, and this many people have survived and this is your survival rate, it's like 99%." They always focus on the bad aspects of it instead of, I wouldn't say good aspects, but like positive things, that people are--the survival rate is so much higher and stuff and yes, it's horrible to lose people and people are dying, and it's so sad, but yet, that, they don't, they don't really share that, you know, well, "this many people were hospitalized, but this many people were checked out of the hospital today, and they're fine. They're good." I think maybe that, you know, if we could give a little update on that once a week, that would be great. You know?

Julia Kaeding 30:32

How do you think bias between different news sources, different media like Facebook, have affected the public's perception of COVID-19.

Shawnda Kaeding 30:41

Facebook is always not a good resource. Everybody likes to post stuff that isn't necessarily accurate all the time. A lot of people don't fact check things before they post things. There's lots of, kind of conspiracy theory type stuff out there and a lot of stuff that's just like, "really, you really believe that?" Like, "oh, we're putting up the 5G towers so everybody's gotta isolate" and "oh, don't go get tested, because that's how their chips in your brain so they can keep track of ya." It's just kind of funny, some of this stuff that you can see. And, you know, every news channel is different. You have, you have the more liberal based television channels, and you have the more conservative based, but they've all been reporting basically the same thing. You know, it's all the same theme rhetoric on both ways, you know?

Julia Kaeding 32:00

So even though news sources have been sharing pretty much similar reportings of COVID, do you think that news sources or social media have politicized COVID-19?

Shawnda Kaeding 32:11

Definitely, I think that, you know, and this is something where it, I myself am a Republican, and I would say I'm a Trump supporter, but I wouldn't, you know, I'm not gonna support completely the way things were handled, I wouldn't say "he should have done this, he should have done this." I think that at the time, he did what he thought he should have done, but I think that a lot of the Democratic, Liberal type people like to blame him for the way things have been going on, for the deaths that have happened that, you know, they say, "oh, you should have should have shut things down sooner, you should have done this should have done this;" hindsight is always 20/20. You can always pick apart things that were done, and were not done and blame someone else. But you can see clearly that all over in Europe, they're having the same problem right now, as we are. Their case, numbers are up, their deaths are up, there's people that, they're rioting over there because they're sick of the government having the controls. So it's not a Trump thing, it's a nationwide, you know, entire countries wide thing, it's--you can't put politics into it. It is what it is, and it's really no one's fault. And it's stinks. And to blame, you know, one person is kind of silly.

Julia Kaeding 34:06

How have our local municipal leaders and government officials responded to the outbreak?

Shawnda Kaeding 34:11

I think locally, in our little community they've done pretty well, they've—in the beginning they closed the park and they closed the village hall and, you know, they tried to keep—be careful with how people had contact with stuff like that. County-wise as well. I think, you know they've tried to make sure people are doing the masks and the distancing all that stuff. I know Governor Evers has really tried to make sure the businesses and stuff are being careful and things like that. So I think I consider what they're doing and or what they're attempting to do. And even personally, you know, it was different. In the beginning, people were more scared, so they were more willing to do what was asked of them. And I think now people have come to realize that, like I said, "hey, I guess I'm probably not gonna die from this," they're getting to be like, "whatever, I don't, really what are they gonna do? What, are they gonna come arrest me, because I have twelve people at my party instead of ten?" It's just kind of—people have gotten tired of it.

Julia Kaeding 35:43

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

Shawnda Kaeding 35:50

I know that, I know different states all have their way of doing things and stuff, and you could even tie that to party lines, I know, a lot more of the Democratic type governors are trying to be, have more restrictions, or to try to shut things down. I know that more of the Republican and stuff governors are kind of given not as tight and stuff like that. Like South Dakota's governor hasn't had as many restrictions and things. I think they're all trying to do their best to keep their citizens safe, but I think it all kind of comes down to the individual themselves, and whether they

want to follow the rules or not. So basically, there's no policing of these rules. So especially if you're doing your own thing, if you're having your own get together, you know, cops aren't gonna come and bust it up. So it just, right now it's come down to, if people are willing to do what needs to be done, and that it all lies on the individual.

Julia Kaeding 37:18

Has your experience with COVID-19. And the pandemic transformed how you think about your family, friends, and community?

Shawnda Kaeding 37:24

I know that it's kind of weeded out some of those people that we thought were pretty normal, and you can now realize that they might be a little off and some of the things that they think, it just kind of, some of our friends, family even think this is all a joke, it's a hoax, it's a government control thing. It's all kind of, like I said, about putting a little chip when they do the swab up your nose, you know, let people believe that and they're still your friends, they're still your family, but you've learned that you can't argue with people, it's not worth it. You just let people believe what they want to believe because if you try to change someone's mind, or, you know, try to explain, "well, I don't think that's quite right." You're just going to argue and you're just going to get in a fight, and then you will lose a friend over it, so it's more of you know, he just kind of "yep, okay, if that's what you want to think then you just, you just do that." Yeah.

Julia Kaeding 38:50

Knowing what you know, now and what you've experienced, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Shawnda Kaeding 39:00

I think that going into the future, and I think that even, you know talk a month from now, or you can talk six months or a year from now, but this has changed how we are as the people that, yes, we need to, I don't want to say follow the rules, but we need to be good to each other. And it's something as simple as putting a mask on to prevent your spit from flying out when you're talking to someone. It's simple, it's a simple thing that you can do. And I think that people thinking that that's a way that the government's trying to control you, we need to keep in mind, that no, you know, is it? That going forward we need to wash our hands. Stay clean, be considerate. And I think that's kind of changed some people's way of thinking, you know?

Julia Kaeding 40:18

Okay, well thank you for talking with me today and being an interviewee, it's been a fun time with you.

Shawnda Kaeding 40:24

Well, you too!