

## **Transcript of Interview with April Jackson Hunter by Kit Heintzman**

**Interviewee:** April Jackson Hunter

**Interviewer:** Kit Heintzman

**Date:** 03/11/2021

**Location (Interviewee):**

**Location (Interviewer):**

**Transcribed By:** Angelica S Ramos

### **Some of the things we discussed included:**

Having worked as a CNA pre-pandemic. Working as a school bus driver for special needs students pre-pandemic, losing the job, and restarting the job during the pandemic. Children exposed to COVID still attending school and riding the bus to school. Wife losing employment, and becoming a zero income household, changing tax bracket. The link between hygiene and COVID-prevention. Initial reactions to the pandemic informed by H1N1. Launching Mercedes Closet at the beginning of the pandemic, losing funding, and struggling to acquire more funding. Funding activism out of pocket while having lost own sources of income. News and media messaging about COVID prevention. Personal safety as a domestic violence survivor and the threat of death; people's carelessness with COVID safety threatening death. Selfcare to build up the immune system with natural medicines. Newly taking up meditation through a 3 day challenge. Having a mostly asymptomatic COVID-19 infection, wife going to the emergency room for COVID, wife fearing she would die alone in the emergency room. How scary it was to see the fear her wife was experiencing and own fears. The importance of talking to everyday people. The importance of healing from what has happened to our live and world since COVID.

**Kit Heintzman 00:00**

Hello.

**April Jackson Hunter 00:03**

Hi

**Kit Heintzman 00:05**

Would you please start by stating your full name, the date, the time and your location?

**April Jackson Hunter 00:11**

I am April M Jackson Hunter. Today is March the 11th 2021. And the time is 7:45pm. My Location I don't really state, my state because I'm a survivor of domestic violence and my predator is still out there. My abuser. I'm sorry.

**Kit Heintzman 00:36**

That's all right. And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under a Creative Commons license attribution noncommercial sharealike?

**April Jackson Hunter 00:47**

Yes, I do.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:49

Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who may be listening to this? What might you want them to know about you and the position you're speaking from?

**April Jackson Hunter** 01:01

My name like I said, my name is April Jackson Hunter. I'm an award winning author and the founder and president of Mercedes closet Inc, which is a nonprofit geared to empowering survivors and to be Secure Communities community of violence and I'm survivor COVID-19.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:23

I'd like to start by asking if you see COVID-19 as a pandemic

**April Jackson Hunter** 01:29

I do.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:31

And what does the word pandemic mean to you?

**April Jackson Hunter** 01:36

I want to say my think about the word pandemic I think about the loss of mass of life due to an infection or disease.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:52

I'm curious, would you be willing to share something about your experiences with health and healthcare infrastructure prior to the pandemic?

**April Jackson Hunter** 02:02

I really don't I can't stay away my I didn't really have a hands on healthcare. Now I do. I was a CNA. But it was to my previous on while back so I have pretty much maybe like a layman's grasp on, say the infrastructure of hospitals and health.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:26

Pre pandemic, what was your day to day looking like?

**April Jackson Hunter** 02:30

It was awesome. I drive a school bus for special needs school bus for a public school. And it was great. We had fun kids were on the bus. Going to work every day. I was making money I had a great lifestyle and then COVID hit.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:54

What have been some other ways you've had to adapt your day to day

**April Jackson Hunter** 02:57

at first, we were totally out of work. Because I shut the school down. That impacted us financially. My wife lost her job. We had to we think our whole life as start a new basically.

**Kit Heintzman** 03:21

What did starting new bring you to?

**April Jackson Hunter** 03:25

it was a different viewpoint. Because we was in a different tax bracket before COVID In the My wife lost her job and so now we have to up keep up with our day to day lifestyle and now we're financially strapped so we pretty much dove into our savings was kind of depleted us around a couple of months after you know and we had pretty much got to the point where we didn't know what was gonna happen to us, like many other families that are surviving to be independent.

**Kit Heintzman** 04:00

What is the restrictions been like where you are and how are they impacting them?

**April Jackson Hunter** 04:06

We've opened first everything was shut down. There was no moving in and out. We social distance we have to where our masks I am back to work, but it's limited due to the fact that not all students are going back to school where I was making 45 to 50 hours a week I'm barely making 35 I have to wear a mask on the bus at all times. You know and make sure we have hand sanitizer has been my best friend and like saw wipes

**Kit Heintzman** 04:45

I'm interested what is it that you remember hearing about thinking about feeling when the pandemic first started when you first became aware of it?

**April Jackson Hunter** 04:56

I want to be honest with you at first I wasn't only concerned about the [inaudible] was like another h1 and one, you know kind of thing. I really wasn't. I didn't really put too much thought about it. There was just nothing I really nobody thought it was gonna have the effect that it did.

**Kit Heintzman** 05:19

And how did that change over time?

**April Jackson Hunter** 05:22

The mass deaths, he became scary, predictable. We didn't know what was going to happen next.

**Kit Heintzman** 05:34

2020 was a pretty big year, with COVID-19. And with a lot of other things, as has 2021. So far, I'm wondering what some of the most significant issues have been on your mind throughout the last year.

**April Jackson Hunter** 05:50

Just saving people's lives, I want to get to a point where not losing so many lives daily, I want to get to a point where we can actually start healing from what has happened to our life our.

**Kit Heintzman** 06:09

What do you think that healing might look like?

**April Jackson Hunter** 06:14

To be honest with you, I just don't want people to no longer die of COVID. I know death is a part of life. But COVID has really destroyed homes and families, multiple family members have passed away is just I just want to want to get to a point we can just look back on it and reflect but not be so afraid of talking to your neighbor or being in the same room with someone.

**Kit Heintzman** 06:47

I'm curious, what does the word house mean to you?

**April Jackson Hunter** 06:53

First, it may being healthy, it meant, you know, how can I put it? You know, just don't be fit. be unhealthy eating right? The kind of work my mind goes to when you say hello. But now it's like deepened since COVID is like making sure everything is clean. And making sure you're not being infected with the virus is like your whole perspective of Health has literally been uprooted.

**Kit Heintzman** 07:30

How has that been invite? How has that been involved in some of the work that you've been doing with survivors of domestic violence?

**April Jackson Hunter** 07:39

COVID really hit we launched really, in the first beginning of COVID. So we weren't we haven't been able to eat completely like any kind of like, wiped out our funding. It has been hard on our fundraising attempts because nobody knows what our next dollars coming from for people who are not so ready to give. So we've been trying to help survivors where we can donate these but like I say it comes out of our pocket. And since we've been financially ourselves damaged, okay, as do as much as we've been doing at first.

**Kit Heintzman** 08:19

What are some of the things that you want for the health of people around you?

**April Jackson Hunter** 08:27

What do I want for people? That's a great question. To even just come together. I just want everybody to be able to come together, man we been so distinct. For almost over a little bit over a year. I just want to be able to go out to lunch with friends and family and just the togetherness that we no longer have. We become so distant. The world has really.

**Kit Heintzman** 08:56

Either from personal experience or what you've seen on the news, how are you perceiving the current healthcare infrastructure to be handling COVID-19 where you are.

**April Jackson Hunter** 09:08

At first, our thought it was like a joke. There was not it wasn't encouraged people to wear masks. On they was talking about what social distancing. I think they've gotten a lot better with encouraging mask in social distancing, but I still see people not wearing masks. I think they have become complacent with the vaccine that's being distributed. And they're not doing what they want was doing. So I really feel like is the real part is not over yet because people are not taking seriously anymore.

**Kit Heintzman** 09:45

Could you tell me what safety means to you?

**April Jackson Hunter** 09:49

Safe safety as far as?

**Kit Heintzman** 09:52

Anything as broad as you would like.

**April Jackson Hunter** 09:56

For me safely I just cuz I'm a survivor. I'm eager to go to My personal safety as far as you know, maybe not putting a situation what would it look off my life

**Kit Heintzman** 10:13

Within the context of COVID, how have you been determining what feels safe for you? And how have you been negotiating that with people in your life?

**April Jackson Hunter** 10:24

I, it's kind of really hard to stay safe at work. I drive it, like I said, drive a school bus. And I feel like my employers don't take our life seriously. We I've had several incidents will not with me person to live with me personally. One, but I've heard over the radio several incidents where they have lowly kids that are supposed to be on quarantine on Wednesdays, and we have not found out about it. So we get to the school. That means we have written at least 25/30 minutes with a possibly COVID-19 child, or what's the school and they're not allowing us to quarantine after we've come in, you know, um, so what we've been doing.

**Kit Heintzman** 11:11

That sounds incredibly stressful.

**April Jackson Hunter** 11:15

Yeah.

**Kit Heintzman** 11:18

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

**April Jackson Hunter** 11:22

I feel upside is coming. I feel like once we do get in front of the initial staff that we have that we'll start seeing the upside to the COVID-19. So I'm optimistic about what COVID-19 will look for us in the future.

**Kit Heintzman** 11:42

And what are some of the things you hope for in the long term future coming out of this?

**April Jackson Hunter** 11:48

I hope that we can get a good handle on COVID-19 I hope that we can get to a place where we can understand educate each other, what we need to do to not get ourselves in a future pandemic like this again.

**Kit Heintzman** 12:08

Would you be willing to share some of the things that you've been doing to take care of yourself throughout the pandemic?

**April Jackson Hunter** 12:14

Oh, absolutely. We've been loading up on vitamins we do. We've been taking elderberry. We've been taking Black Sea oil. I think we would take your multivitamins, vitamin C, do. It's kind of like a Grand Slam from Arden garden has like ginger, cranberry, wheatgrass, lemon, and we do a shot once a week, you know, just to keep my immune system up to par, the key thing is building your immune system that helps you fight it off. That's the key thing that we've been doing.

**Kit Heintzman** 12:53

And what are some of the things that you've been doing to take care of the emotional side, the stress, etc.

**April Jackson Hunter** 12:59

You need to have a moment to digress. I say that because this can be overwhelming, mentally. So self care is always the key. We know that we've been stuck in the house pretty much all the time, just kind of like hard to get a moment to yourself because the whole house is at home with you. So whatever you can do, to self care, to have a mental digress, yourself alone is really one, it worked wonders for me. I like to spend a moment to listen to some music, meditate, just to have a moment of clarity for myself.

**Kit Heintzman** 13:39

Mask, if any of those self care strategies or new post pandemic or if they're things that you've borrowed from previous experiences?

**April Jackson Hunter** 13:47

Just really recently started meditating. I promise you maybe like a couple of months ago was I got to the point where I was really stressed out I was, I think like most of us are, came across a meditation and I tried it out and I did a I think it was a three day challenge to learn more about the chakras and meditation. And it like, I felt so at peace. And so I started I've got it on.

**Kit Heintzman** 14:16

You had mentioned that you had had COVID-19 I was wondering if there is anything that you're comfortable sharing about that experience?

**April Jackson Hunter** 14:25

Yes, it was very scary. I did not initially find out that I had it. It was my wife. Um, she got sick, and what to the emergency room and she was positive. And I didn't. I was asymptomatic in the only thing I had was like a rash from my arm. It's the only symptoms I got but she was really really sick and she started going downhill deteriorating. My past previous this pre existing condition she has several so it was taking a really bad toll on her body and it got kind of scary. I thought I would lose her But she fought like she fought back. And she fought like a champ. And I pushed as much immune building things I couldn't her body in, to help her rebuild, and it and it got to the point where she couldn't even walk from the sofa to the bathroom without not being able to breathe, but you can catch our breath, and had gotten to that point. And I was just like, I don't know what's gonna happen next. And it's like, so it was so scary kid. I don't know if I'm sorry. Because it's just just to see the fear in her face, because she didn't know what was going to happen. And she didn't one of them I say the emergency room because they wouldn't let nobody in there by her. And she told me she didn't want to because she didn't want to die alone. And I'm sorry.

**Kit Heintzman** 15:56

You have nothing to apologize for. Thank you so much for choosing to share that.

**April Jackson Hunter** 16:02

I'm fine, I'm a cryer. Yeah. But um, she started getting better, but it took her like almost a little over a month and a half to get back to herself.

**Kit Heintzman** 16:19

I am glad that she's back to herself. That's good to hear. I'm at my second last question. It's a bit odd. So we know we're in this moment where there's all kinds of biomedical research going right, like we expect that there's all of this science happening in there is I'm wondering what kind of work you think people who are trained in the humanities like literature, history, as well as the social sciences, Polly sigh sociology, what kind of work do you think they could be doing to help us better understand this moment and what we're living through?

**April Jackson Hunter** 17:02

I think, they need to talk to everyday people. Because you can't understand how this pandemic is affecting everyday people. Unless you have them, give them a voice. Once they, because all they all they see are numbers, or they're seeing his data. They're not talking to actual lives. So once they give an actual person of voice of how, how this pandemic is impacting them, I think they get a better outlook on which which road they need to take.

**Kit Heintzman** 17:38

And this is the last question. So this is an oral history. And I'm a historian and I carry a few assumptions with me as a historian. One of them is that a historian, a couple 100 years in the future, will understand very little about this moment, no matter how hard they try. I wondering two things. The first is, what would you want them to remember about the context of COVID-19? So like, everything in the world has changed? What are the pieces of that you wouldn't want them to lose? And then secondly, beyond the context, what stories do you want to make sure get told and remembered about this moment.

**April Jackson Hunter** 18:25

I don't want them to lose the mass of life, lives that were lost, they there's all people matter. And I get to once they get inside looking at data, all they're going to see is the amount the number, they're not going to, you're not going

to have faces to those names. We're just going to have a they're not even gonna have names, it's going to have numbers. This is going to be the amount of people that passed away those people have actual lives. Just remember that we are people and our lives matter. This pandemic was ruthless. It was relentless. And it happened so I will say after so quickly because it was gradual. But once it once it got started a spread like cancer just keep in mind that this disease is deadly any people after losing their lives.

**Kit Heintzman** 19:28

I want to thank you so much for everything you shared today. And at this point I just want to invite you to say anything you might like to to anyone listening to this that my questions haven't given you the space to talk about.

**April Jackson Hunter** 19:47

I just want to say be careful I don't know if this disease ever gonna come back again. I hope we I pray don't but social distancing and wearing your mask and keep Keeping yourself clean. At all times this have been a very big help. So this virus does come back. Those are be the key things that you guys can start off with doing. And I hope that you guys can learn something from what I share today.

**Kit Heintzman** 20:18

Thank you so very much for your time.

**April Jackson Hunter** 20:22

Thank you