

Transcript of Interview with Sara Mount by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Sara Mount

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 01/26/2022

Location (Interviewee): Silver Springs, Maryland

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed By: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed included:

Being in an at risk category by virtue of age (83 years old), even though very healthy
Not being able to work for the first year of the pandemic; works as a liaison for a fragrance company.
Practicing isolation as a very outgoing person and frequent traveler. First hearing about the pandemic in January 2020 while in the Dominican Republic while taking group on tour. Last pre-pandemic trip in Feb 2020: a large gem show event planned in Arizona with a large international group of dealers and participants; organizers calling the CDC about the show in advance and early sanitation interventions. Similarities and differences on pre- and mid- pandemic travel summer 2021. Watching adult-son from a distance struggle with career related visas in the UK and Europe. Maryland's quick response to vaccination. Relief associated with getting vaccinated; timing international travel around vaccination schedules. Masking culture in Europe. Helping older Spanish speakers access vaccines and boosters who were encountering language barriers. Vaccine culture in Cuba; having, as a child, watched her mother—the mayor of a small town in Cuba—distribute vaccines. The USA presidential election; voting by mail. Deferring to scientists for safety advice. Increased awareness of touch, becoming more protective of one's hands, elbow bumps. First post-vaccination hug. Caring for a loved one with depression; son having poor access to medication and doctors in Europe. Testing before social events. Online Noche Buena and New Years celebrations. Catching Omicron, mild symptoms, inaccessible testing; no support from PCP after testing positive. Having an ER physician in the family. Planning ahead for tourism travel in Oct 2022. Misinformation, knowledge and authority

Kit Heintzman 0:00

Hello.

Sara Mount 0:02

Hello.

Kit Heintzman 0:04

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

Sara Mount 0:09

Sure. This is Sara Mount. And today is the 26th of January 2022. And I'm in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Kit Heintzman 0:23

And what time is it?

Sara Mount 0:25

Oh, it's 4:48

Kit Heintzman 0:29

Thank you. Do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded, and publicly released under a Creative Commons license attribution noncommercial sharealike?

Sara Mount 0:42

Okay, yes, I do agree, I do consent. And I'm happy to share our conversation wherever you need to put it.

Kit Heintzman 0:51

Thank you so much. I'd like to start by just asking you to introduce yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this, what would you want them to know about you?

Sara Mount 1:02

Oh, I'm just, somebody that has been affected quite a bit by the pandemic, has kept my work schedule down a lot. But you know, it has not, outside of the fact that I have not been able to be with my son as often as I would like to, you know, I don't feel like has taken a huge toll on me, which I'm sure has, mentally. But you know, I'm, I'm not a, I'm fairly optimistic person. So I kind of tend to look at the prism on the good side.

Kit Heintzman 1:49

What do you do for work, if I may ask?

Sara Mount 1:53

I actually work in fragrances. I work for a large fragrance company. And I, I don't work for the store. I work for the fragrance company and I go into the store, try to sell the fragrance, try to have the, you know, have our fragrances arranged in the proper way, sometimes events, things like that. And I've been doing that for a long, long time.

Kit Heintzman 2:25

And you had said that the pandemic was disrupting some of your work schedule. Would you say more about that?

Sara Mount 2:31

Well, yes, because at the beginning, right after it got really bad. You know, like in March of '21, you know, it got, 2020 or 21? March '21.

Kit Heintzman 2:53

March 2020, been a long time, been a long time.

Sara Mount 2:57

Oh, 2020. We just stopped working, we just all went home and nobody got back to work except for a few people that were very young, and were willing to take the chances under risk. So we spent, I spent a good year or some without, without working because of the pandemic and being a person that was older, you know, didn't want to take the chance to be, you know, to be at risk. And so that, the vaccine was wonderful, wonderful once we were able to get vaccinated, that allowed me to go back in without so much fear of getting infected, which I finally did, but that's okay. You know, one of those things.

Kit Heintzman 3:52

I have so many follow up questions, but I'm going to start with something kind of broad, which is tell me a story about life in the pandemic. If you were, if you were explaining to someone who hadn't been here who hadn't seen it, what's the story you would tell them about life now?

Sara Mount 4:09

I'm, I'm a pretty outgoing person. You know, because of my work, I have to talk to people constantly, you know, convince them that they cannot live without that fragrance that I'm trying to show them. So it was really hard not to be able to communicate with people, I pretty much isolated myself. And then I started to do all my food orders online. So I would just go and pick them up or have, had them delivered. So it was really hard for a person that is, for a person that is used to be in contact with people all the time. And it was, went down to just telephone calls and you know, and of course the hardest thing was not being able to, my son is in Europe, working in Europe, when this pandemic started, he was about to take over a new job. He was leaving England to go to Germany. And, of course, all the, all the countries got shut down by the pandemic, he couldn't get his visa processed. And I lived that experience with him, not knowing when he was going to be able to leave England and go on to, to Germany. So instead of arriving in Germany by the first of April, he did not get there until the very end of August. And all that was really very stressing for him. And it was very stressing for me, outside of the fact that I had to be completely shut down in the house and, and not seeing basically anyone? You know, I live by myself. So there was not, nobody else around too much to talk to, you know, I'm off to a neighbor, you know, with wearing a mask and six feet apart. But very rarely, and not very often. So it was, it was extremely challenging, you know, even for an upbeat person and somebody that is optimistic and neutrally in a very good frame, frame, frame of mind, but it was very challenging, you know, and not being able to, um, I travel a lot. You know, I mean, a lot. I'm, I'm, I get itchy if I'm not in an airplane every three months, you know, so for me to be closed in and not being able to fly, see my son in Europe. That was, that was you know, that was probably the hardest part, knowing that I could not fly and then enter country where he was at, because we as Americans were not allowed to go in. You know, that was the hardest thing of the whole pandemic. I could live with everything else, that thought was one that kept me up at night.

Kit Heintzman 7:26

You had mentioned the extra risk associated with your age, may I ask how old you are?

Sara Mount 7:32

Yeah, 83.

Kit Heintzman 7:34

83. How did thinking about the pandemic and your age shape your experiences?

Sara Mount 7:43

Well, I'm a very healthy person. I mean, yes, I'm old. But I'm a very healthy person. You know, I'm, you know, I have a problem with my scoliosis. But, you know, other than that, you know, I'm healthy. I was not thinking, like, I was at a lot more risk than somebody that maybe was 15 or 20 years younger than I am, but I still have to take in consideration the fact that I was on the very high end of the riskiest people in the pandemic, you know, which, to me getting the vaccine was a godsend, you know, that was absolutely fantastic. And I had it as soon as it was available.

Kit Heintzman 8:42

How easy was it for you to access?

Sara Mount 8:45

What's that?

Kit Heintzman 8:45

How easy was it for you to get the vaccine?

Sara Mount 8:48

Oh, it was, it was not immediate. But inside had, you know, I've, I take care of my health. So I have my regular doctor, I have my heart doctor, I have, you know, different doctors. So I went through each one of the different you know, organizations, like my heart doctor is part of John Hopkins, my regular doctor is part of MedStar. And I contacted, you know, all of these people, you know, saying when can I get my, my shot, you know, I saw that the fact that I was in Maryland was very good, because the state of Maryland was very good at getting you know, getting the vaccine rolling as soon as they possibly could. So it was it was quite good. It was quite good. I didn't have to wait to get my, my vaccine more than maybe a week or 10 days after they started to come out. You know, and actually, I helped a lot of people get vaccine because of the language problems, you know, and I'm, you know, fluent in Spanish. So I knew many people that needed to get vaccines, but they couldn't maneuver the computer and things like that. And I would just, once I got mine, I just go in and make the appointment for them and all of that, so, and that made me feel good. Because I knew it was important for them to get it, you know. And they were all for older people, too, that were more of a, in danger if they did get it, you know, if they did get COVID.

Kit Heintzman 10:38

That's really beautiful. Um, how did you find these people? Were these people already in your life, were they knew people that you met?

Sara Mount 10:47

Well, no, not necessarily. They were, see, in my job, I had a lot of people that, that I knew, that were, in that situation, some of them were, they were mostly young people that I work with. But in, in the stores that we work, we were with a lot of Spanish speaking people. And we are sent to those stores, because we are bilingual. Obviously, that's the reason why we are sent there. So we do hire people that are, you know, also bilingual work in those tours. So I know a lot of girls that, that, you know, have mothers and dads and people like that, that, that were wanting to get, they wanted to get them to vaccine. And many of them were working, because they were younger, they were working less, see, they only work for company, our company part time, so they work like in the school system or whatever. So they didn't have time to go fiddle around looking for appointments which sometimes you, you know, I got a lot of the appointments like three or four o'clock in the morning, because I'm just get off for an hour and try it and see, which hospital was giving what, you know. And so I was able to do it for them. You know, so many of them have kids, and they couldn't just take half an hour to go hunt for you know, or an hour computer to hunt for the vaccine for the parents or whatever. So that's, that's what I did.

Kit Heintzman 12:39

Thank you for doing all that.

Sara Mount 12:41

That's alright, I mean, it was fine, it was perfect. There was not you know, I didn't, I didn't mind it. And I was doing something that might protect somebody else just like I had protected myself by getting, you know, a vaccine. And I did that also for the, for the follow up for the second shot. You know, of course, once you get the first shot, then you got the appointment rifle, the second shot, you know, but the booster was the same thing. You know, I help them get into the booster thing.

Kit Heintzman 13:18

How did your body react to the vaccine?

Sara Mount 13:22

I didn't have any huge problems, a little bit of soreness in the arm, maybe a little bit of tiredness. I didn't have a fever. You know, maybe it would have been more tired and slept longer for the first 24 hours. I didn't have any, you know, my arm was sorest with the booster. You know, it did get sore and lasted a

little bit longer. But again, I never had, never had a fever. Never, never, I never had to get in bed too because I was feeling bad. No, none of that. None of that.

Kit Heintzman 14:06

And what about the sort of emotional impact of getting vaccinated, what changed with that?

Sara Mount 14:15

A huge sense of relief, emotionally, really. And then, you know, I was sort of like the beginning of things turning well, because I knew that I was getting vaccinated. There was a very good chance that my son would be getting vaccinated soon. You know, the vaccine was going to allow us to travel, do the things that we wanted to do. And that was, that was a great moment of knowing that, you know, yes, you just had your first vaccine but the second vaccine will come in 20 some days and and he will be getting his first vaccine and, you know, actually, I flew to see him on the day that it was two weeks from his second shot. So we timed it so that he would be protected by his second shot. And I was already protected by my second shot. And that was a joyful occasion [unintelligible] your second week after the second shot, so.

Kit Heintzman 15:36

How was traveling, what was different about it, what did it feel like?

Sara Mount 15:41

Well, for somebody that traveled as much as I do, really, it didn't feel that different, except for the fact that, that, that we all wore masks all the way. You know, I mean, it was like a seven and a half hour flight from, you know, from my area to Munich, which is where I live. And, you know, you did not take your mask off, except to lift it a little bit and have something to eat, or have something to drink. But, you know, the atmosphere of the airplane was not, was not horrible, was not bad, and everybody was compliant. Everybody was, because it was an international flight, everybody was compliant. And, and everybody kept their masks on except when they were eating. You know, and I think everybody felt like, you know, we take turns eating, you're eating, I'm not going to be taking my mask down. And then, you know, then it's my turn to eat. They had their mask off. So I don't think, I did not feel that it was that different. And once I got to Europe, everybody was wearing masks, and you felt comfortable wherever you were going. Because, you know, no matter where you were you, people were wearing masks. In the trains, because I had to take three trains to go from Munich to where my son was, you know, everybody was wearing masks. So, you know, it did not feel like it was, you were in in peril, let's put it that way.

Kit Heintzman 17:31

Did it, did the masking seem different than what you've been witnessing home in Maryland?

Sara Mount 17:36

Well, yeah, well, no. Not in Maryland, Maryland has been very good about masking. So that was not, was not any different, you know, but at the same time, we were hearing of other places within the US that they were having all this problem with masks and all of that. So no, Maryland with, and even to this day, it's, it's very compliant with a mask. So in Maryland it's excellent, you know, I mean, a few people were walking outside without masks, but the moment you walk into anywhere, that was close, everybody was masked. So at that point, I mean, things changed a little bit after that, you know, but people got tired of it, and all of that. But, you know, at that time, it was very good. That was July to August of 21.

Kit Heintzman 18:38

What does the word pandemic mean to you?

Sara Mount 18:42

Well, it didn't mean much until it arrived. Because I had not been conscious of the one that had happened so many years ago, and so on. You know, having come from a Latin country, we were very aware of what, you know, how important it was to get vaccination for certain things. If I can give you a little tip on that, my mother was the mayor of a very small little town in rural Cuba. Okay. And, you know, all the Caribbean countries have had over the years, illnesses that are endemic to the country like typhoid fevers and things like that. So I remember being very small and the health department, from the provinces would send my mother a box full of typhoid fever vacc, vaccines, you know, and the syringes and things like that. And she would get, she would have people come by our house to get vaccinated, and then she would get on a horse, you know, certain days and go to faraway places where people couldn't come to, to us, and, and vaccinate people. So I'm, I'm always, lived with the idea that you know, their illnesses out there that are working, you know, in, they could become an infection that would kill lots of people, so, but I was not used to the idea of having a pandemic. And that was, that was very different. You know, that was very different. I wish never been in a situation where there was an infection that, that spread to the people the way this pandemic did, you know, I was aware of the fact that you can get very ill, like certain things that, you know, certain illnesses, but I was not, I was not aware of that. And that was, that was a very challenging thing, you know, to realize that you are dependent on love, and you might be dependent on how well you take care of yourself.

Kit Heintzman 21:37

Do you remember when the pandemic first hit your radar, when you first noticed something was happening in the world?

Sara Mount 21:46

Actually I had been to the Dominican Republic with some friends in January. And there was talk already of the...

Kit Heintzman 22:00

January 2020?

Sara Mount 22:02

2020, right. And that was just, you know, when we were beginning to hear that there was a case here somewhere or another one there. And I came back. And normally I go to, because I have another business besides the, the fragrance, I have a personal business, which I do travel for. And you know that, I think we talked about that, personally? Okay. I take groups, you know, to countries, I have two different types of groups. And trust me, you don't want me to tell you this, but...

Kit Heintzman 22:53

I definitely do want you to tell this, I think this is lovely and important.

Sara Mount 22:58

Okay, I take people to countries that are where you find a lot of gemstones and minerals and fossils and things like that. They also tell people to take people to areas that are cultural, of course, you're cultural important, and that are fun and that are places to be at and you know, things like that. So because of that I always come to this big gem show in Arizona, in February, at the beginning of February. So I came back from the Dominican Republic. And then about two weeks later, I went to, I went to Arizona, to the gem show, I usually just go two or three days, visit there with people that have traveled with me before, and go to all the shows where I know people from Brazil, Hong Kong, you know, everywhere that places that I have taken my groups to, you know, Morocco and so on. And when the, I think the gravity of what was happening came to me when I, of course I know the people that are, that organized this gem shows, especially the biggest one in there is somebody that I have known for many, many years, we're friends, and that when I got to that particular show and I was talking, talking to the person that is chairman of the

board of the the group, GLW, and of course, she, sellers from all over the world come to the show, like this one particular show has about four thousand dealers from all over the world showing their goods in there. They come from China, everywhere. So I'm talking to her. And then, you know, well Candy, how are you handling this thing about, about the, you know, pandemic and all of that. She said, Well, the weirdest thing happened to me, because I call the CDC to find out what I should do about, you know, setting up, like sanitation stations and things like that, you know? And they say, what do you, what do you want that? And she said, well, because I have like two thousand dealers from China, and they say, what? Two thousand dealers from China? And she said, Yes. I mean, you know, we have people from all over the world. So they scrambled, and they called her back, and they asked her to put, you know, sanitation stations all over the place, and all of that, but that gave you a little kind of, you know, idea of what, you know, what was happening and what, and actually how unprepared we were. Because here is, you know, the CDC doesn't know that, that it's a show where probably half a million people go through in that are probably, you know, thousands of people from all over, all over, coming over, you know, including China, which of course, you know, was the originator of it, and everywhere. So, that was a awakening, you know, like a wake up call of what was to follow, you know, anyway. And then I traveled with my last trip, that was my last flight in February of '20. Before I went to see my son in July of 1921. I mean, 2021.

Kit Heintzman 27:32

1921 would be a jump back. What was I gonna ask? Right, I wanted to know about your initial reactions to the pandemic. So what did it feel when it started to hit your radar?

Sara Mount 27:47

Well, you know, I, I did not feel extremely threatened by it. Until we began to hear about the people getting really in trouble with the pandemic, this was not a flu, you know, and people were being hospitalized and intubated, and, and people died. And then you took seriously what was happening, you know, and, and it didn't take that long. Because from the time I was over there in February, you know, two months later, it was all over. Yeah, really.

Kit Heintzman 28:43

So, in addition to the pandemic, 2020 and 2021 had a lot going on. I'm wondering what kinds of other political and social issues have been in your, on your mind over this period of time?

Sara Mount 28:58

Oh, well. Getting, both my son and I wrote in, you know, through the mail, you know, but it was very important for us to be able to change what was happening in government, because you could tell that we would never get out of this pandemic unless somebody came in and did the right things. And that was obvious from the very beginning, you know, so now I'm being, politically, it was very important to make sure that the right people got into the government to be able to handle the pandemic properly. That was my personal opinion. But you asked me, so I'm telling you.

Kit Heintzman 30:06

What was the process of mail-in voting? Like, is it the first time you did a mail in vote?

Sara Mount 30:10

Or no, we, I've done it before, I've done it before and requested the mailing ballot with plenty of time, show that my son in in Europe, he did. And we got it, mailed it in, and it was acknowledged that it had arrived. And that was fine. You know, but for him, both for him and for me. Mail in ballot is, it's a very important thing for anybody, you know, because, you know, you may not be able to do it because, to go vote because of your job, because you're, you know, different location, you're traveling or whatever. So, mail in voting is, is, is part of maintaining a democracy.

Kit Heintzman 31:13

What does the word health mean to you?

Sara Mount 31:16

What's that? What?

Kit Heintzman 31:17

What does the word health mean to you?

Sara Mount 31:20

Um, I mean, it means being fit, body and mind. Mind very important, you know, keeping your brain agile, do things to keep yourself involved, reading, you know, getting into chats into whatever you need to do to keep that way. And health means good food, foods that you know, that your body likes. And that will do whatever is needed to, you know, keep your cholesterol down, and, and make sure that you have a balanced diet that will, you know, will keep you alert, mentally and physically.

Kit Heintzman 32:25

What are some of the things you want for your own health and the health of people in your life?

Sara Mount 32:32

Mental health is very important. You know that my son has what, you know, depression, since he was 15 years old. So, I think that it's very, very important that mental health is giving, given the importance that has, you know, but at the same time, you know, I think all health is important. You know, even if you don't have an issue with mental illness, you know, being able to do the things that will keep your mind fresh and able to sync and, and, you know, and take care of your own self. Because when you can think about what to do, then you take care of yourself. So I think it's just important to keep in mind that having your body and your mind working properly should be a, something that you take care of, that you're very attentive to you around all the time, and no matter what age

Kit Heintzman 33:55

What does safety mean to you?

Sara Mount 34:06

It means not taking unnecessary chances. But not being afraid to do what you want to do. You know, I'm, probably because I have traveled so much, I don't have the fears that some other people do, you know, you know, don't go here. Don't go there. You know, I mean I'm not afraid of any religion. I'm not afraid of any person in particular, because I think they're all human beings just like you and I. They happen to be born in a different country where, you know, they were born into a different religion, a different view of God, a different, you know, a different reasoning for why you're in this world. But still, we all get up, we all go to bed, and, you know, human beings. Oh, safety is important. But I don't let it stop me from doing what I think is important.

Kit Heintzman 35:34

There's been this really narrow conversation about safety during the pandemic, right? Like, there are all these small things and changes that we're supposed to make. I'm wondering thinking in that, like, tiny world of COVID, what you've been doing to feel as safe as possible?

Sara Mount 35:55

Well, I only, I really been doing what the science tells you to do. So, you know, wash your hands. If you go anywhere, try not to touch your face, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, when you didn't

really know, you know, what was happening, and washing the vegetables that you got, and things like that. But basically just going by the science, what science was telling you to do, you know, after all, they've been dealing with pandemics from, you know, from way back, you know, while I've been reading about fragrances, and what mineral is found, and what country, they've been reading about what happened 200 years ago, and what else that brought on a pandemic or, or, you know, whatever happened, so I think that they're, they're there to be followed. And, and use your own judgment about who you want to listen about what how to protect your health, but that definitely do what you're supposed to do if you know, wear your mask and, and, and stay six feet away, eight if you can, and wash your hands and, and keep sanitizer everywhere. And, you know, I, because I fly, I study things like what happened with the air circulation on an airplane, so that you can be not so fearful of getting on an airplane because the air does circulates fairly quickly in an airplane, so you don't have to be paranoid about, you know, so things like that.

Kit Heintzman 38:02

How's your relationship to touch changed over the course of the pandemic?

Sara Mount 38:07

To touch. Touch. I'm much more aware of it. Like, I now go to a grocery store. I still buy online a lot in cooking. I used to it, and it's convenient, and everything else. But I do go to the grocery store to get the things that I like to pick myself. And I'm very aware of touching. I'm very aware and wash hands when I get the cart from the grocery store. I am sure to, they have handle wipes that they have, I'm sure to clean the handle on it. And and then once I'm done, I get to the car, I have sanitizer in the car. I've cleaned my hands with sanitizer. So, yes, touch has become very important. And, and you tend to be much more protective of yourself. Where you put your hands after, when you are outside. You go to a bank, you go to an ATM, you know, you take money. I get back in the car. I put those bills away in my wallet. And before I touched the wheel of the car, you know, I put sanitizer on my hands.

Kit Heintzman 39:38

Do you remember the last time you touched a stranger?

Sara Mount 39:43

Umm, hmm. That would be really hard to figure out. Because I'm one of those that still goes anywhere and then I just go touch elbows, you know, none of the huggy and, you know, course I hug my son when I saw him. But talking about strangers, I don't believe I have touched a stranger, since, well, maybe I go back to my trip to Arizona, in 2020.

Kit Heintzman 40:31

Can I ask you to describe what it was like to get to see and hug your son again?

Sara Mount 40:38

Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't even you know, begin to describe it, you know. It was just unbelievably wonderful. You know, it was just so great to see him. I mean, I talked to him on on Skype all the time, and see his face, but basically being able to hold him and, and wrap my hands around him. And we didn't do that until we got to his apartment in Konstanz because, you know, I arrived on the train and, and gave him a quick little hug. And of course, but there was a taxi waiting for us and, and, you know, we were wearing masks, and in all of this, and, you know, we, we got in, we've got into his apartment, and we washed our hands, and we took our masks all off and then we hugged each other. And that was, you know, that was just heaven. That was just absolutely the greatest feeling, you know, great feeling, great feeling. I continue to talk about it and you don't want me to, because that really is to me, it's just a wonderful emotion. And it's really great. Really, really great.

Kit Heintzman 42:08

I really am happy to listen, if there is more you'd like to say more about that.

Sara Mount 42:13

Oh, you know, what was wonderful about it was that once I got there, you know, and we, you know, with great very hard because, you know, he had been moved in into an apartment that he had rented seven months before he got in. Then three weeks later, the movers from, movers arrived. It was a very, very difficult time for him. Because he could not get a psychiatrist in Konstanz right away. And he was without any of his medication. He had a very, very hard time living through that time. And he made it, you know, and he was feeling so much better when I got there in, in July. But the wonderful thing about it is after the week, I helped unpack, you know, he had, what, fifty-something boxes that had not been unpacked, you know he's a book fanatic. So he had like 59 boxes of books that had not been unpacked. And then we got bookcases, we set them up, when we unpacked all of that and we cooked together. We made meals together, you know we, we would go shopping together and it was just, it was just the best three weeks. I was supposed to be there just two weeks, but at the end of, you know, a week and a half or so, you know, we talked and he said What, why don't you stay stay a little bit longer. So I did, I changed my ticket and stayed for three weeks with him. And like I said we cooked together we did all these things. He invited the people once we got all the books right out, and the place looked like something, we did cook one day for the head of the department and the other and his wife and and it was wonderful. It was great. We made a fabulous mushroom recipe and, and he, you know he's a wine connoisseur and he had wines for the hor d'oeuvres and he had wines for this and he had wines for dessert and and we just had a absolutely wonderful time, wonderful time. But we cook together just every day we cook together, and if we ordered out, it was great too, because we would make it, you know, if we had German beer, we would toast and it was wonderful. Really, really, great three weeks, really, three weeks. Can't wait to repeat it, too.

Kit Heintzman 43:13

What can I ask? I wanted to know, how was your New Years?

Sara Mount 45:35

Um, well, you know, it's been two years since that time, the first one was really hard. Because he was going through that period, he was feeling so depressed, and, and, you know, so out of it, you know, all I could do was just try to pump him up and making feel better and, you know, have a sip of beer or wine or whatever, you know, but that, but it was bad, it was, it was, it was very lonely for him, it was very lonely for me, it was very lonely for anybody that had anybody away that they couldn't be with, you know, it was, it was tough. It was really, really tough. This new year was better, because, you know, he was in a better mood he's worked in, he loves doing what he's doing. He loves his job. And even though he was by himself, you know, he had been to, the head of the department had invited him the Saturday before to go to their house. And, of course, in Germany, you know, tests are everywhere. So if you're going to go to somebody's house, you, you do a test before you go anywhere. So they were just like, five people, five or six people in there, and everybody had a test before they ate. So he made you know, everybody brought a little something and he made some kind of hot drink because of course you winter and that, you know, and, and here you're, and then on on New Year's Eve, of course, we, in Cuba, we don't celebrate Christmas, we celebrate the night before Christmas. So the night before Christmas, we had a beer together and we enjoyed it very much. And then, then New Year's, he was very concerned because at that time, I had gotten Omicron. And he was very concerned about me. But you know, fortunately, it was, it was not a problem. But, you know, he was still worried about me. But we did have, we did share a beer, you know, on UUC.

Kit Heintzman 48:22

I assume you mean on Zoom, or some kind of Skype platform.

Sara Mount 48:27

Right yeah, we use that.

Kit Heintzman 48:31

You mentioned catching Omicron. Tell me that story if you're willing.

Sara Mount 48:37

Yeah. Well, it was very strange, because I wore double masks all the time that I went out, I was working. And the last day that I worked, I didn't know it was gonna be the last day that I worked. When I got over there, one of the people that that I had trained, and I know people that care about me, you know, that one of the people that I have trained in the store, you know, when I walked in, I had worked on Friday. And then I was going back to work on Monday. And when I walked in, she told me she said, We need to talk right away. And I said, Fine, let me take care, there was a customer waiting and, and she was with somebody else. So I say just give me a chance to do this. And I did take care of the customer. And I did take her over to the register, you know. And so it took about 15 minutes for me to get back to her and I said what's happening? She said you need to get out of here. And I said what's happening? And she said there are people working that have COVID, and the store is allowing it to happen. And I said, How do you know she said, I know, just trust me, you know, get out of here, you, at your age, you don't need to be exposed to them, even though, you know I was masked, and, and all of that. And I said fine. I'll go. So I was there for about half an hour because somebody had driven me, this is very hard to get parking those days. So somebody had driven me over, and I could not get in touch with the person to come and pick me up. Well, I finally like 20 minutes later, they said, I'm out of here, I called up taxi company, got a taxi to come and pick me up. And then I left and came home. But, you know, that was, that was a Monday. And I, several days went by and I was fine. I was, I was good. You know. And then came, you know, Friday, which would have been [unintelligible], you know, the, the 24th, okay. And I order Cuban food, and have my beer with Beau and things like that. And then the following that night, which would have been Christmas Day, you know, I just, well, even before that, I began to get a lot of post nasal drip, then I'm, I have allergies. So that's not an unusual thing for me. You know, I mean, it was my allergies are acting up kind of thing. But then on Christmas Day, I got a little bit of a scratchy throat. Just a little bit of a scratchy throat. You know, I have some lozenges, and and I had some gargle with with salt water. And I thought well, I don't know. It could be, it could not be, you know, whatever. In the meantime, I had, I knew that a person that was visiting somebody near me here had, well, I didn't know he was sick. But two or three days later, I found out that he had been sick. And he had been close enough to me that I could have been exposed. So I really to this point, I don't know whether I got it in the store, or whether I got it from him. But outside, outside of that is crashing through on Christmas Day which was Saturday, you know, I had lined up, I had lined up to have a test because I knew I had been exposed in the store. So I had lined up a test on Monday. Well, they call me and they told me that the labs were too backed up and they couldn't do the test on Monday. So I was able to get to another test and had the test on Monday night. And it came back inconclusive. So then, they said, Come on Tuesday night, and we will do a PCR but it will be on rapid test PCR on Tuesday. That would have been a week and one day after I had been in the store. But it was only like five days after I had been exposed to the other person. And sure enough, when that test came back, it came back positive, but I never got sick, really. I never had a fever. I did not, outside of the fact that I had the post nasal drip and a little bit of a scratchy throat, you know, which a lozenge resolved it. You know, I've didn't, I didn't feel bad, you know, and I think that has to do with the fact that I had been vaccinated. I had been boosted and I think I have a fairly strong immune system, you know that I didn't, you know, I didn't. And by the following, the Saturday after, well, I took the test on Tuesday, and it came back positive. And I waited. And then a few days later, I went back for another test was negative. That was that.

Kit Heintzman 55:36

How would you describe access to testing? So in that in the story during Omi, Omicron, you mentioned, like, it getting canceled, what's been trying to get tests like before?

Sara Mount 55:49

Well, I never tried getting tested before, because I never had a reason for, I didn't think that I had been exposed. Okay, but trying to get tested, once I got, you know, it was a real problem, you know, you had to wait, you know, two or three days to get the test. And then once you got to the testing site, you know, one time I waited an hour and fifty minutes online, in my car, you know, for the drive thru test, that was one that came inconclusive. So then the following day, I went back, and that time only took an hour and 20 minutes to go through and get the test done. So, but it was really hard to get tested, but that, that was at the height of Omicron. You know, which was Christmas.

Kit Heintzman 56:47

So you had mentioned, this goes way back in the conversation, but you had mentioned having a relationship with many different doctors, how has your access to sort of everyday health care changed during the pandemic?

Sara Mount 57:09

Oh, it changed a lot. Really, it changed once I found out that I was positive, you know, my immediate, very immediate reaction was to call my regular physician, you know, following day, I let her know that, you know, I have COVID, what should I do? Some people in the family, in my family, are doctors. So the moment I call my closest people, you know, I have it, you know, they contacted, you know, the one doctor in the family with an emergency room physician, you know, and he immediately looked up, Maryland Health Department and the numbers for, you know, getting treatment or getting, you know, monoclonal, monoclonal antibody, even though by that time, he was aware that two of them didn't work, and there was only one that did work, but he wanted me to be alerted to it. And he said, just contact your regular physician. And, and be make them aware in case you do feel like you need to have, you know, more intense treatment, then, you know, if you begin to feel bad or something like that, so I called my regular physician, you know, well, I asked for her, and they said, she's away, she won't be back until the following Tuesday, this point in the morning. And I said, Well, you know, I tested positive last night, and I need to contact whoever's, whoever's, is taking care of her patients. And they said, well, you know, we don't have anybody taking care of her patient. I said, how can that be, you know, you're a large, big organization. You know, I mean, how could you not have somebody taking care of her patients? And I said, well, what am I supposed to do? And, and the guy went through, the nurse said, call the CDC. And I said, no, the CDC is not my regular doctor. You know, I need to speak to somebody that can help me that is, knows my case, knows who I am. You know, as matter of fact, my physician is a block and a half for me where I live right now. Well, now, I don't have an answer for you. Just just, you know, We can't, can't really help you. So I call back and got somebody else in the office. And, and she pretty much told me, told me the same thing, but she was at least a little bit more, you know, sympathetic, a little bit more, you know, she said, Well, you know what happened, out of the four doctors in the office, we only have one in here. And I said, Well, you know, my thing is, if I need to have any help with this situation, I need to find out who I can call. And she said, Well, I couldn't even begin to give you an appointment for, for a, you know, for an online thing. So I thought, you know, I'm not getting anywhere with her. So I just called the Maryland Department of Health. And, you know, because my family has given me the number to call for all the treatments, all of that. And, and sure enough, they did have people that, you could actually talk to a clinician, if you felt like you needed to have it. And it has the list of all the hospitals that were giving the monoclonal antibodies, and all of that. So even though I did not have the physician behind me on it, I felt like I had enough tools in my hand, that if I got in trouble, I would know what to do, you know, call them up and, and set up an appointment in one of the hospitals and go in there. But as far as my physician forget it, doesn't work. Now I did make an appointment for when she came back. And, and I talked to her, she gave me, I had a, you know, an online appointment. And that, and I register a complaint with her.

And, and they did call me back and talk to me about who had been the person that I talked to, and all that because I felt like, you know, if you're in the health business, you need to have at least a little bit of empathy. You know, and be able to, you know, besides these are people that I've been seeing for the last 15, 17 years, I've been seeing these people all the time. And all of a sudden, you're a stranger, go call CDC. Anyway, that part of it wasn't very good.

Kit Heintzman 1:02:45

What's it been like having a family member who's an emergency room physician right now?

Sara Mount 1:02:52

Oh, it's nice, because you always have somebody that you can contact. Which is nice. You know. I know he's in Florida. But of course, my, my cousin, which is my brother, you know, he's like, my son's second father. Okay. He is in communication with him all the time. So he passes to me anything he has to say about, you know, the pandemic or anything, you know, and I know that I can always get in touch with him through, through my brother or directly, or his wife, which is, you know, I mean, I'm in contact with her all the time. So it's nice to have somebody like that, that if you get in trouble can come and rescue you, you know, I will at least try to give you some [unintelligible], let's put it that way.

Kit Heintzman 1:04:05

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Sara Mount 1:04:09

Oh, I'm just hoping that, I'm an optimistic. So I'm just hoping that Omicron is going to be the beginning of the end. You know, I'm not sure that I'm going to be some other, you know, that there is not going to be another strain, but hopefully, it will not be a really bad strain that will not be reasonably easy to control. And I think that we have so many more medications, we have the vaccine, we have some new things coming in the market that will allow you to treat the people that are really ill, that get really ill, so I'm optimistic, I, you know, but then I'm an, an eternal optimist anyway. So, you know, so optimistic that I already have a tour fully booked for, for Morocco in October. So, you know, fully booked, I mean, we have, we're, the people that have traveled with me before have been in Morocco before and they called me and said, you know, we're sound, we're going. So I've already have my hotel selected, I've already, because we stayed in very small riads, which are like bed and breakfasts, but really nice, beautiful, gorgeous five star places, you know, and many of them only have like seven and eight rooms, so I block all the rooms, so I have that place to ourselves for two days in a row. And then we move on somewhere else where we have some similar place like that to ourselves for two days in a row, so.

Kit Heintzman 1:06:23

What are, beyond the big trip that's coming up, what are some of your hopes for a longer term future?

Sara Mount 1:06:33

Well, if I make it personal, you know, Beau to get a permanent position, you know, somewhere. And for him, for me to be able to see him, you know, get a place and, and settle down into a place, get the cat that he's been wanting to have. And, and that, you know, fortunately, I'm not allergic to cat, so, and I hope I can go and help him set up this place. And, and that's it, you know.

Kit Heintzman 1:07:09

What are some of the ways you've been taking care of yourself over the course of the pandemic?

Sara Mount 1:07:13

I'm much more careful about what I eat. Trying to, I've lost weight, which is something that I have meant to do, because when you have a scoliosis, which I do, the more weight you carry, the worse your back is

So I made it a point to lose weight. And I started, you know, after Beau began to feel better, you know, and he was getting back into the rhythm of things and I was not so stressed out because of that, then I began to take care of, take care of the meal, I was eating and balancing the food more. And I began to lose weight. And, you know, by the time I went to see him in July, I had already, you know, so I had already lost about 10 pounds. And I'm going to be looking forward to having lost another 10 since that time, and and I might want to lose another five before I, you know, but my back feels much better. And you know, and I feel good. You know, I mean the face gets more wrinkles because the moment the skin falls out of you, you know, you lose all the fat in your face and your wrinkles come on, but then again, I don't worry about that. But I have been taking better care of myself. I you know, I think that I always did. But I began to be much more careful with what I ate, you know, more selective and, and, you know, my health has been good.

Kit Heintzman 1:09:26

This is my second last question. And it's a little weird.

Sara Mount 1:09:31

I like that.

Kit Heintzman 1:09:31

So, so we know that we're in this mode like we know all the scientific research is happening, right? Like all of the time the vaccines are developing, they're studying the virus. I'm interviewing you, as someone trained in the humanities and the social sciences, and I'm wondering what you think people doing this work in the humanities and the social sciences can do to help us understand this moment?

Sara Mount 1:09:59

I think the most important thing is to not allow, well, to be a strong voice for reasoning, for science, or, not science as you being a scientist, but somebody that can pick and realize that, like some Joe Blow on, on a speaker is saying about, you know, what is happening, is not what a reasonable person that can think, somebody that is educated, and that recognizes what, what the spot is for the scientist. And what the spot is for the cook. And I'm not talking about cook of the petition, but the other kind, they burn out, you know, and that is what I think is important for the people like you. And that is to make sure that the message gets across to as many people as possible. That, you know, I think, as a reasonable person, do not allow, do not allow people that have no knowledge of what they're talking about convince you of something different than what you're thinking right now. Or if you're thinking, whatever your thought, talk to, allow yourself to speak to somebody that can reason, that has intelligence, that has the ability to explain how important it is to recognize that, you know, that you cannot listen to people that have no knowledge of what they are speaking about. That is just, that is just not a good procedure for handling a pandemic, or anything else.

Kit Heintzman 1:12:16

My last question, I'm going to ask you to imagine some historian in the future. So imagine someone far enough in the future that they've never lived through this moment. So they, like, they know nothing about what it was like to be here right now. What kinds of stories would you tell them need to be remembered?

Sara Mount 1:12:37

Okay, the fact that you cannot allow people to distract you from the fact that there is a pandemic on the way, not politics, not, you know, the talking heads anywhere, just remember that the best example of what you don't want it to happen is what happened in 2020, with this pandemic. You do not want some new thing to tell you that, that, you know, we are doing all we can, you know, this is going to go away, and it's not going to come back, it doesn't go away. When these things, this infectious diseases happen, you have

to take them seriously. And that this is the moment to listen to the people that can think and the scientists and the people that can actually do the best they can to try to keep you safe.

Kit Heintzman 1:13:52

I want to thank you so much for the generosity of your time and like the gift of all you've shared. And at this point, I just want to ask if there's anything that you'd like to say that my questions haven't made space for? Please take the space to say it now.

Sara Mount 1:14:10

I don't know, I think you've covered pretty much everything. You know, you made me talk about me personally, as a family, with my son. And then my experiences with pandemic and my travels and, and, you know, we cover just about everything I could think of and that, but I do want to thank you for the opportunity to let me, you know, talk to you, let me express what I had in the back of my mind about what went wrong during the pandemic as far as the politics of it, and then how appreciative we should be to the science that has brought us to the point where we are right now that is not quite as bad as we were before, you know, so, and that's important, and I thank you, Kit.

Kit Heintzman 1:15:04

Thank you so much.

Sara Mount 1:15:07

You're welcome.