

Interviewee: Chontay Littlewolf

Interviewer: Kaitlin Rikala

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Abstract: Chontay Littlewolf was raised in the Chippewa Valley in Wisconsin; she currently resides in Fargo, North Dakota. In this interview Chontay shares her experience living in North Dakota during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as her experience as an essential worker at Starbucks during the Covid-19 pandemic. Chontay gives her perspective on how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted her communities which include her friends, family, neighbors, and Native American tribe (Ho-Chunk Nation). Chontay also discusses her thoughts on how the Covid-19 pandemic could have been handled better by everyone, ranging from individuals to governmental leaders. Chontay reflects on mental health, physical health, the economy, media and the actions of the government in this interview.

Chontay Littlewolf 1:45

Hey. Okay, so the date is November 22nd, 2020. It's currently 10am. The Coronavirus cases in the US: there's a total of 12.2 million cases and a total death toll of 256,000. In North Dakota, the total cases are at 71,546. And the total death count is at 840. Before we start, can I get your name? And do you mind sharing demographic information for the study such as your race, ethnicity, age and gender?

Chontay Littlewolf 2:30

Yeah, do I just say I'm like--like my name, and then all the stuff?

Kaitlin Rikala 2:35

Yeah.

Chontay Littlewolf 2:36

So--I, my name is Chontay [Littlewolf]. I'm a 21-year-old Native American, female. That's it.

Kaitlin Rikala 2:48

Where do you live? And what is it like to live there?

Chontay Littlewolf 2:51

I live in Fargo, North Dakota. It's--the winters are really harsh because it's so windy. So that's like, all I ever think about all the time is like, how hard the winters are gonna be. So, like, in the summer, I'll like, be like, drive around a lot more. But that's really it. It's just the winters, they're hard.

Kaitlin Rikala 3:18

What are the primary things you do on a day to day basis, for example, your job, your activities, etc.?

Chontay Littlewolf 3:26

So I wake up, and I like clean around my apartment and take care of my rabbits. And then if I have things to do like going grocery shopping, or go to the pet store, or anything like that, I'll do that. And then I go to work at 1:30. And I don't leave there until 10:30. So that's kind of really it. Then just come home. Go to sleep.

Kaitlin Rikala 3:50

And where do you work?

Chontay Littlewolf 3:51

I work at Starbucks.

Kaitlin Rikala 3:55

When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your first thought thoughts about it? And have they--have your thoughts changed since you first learned about it?

Chontay Littlewolf 4:05

Well, when I first learned about it, I don't think I really understood what it was. I--it wasn't as big of a deal as it was when I first heard about it. I just...and now I'm like really concerned about it. It's something that bothers me a lot, where I take a lot of precautions to make sure I don't get sick. And I--and that I don't get other people sick. So that's just something I'm constantly aware of was, like, am I washing my hands enough? Did I wear a clean face mask? Am I doing everything I can? And so, I guess it just adds a lot more stress to my life just by constantly doing those things.

Kaitlin Rikala 4:57

And what issues have concerned you the most about the pandemic?

Chontay Littlewolf 5:02

That people don't really believe in COVID. It stresses me out. Because I don't understand their thinking. I'm like, it doesn't seem that hard to me to just wear a facemask and wash your hands more. So, I get frustrated with that a lot not understanding where those people are coming from who are like, don't want to do anything about it or don't believe it's real. And they're fine with people, people dying and they're just like, 'Oh, do you know anybody who's died?'. It's not like enough for them to just know that people have died, they have to know someone personally. And that makes me really uncomfortable and it kind of scares me a lot.

Kaitlin Rikala 5:44

Yeah. And in the area that you're living in are there a lot of people that don't believe in the Coronavirus?

Chontay Littlewolf 5:52

Yeah, it's--a lot of people don't believe in it. A lot of businesses have catered to those people. And I, and if they have a note that says they don't have to wear a face mask, they don't wear one, so I choose not to go to those stores anymore. Yeah, I feel like at my job, I argue with people on a day to day basis, about COVID and, like things are policies that Starbucks put into place to keep us safe as baristas. And it's really stressful. I didn't really think too much about other people until I started working in customer service and I--but now I'm like really aware of like what other people are doing all the time. And yeah, that's kind of really it.

Kaitlin Rikala 6:39

Yeah. That leads into my next question(s) of: how has COVID-19 affected your job and in what ways?

Chontay Littlewolf 6:46

At first, I feel like for the first month, COVID was like a big deal. So, like in February, I think, like the middle of February, that's when everybody starts finding out about COVID and talking about it. And my job didn't really do anything until like the middle of March, they closed our lobby, so no one can come in order, no one can come pick up their mobile orders, people can't sit in there. And that was really frustrating to customers where they would come and, like bang on our windows, or call us all day. Not understanding what's going on. And we didn't understand what was going on. So there was--it's really hard to communicate with them about, we didn't know what was going on. And it was kind of scary to everybody around us. Because at first our customers would like quarantine and not come. So, a lot of us were just standing around and cleaning all day or just going home early because there was nothing to do. And we--since we were only drive thru, our drive thru line got really long. And progressively as COVID went on and weeks were passing by, people stopped caring as much. And so, they would start coming to Starbucks because everything else was closed, like our--anything that wasn't an essential business was closed. Starbucks was an essential business, I guess. And we stayed open the entire pandemic, we closed one time due to a COVID case. But during that time, we picked up a lot of business, because everybody wanted coffee, like we had, at the time too Starbucks was offering a free drink to essential workers like doctors and nurses. So, they would stop by all the time and get a free drink. So, our lines got super long. And people started getting more frustrated with us for our lines being long. And it started making this divide between us and the customers. Where now we groan anytime customers come in. And that wasn't, that's not how it was before COVID. It was like, we liked the customers, we took time out of our day, out of our like busy schedule we had going. Like, if I was like, mopping the floor, I would stop mopping and connect and talk to a customer and ask them about their day and try to figure out how I could make their day better. But now it's like, I don't want to see a customer. They stress me out. And they feel the same way about this because Starbucks hasn't really communicated with us very well. So, there's a lot of inconsistencies in our store. So, we'll close, and we'll open, and customers get confused by that. And they don't really understand it. And we don't know how to explain it to them, because we don't know what's going on either. So that's just--mostly it's just there's a lack of communication within corporation to my Starbucks. So, we don't know what to do when things happen. Or when we get too many orders because other Starbucks have to close when COVID hits them. So, like if a barista gets COVID, your entire store shuts down and they hire in a team to come and clean the entire store, so no one gets sick and anybody around you and on your shift has to quarantine for two weeks. And that's basically an entire morning block that gets taken out so you can't open in

the mornings. And then if someone at night gets it, then your entire night is closed. So, it's just kind of frustrating in that way, is that instead, that there's no communication between us and other Starbucks either. So, we get all the business all the time, because we never close. And it's just added a lot more stress to my day because we have to constantly be cleaning. Whereas before it was just where we had to stay in health if that makes sense? Like we just had to stay clean. Now we have to be like super sterile, and constantly wiping stuff down, constantly washing our hands. And like--having to, like, explain to customers all the time what's going on and why Starbucks is doing what they're doing. And they're frustrated with us. And they take it out on us when it's not necessarily our fault. So that also adds the divide to the customers. So, it just--it really just kind of made my job harder with customer service, which I found I liked. And now I'm like not sure if I want to continue on later on in customer service. I don't think I would because it's just hard. It's just hard to explain to them that what's going on. When I don't really know what's going on. It's new to me too. I'm only 22 I've never lived through a pandemic. And I don't--I don't know it's kind of scary.

Kaitlin Rikala 11:35

Yeah, like when you're talking about the divide with the customers. Do you ever feel like in danger by them at all? If they're not wearing a mask or if they get violent or anything because they're so frustrated?

Chontay Littlewolf 11:46

Yeah. There has been a couple of times where customers will like start screaming at us or they'll like, they'll scream at us and yell at us and say ugly things to us because we have to have them have a mask. And there's been a--one-time where a family like harassed a worker in the parking lot. And so, yes, I was scared for a while because I work until 10:30 at night, and I didn't know the kind of people who really come into our Starbucks. So yeah, I was scared for a while about it. And then eventually Starbucks closed their lobby again. So, there isn't really any interaction with us and the customers anymore. They just kind of come in, and we give them their mobile orders. And then they leave. And we don't really have to talk to them. Because we are able to say, 'hey, it's COVID, we're trying to limit our interactions with customers'. But for a long time, Starbucks was pushing this, like, you still have to connect with them, you still have to see how their day is. It's important that the customers feel welcomed still to our store. And that was frustrating. Because I didn't want to talk to them. I didn't want to get sick. I didn't know. Because people will come through and be like, 'Oh, I have COVID What do you recommend for a tea?' and we're like, 'oh, my God, this woman's here trying to get tea to treat her COVID'. And she--it just seems I don't know, like an unnecessary risk. Like to get a tea at our store. I don't understand. Like, so that's scary, too, is the fact that they don't necessarily care about getting other people infected. That also scares me about them. And that's mostly it. Just. Yeah.

Kaitlin Rikala 13:45

Yeah. And are there any regulars who are understanding? And they're like, 'wow, I really appreciate what you do', or is it mostly just that?

Chontay Littlewolf 13:53

Yeah, actually, that's kind of what like I think about or gets me through my day is I think about those people who were really thankful for us even being open. They're like, 'thank you for being open', because they would work from home. So just leaving home and waiting in our Starbucks line, would make their day even though they had to wait like 20-30 minutes just to get a coffee. They were like, I have nothing else going on. This helps give me some sense of normalcy. And all of this and at the time I didn't really understand it. I was like, why would you wait in line because like, my life didn't change. I still had to go to work. I was working overtime, because we just were so busy. I-I don't know. And so, at the time, I didn't really understand it. But I was-- there was just so many like angry people with us. I was, it was really nice to hear that like, even though I just made coffee that it mattered in a way and, and then when we started opening our lobbies again and mandating masks because Fargo didn't mandate their masks until like two or three months ago, or something like that. So, this entire time people had the choice. And Starbucks as a business decided right away that we all had to wear masks. So that was frustrating too is that our state or the state wasn't behind us in wearing a mask. And so, when people would come in, they were really thankful for--to us for wearing a mask and making people wear masks and calling out people for wearing masks or not wearing masks. And then be like 'Oh, thank you so much. I really appreciate that. That means a lot to us that you're taking it serious' and I was like 'yeah'. It's I-I didn't. I don't know. So yeah, I think that was it.

Kaitlin Rikala 15:53

Yeah, and that kind of leads--and you said some stuff about your store closing for Coronavirus and also having to work, like, overtime. So how has the Coronavirus, like, impacted your employment status overall?

Chontay Littlewolf 16:07

It made my job a lot more intense because we get so much business now. So at first, when I first started working, I just started working at Starbucks, so they didn't really give me that many hours I was only working like 20 to 30 hours a week. So mostly on like the lower side of it. So, I didn't really like work that much. I was just kind of there in the morning sometimes and then after Corona came a lot of people quit our store because they were scared for their families and they didn't really see working at Starbucks as something they wanted to continue doing. So, people quit. And then so they needed more people to come in. And I was like, 'I can do it'. So, I started working a lot more. And we had to be a lot more clean. We had--So yeah, that was also something we had to do was we constantly had to have someone cleaning. And that just, we mean, a lot more people for that, because it's not always necessary. But we don't see the point in always having someone cleaning, when there's only like two of us on the floor, like making drinks and taking orders. Instead of having a third person clean, we'd rather them help us make drinks or take orders. So, it was kind of hard to find that balance between it. Is like, between, like, wanting to keep up Starbucks' standards and wanting to like stay afloat. So, that was something that affected us a lot.

Kaitlin Rikala 18:03

And what concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on not just your employment, but on the economy more broadly, if you have any concerns about that?

Chontay Littlewolf 18:18

I think--I worry about the people who couldn't work the entire time or got laid off or whose business relies on being able to connect with people, or like go into their homes and stuff. And like. So that bothers me a lot is just thinking about those people who can't really work right now, due to COVID. And knowing how hard they're struggling and knowing that the government doesn't really necessarily care right now. So that's something I think about is just how hard it seems like everybody is struggling financially, that's mostly all I really think about. It's just that-- because I can sympathize with those people a lot. So, I mostly just think of them. And that's all I really think about economy wise, it's just the people who are struggling right now. To make ends meet.

Kaitlin Rikala 19:25

Yeah, that's understandable for sure. And has COVID-19 affected the employment of people, you know like friends or family?

Chontay Littlewolf 19:35

Yes, it's just like, in the same way I have, like, well, not really, because since I'm--like, I have a cousin who works at Walmart. And since Walmart lowered their hours, she kind of was-- her hours got lowered. But--so that was hard. It's just like lowering hours because you don't stay open as long and so you don't need as many people all night, and all day. And that was hard. It's just the hours or not being an essential business and you close. That was also something that people I know struggled with. And then I had, I think that was it. It's just those were my main concerns, that's all I ever really cared about. I don't know why it's just people, like not being able to work and then them struggling financially. So that's always something to think about. Sorry.

Kaitlin Rikala 20:48

And how has the pandemic affected you and/or your family's day to day activities?

Chontay Littlewolf 20:58

Well I don't really see my family cuz they live in Wisconsin. So, I don't really know how their lives are affected. Like to day to day. Like I understand my siblings don't go to school anymore. But that's really all I know about their lives, but my life has been affected in the way I can't really do much without being afraid that I'll get sick. Because since I work in Customer Service, I feel like I'm really aware of like, the mindset Fargo has going for it. So, I don't really feel comfortable going out and like going to restaurants or doing activities like that, like going to the mall. I don't really see that as necessary. I don't, I just don't do it. Instead, I try to find things to do that are just like, with--within me and my friends. So, well like. So, I guess just that is finding things to do that we don't have to talk to other people or touch other things other people have touched. So that's like how it affected my life in that aspect of like, things to do and having fun. Like, my job has been affected by it. I think that's really it. I feel like, I'm fine with the way everything else is like having to wear a mask. In any store, I go to the grocery stores and pet stores and stuff like that, I'm fine with that. That's all that's really changed within them that I've noticed. I know at other grocery stores, people were constantly wiping down the like shopping carts that our grocery stores, they didn't do that. They did it like I think for a week, and then they never did it again. And I--that's kind of really all they did. And so, I never really noticed a change within them, maybe their hours, I guess, just their hours. So, I have like a smaller amount of time to do that. But nothing really else.

Kaitlin Rikala 23:19

And does that make you less comfortable, like, going grocery shopping and stuff, knowing that maybe the people there aren't keeping it as clean as they should be?

Chontay Littlewolf 23:28

Well, I take the precautions I can in the moment, like if they have the sanitizing stuff there, I'll sanitize the cart myself. And then it's just something I have to do. So, it's a risk I kind of have to take. So, I don't really think about it, I just do what I can do to keep myself safe. And to keep the people around me safe. So, I won't—I'll like—at our Walmart we had like these little guides that said, 'you can only walk up and down this aisle'. So, I would always follow those guides. Or I would just do what I could do in the moment to help minimize my risk of getting sick. And I mean, if I could do something else, like if there was an alternative to just not going in there, then maybe I would be more uncomfortable with it. But there's nothing I can really do in the moment.

Kaitlin Rikala 24:29

Yeah. And how are the day to day activities in your household? Like cleaning and stuff? Do you find yourself more concerned about sanitizing things?

Chontay Littlewolf 24:41

Well, I live alone, so not necessarily because I--like when I come home, I wash my hands. As soon as I come home. I'm guessing like, I sanitize like my front door a lot. Which is something I never really did. I would do it once in a while when I kind of thought about it. But now it feels like when I do my weekly cleaning or daily cleaning. That's something I'll do pretty frequently. Which is kind of unnecessary because I do live alone so no one else really touches my doorknob, but it makes me anxious to think about the possibility of someone touching my door. Or, I don't know, I just--that's the only thing that really has gotten kind of weird. It's just over sanitizing my doorknobs. Yeah, I feel like I clean like--I was always like always cleaning and kind of being like, really, I can't think of the word but I was just always really trying to make sure--because I have two rabbits so they like things to be clean. And if it's not clean, they kind of become depressed. So, I just have always made that a priority in my life is just constantly cleaning every single day. So, I--it's not really affected my life. COVID hasn't affected that part of my life in that way that it just adds a little bit more stuff to it.

Kaitlin Rikala 26:21

Has the pandemic affected how you associate and communicate with your friends and family?

Chontay Littlewolf 26:31

Yes. I don't want to get people sick because since I've worked the entire pandemic and I don't know if I've gotten sick at some point and have just been asymptomatic or could get sick at any time. So, I just don't really try to go visit them until I'm--I just haven't, I just don't go visit them. I still talk to everybody I know every day, but that's kind of really it, I just don't see anyone in person anymore that I haven't seen this entire time. So, that's it.

KR: 27:09

Okay, what has been the biggest challenge or the biggest challenges that you have faced during the pandemic?

Chontay Littlewolf 27:21

I think the biggest challenge is not knowing what was going to happen. And the entire time, I felt like I was confused about the entire situation for a long time, and not really understanding why things like toilet paper, were hard to find and being concerned about that. It's like, 'Oh, my God, are we gonna actually have toilet paper?' That was something that was challenging, I guess, because it was, it sounds really dumb, but it really was a challenge, or finding cleaning products was really hard and kind of stressful. Again, I feel like I've been very fortunate on like, on being like an essential worker, is that I haven't really faced too many challenges. Like getting sick, or like, putting other people at risk, because I don't know anybody who is--who could like die from being sick. So, I'm very fortunate in that way. But no, not really.

Kaitlin Rikala 28:36

What have you, your family and friends done for recreation during COVID-19? As far as just entertainment.

Chontay Littlewolf 28:52

I take my friends for drives. So, we'll go for like a drive around Fargo or we'll just go for a drive. Because my friend, her hometown has like, a really small National Park. So, we'll go there and walk around there. So, it just is anywhere where we can't be around other people or need to be around other people as what we'll do. For like, if we go out to eat, we'll just order it. And then someone will go in and get it. We only do take out now. That's kind of it. I find myself in nature a lot more than I used to, like I feel like I used to go to Target or the mall a lot with my friends. And now it's not something we do at all. Or even like consider doing. Just yeah, just a lot of like, staying home and being away from people.

Kaitlin Rikala 29:56

Yeah, and whenever it is that the pandemic ends, do you think you'll go back to doing those things that you did before, or kind of keep going with what you're doing now?

Chontay Littlewolf 30:07

It put, I think it put a lot of things in perspective for me, where I'm like, I don't actually need to go to the mall, I don't need to spend money on like brand new clothes, or I don't need to see a movie in person because at least those were things I was doing just because I was bored. So, I think in that way of like spending money, it helped me a lot. So, I don't think I'll need to do stuff like that anymore. Or, but like experience things like going to like trampoline parks and stuff like that, or arcades. And those are things I'll still continue to do or going to concerts, I miss going to a concert. And I'm excited for that kind of stuff to happen again, or fairs. So yeah, I think I'll still continue to do those things. But I won't do like smaller things like shopping and going to movies and going into restaurants and eating because I realized I don't really need to do those as often I was as I was doing in the past. Yeah that's really it.

Kaitlin Rikala 31:25

I heard you said that you do enjoy concerts. And I know that I've seen that some people have been getting called out because they're still doing concerts and letting people gather in large groups. How does that make you feel?

Chontay Littlewolf 31:40

That--I feel like I would get I get really upset about stuff like that. So, I didn't really think about it. I just kind of like seen what was going on. And I was like, 'Oh, okay'. I feel like it's really selfish. And it's annoying that some people think it's okay. Or maybe--I don't know, it's just frustrating to me, because I don't understand it. But I just don't understand people's thinking like that all like not wanting to wear a mask or just not wanting to be safe. And because that's how I see I'm like, 'Oh, you don't care about other people and you don't want to be safe' I just don't get it. So, I don't really think about it too much. I remember, at some point, when COVID first started, in China, since they were pretty quick to get everything under control, they were able to go back to their way of living like they were able to have festivals, and it was like, safe. I remember wanting that I was like, 'why can't we just be okay, now? Why is it taking so long for America to be okay, why? Like, why can't we get back to the way things used to be?' And then to see that people, even though we're not there yet, are still going out and partying. Just kind of the frustrated--that's frustrating to me, because like, this helps prolong this quarantine. And I don't know, I'm sorry. It's just frustrating. I don't know. That's all it is, to me. I just don't get it.

Kaitlin Rikala 33:38

You don't have to apologize. I definitely--it's understandable to be frustrated with that. And just as far as communities that you might consider yourself to be a part of whether it's in North Dakota, or I don't know any aspects of your identity that you consider yourself in a community, how has the pandemic affected the communities that you're in?

Chontay Littlewolf 34:01

It feels like it put everything on pause. For like, tribal things like we--when we, because we have a voting thing that we have to do every single year to vote on like new laws and within our tribe and vote for a new president for our tribe. That didn't happen this year. Our president isn't a very good guy. And so, this meeting, we were supposed to vote him out. And that just didn't happen. They were like, 'We don't have the money to keep up with what COVID is, and how to keep you guys safe as a community. So, we're not going to do it'. And that part of--that is really hard to deal with because I feel like our president within our tribe hasn't been making the right decisions. So, to find out something as big as our like, election day just kind of got blown off because of COVID. And there's no, like talks about rescheduling this, this meeting it is. So that part of my life, and like festivities within my tribe have been like, canceled, people are still meeting like, they'll still have ceremonies and stuff. And they'll--people have been getting sick at those ceremonies. So, our tribe was like, 'No, you guys can't have ceremonies anymore, if people aren't going to be safe about it and not going to spread COVID'. So just not--just within my tribe, I feel like it's affected it a lot in a way and have shown that even people who I'm close to, cannot care about others and not do like their part to keep people safe.

Kaitlin Rikala 35:58

Yeah, and what about just your immediate community as far as your neighbors and stuff in Fargo? How have you seen them affected?

Chontay Littlewolf 36:16

I, I think just like wearing the face masks, I don't really talk to them because I try to keep a distance from them because I live in an apartment complex. So, I don't really know what their day to day lives are and I don't know what they do for a living, so I just keep my distance from them. Everyone in my building wears a facemask anytime they're in the hallways. So that's nice. That's all I've noticed from my neighbors.

Kaitlin Rikala 36:52

Yeah. And I know that you said your family lives in Wisconsin. So, is that where you're originally from?

Chontay Littlewolf 37:00

Yeah.

Kaitlin Rikala 37:06

Yeah. And with how high the cases are in North Dakota and Wisconsin; how do you feel about that? Just in general.

Chontay Littlewolf 37:21

I'm kind of embarrassed. It just, it--Yeah. embarrassing because, like, I don't know, like, because we come off as like selfish and ignorant. And I don't really like that, because I feel like I've been doing my part to be safe. And we just--Yeah, I don't-- it annoys me. Honestly, I, I don't know, what else to think of it.

Kaitlin Rikala 37:59

And have you seen, whether it be online, people you know, or just people you know, in real life? Have you seen their opinions on COVID change? Where, I don't know, maybe they didn't take it seriously? And now they are or even vice versa?

Chontay Littlewolf 38:15

Yes, my mom. So, over the summer, she herself was still having cookouts. And because I have a sibling whose birthday is in the summer and they were still having cookouts, they were still going camping, they were acting like life wasn't on pause, they were still doing stuff like that, like going to group gatherings. And I would ask her, I was like, 'Why? Why are you doing that', because they were doing it also with people who weren't part of their quarantine. So, they were putting themselves at risk to get sick, because the people they were associating with also didn't care that they were getting sick. That if they got sick, and they passed it along to my family, they didn't care. They were-- and my mom kept putting my siblings in situations like that, where if they were to get sick from these people who don't care. And she didn't really understand that when I would get frustrated with her talk to her about is like, 'why are you doing this, I don't understand'. And then it took the people who she invites to these cookouts and invites to these functions she creates to get sick before she was like, 'oh my god', and to see their lives kind of get affected by being sick and what that meant. So, I think she had to see it for herself, like firsthand, which was frustrating to me, because I don't know why I feel like that's a bit extreme to have to see someone suffer to actually believe that this is bad. Like, this isn't something that

we should continue letting be a problem. And now she is like, all about quarantining and all about not doing more than necessary in the public. So that's something that has changed within her. So, I feel like she takes it a lot more serious than she used to over the summer. That was just a few months ago. That was in August, August.

Kaitlin Rikala 40:33

Okay. So, with self-isolation and flattening the curve, those are two things that we hear a lot that we need to be doing is self-isolate and help flatten the curve, and how have you responded to that request to self-isolate and flatten the curve? Just how do you feel about the government and everybody just requesting that we do that?

Chontay Littlewolf 40:57

I did. As soon as I realized how serious the situation was. And even though at the time, I was like, well--we didn't even--because like when I would talk to my coworkers. They're like, 'Oh, I just live in Fargo, North Dakota'. Like it took us so long to even be affected by what everybody else in the world was because I feel like since we're in the middle of nowhere, we didn't really like shut anything down until April. And when the rest of the world was already closed, like everybody was already staying home. So, by April, that's when we started shutting everything down. And so that's what we did here in Fargo. And as soon as I seen that, I was like, 'hey, Fargo's closing' and so I stopped doing stuff. And I stopped. I just started staying home all the time. I--and then that became hard to do. Well, not really, because I worked the entire time. So, I didn't really care to get a stimulus check, or anything like that from the government. I was more concerned to have like, free COVID testing. That was something that I was--that I wanted from the government, but, so yeah.

Kaitlin Rikala 42:43

Yeah. And I know that you said you knew some coworkers that got sick. So, you knew coworkers that got sick? Did you know anybody else that got sick? Or have you gotten sick at all during the pandemic?

Chontay Littlewolf 42:54

Yes, I've had friends who've all gotten sick. I have had three friends who have gotten sick. Four, I've had four friends who've gotten sick during this pandemic, two, which live in like, super rural areas. And I was really, like, taken aback by them getting sick. And I was like, 'wow, this really is affecting everywhere in the world'. Because I thought they would be fine. But, but that just like, put into perspective for me, like how easy it is to spread. And that scared me a little bit more about it. Oh, wait, what else? What's your question?

Kaitlin Rikala 43:42

Other than knowing anybody that got sick? Another question is, how have you been responding to people getting sick that you know, or have you gotten sick?

Chontay Littlewolf 43:52

No, I haven't gotten sick. I do know people have gotten sick. And then I didn't really know what to say to them. Other than, like, get better, because I don't really know what. And then asking

like, a million follow up questions, once they are healthy is like, how was it? What was it like, and then kind of being afraid to hang out with them? Because I'm like, ooh, could you still spread it to me? And are you actually okay? So, just--and I guess, and financially because then they also being sick, they can't work. And not all jobs, pay you while you're sick from COVID. So that was something I worried about for them is like, are they going to be okay, financially for this month that they're not working? And yeah.

Kaitlin Rikala 44:51

Yeah, and what ways do you think the pandemic is affecting people's mental and physical health?

Chontay Littlewolf 45:02

I feel like isolating yourself from the world is really hard. Especially if you live somewhere where like, it's super easy to isolate yourself, and you don't see people ever. So, you're constantly trying to find things to do. And I feel like, everyone who I know who was quarantining, was super productive at first where they were like, 'I have so much time now, I can do so many hobbies. And now they're like, in this weird state of like, 'I'm going crazy'. And they're just kind of looking for any kind of hope that this is going to end or like, they'll believe in the conspiracy theories that this is fake. And they've changed political parties during this pandemic, because they are so frustrated with how either it is being handled or not believing it anymore. So that's kind of weird to me. Just a lot of my friends have been getting a lot more like depressed or like burnt out because the entire time they thought they had to be productive, or they had to take advantage because if they were considered an essential worker, that they had to take advantage of that extra pay that you got at the time, so they would work overtime. Or, yeah, like those are the only things I've seen within my small friends.

Kaitlin Rikala 46:56

So, as far as going into information and how you're getting information, what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Chontay Littlewolf 47:06

I just kind of go. So, when my phone alarm goes off, it like tells you like news updates for the morning that happened. So, like, if they say something interesting about like, the pandemic, or like Donald Trump, I'll go in, and I will look it up, like on CNN. To figure out what my alarm was talking about, that's kind of what starts it is just hearing that like, as soon as I wake up, and then trying to figure out what's going on, like, within the pandemic every day. And then on my social media, I feel like, I have a lot of things on there that helped keep me informed. I think that's kind of the main thing is just like, social media, and then hearing an interesting story for the day, and then kind of just diving into the news for the day on the web on cnn.com. So, yeah, that's really it.

Kaitlin Rikala 48:17

Yeah, and have your news sources changed over the course of the pandemic? And do you find yourself seeking out news more?

Chontay Littlewolf 48:32

Yes. I--Well, I found out within myself too where I didn't know what was going on. And just kind of was finding things out from people who also didn't really know what was going on. And we were like playing like a line of telephone from someone who did watch the news. And we were like, 'Oh, so this is what's going on?' So, I decided myself, I should start maybe researching more to figure it out. And I feel like I don't know if I've been paying attention enough, but I don't think so. Because I feel like the media I consume has also been taking COVID very serious. And so, within that. No, they haven't really changed. Even for the election, I feel like I was watching a lot of different sources to see who was going to win, or hearing people's opinions about who was going to win. And--or who should win, people's opinions about who should win. That was the--like that just--in that just the election, because I feel like I seen a lot of sources being like, oh, 'Trump's gonna win because of this, this and this' and to see their, their guesses on where the states are going to go. That changed a lot. I was like, surprised in the end, when a lot of swing states went for Biden. So just in that way, just within the election, I've noticed just a lot of different things going on in there. But that's it.

Kaitlin Rikala 50:16

And is there any important issues with COVID or with the election, like you were saying that you think the media isn't covering that they should be? Or that they are covering that they shouldn't be?

Chontay Littlewolf 50:36

Well. No, because I feel--I find--I think it's, I don't know, to be honest, because things I'm concerned about. I'll like go and look and be like, because I'm concerned for like, people who are homeless, that's always been something that has bothered me my entire life. And so that's something I will I research is like, how are the homeless people doing during this pandemic? How are they doing during any time because like, when the whole Black Lives Matter protests were happening, I was concerned for them too. Because I was like, 'Oh my god, there's people protesting and they just like, these people have to live in the streets, and they're already at risk to get to get sick and die, because they don't really have the means to be able to take care of themselves or to have someone take care of them'. So that was something I was always concerned about were the homeless people. And that's something that I've always done research this entire time. So, maybe that--so maybe just what's going on with them. It's something that I'm passionate about and I--that bothers me that no one else really acknowledges or talks about how their lives have been affected by this. And in Native American communities, no one's really talking about, like elders getting sick. And not all tribes are able to afford the health care needed to help treat COVID. Or to get tests. It took the government a really long time to send funding to tribes, tribes didn't get funding or help from the government until August. And that was pretty well into like quarantining and COVID itself. So that was also annoying in a way that that their lives weren't being acknowledged, and their hardships weren't being acknowledged about what's going on with those communities. Yeah, that's really it.

Kaitlin Rikala 52:57

I really appreciate your perspective on that. And going in, you brought up the government a lot. And so, I wanted to ask a couple questions about just, the government in general, so how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

Chontay Littlewolf 53:13

I feel like—not very well. I'm like, like I said, earlier, our, our state didn't start mandating masks until a few months ago. So that was frustrating. They don't--I don't know that--And then like, the money that we got from the government for relief, a lot of it went into fracking for our state. Not a lot. I think like just a big chunk of it, like a couple million, went to fracking. And I understand that's good for like the economy at this time, because it helps give money to like, the locals, everybody who's affected by fracking. So, I--I get it, but at the same time, I don't really support fracking myself. So that was frustrating to me to hear that so much money went to fracking, and I was like, 'Oh, my God. Why?' Because right now, our hospitals are overrun. And they are trying to set people up in a stadium, just to have somewhere for them to go. And I--there's not like--because doctors will come into our Starbucks to get coffee, because we're kind of close to a hospital. So, they'll come to our Starbucks. And if you talk to them, they'll be like, 'Yeah, no, we don't have the money we need. We don't know what to do. People are just, there's nothing they can really do to help people, there's no space, there's not, there's no money and resources that they need'. So that's frustrating in that way to learn that. And places like bars and stuff weren't required to wear a mask. So, if you went into a bar, you didn't have to wear a mask. And they also didn't have to follow the guidelines of only having like, a certain amount of people in there, they could still be at full capacity. And it was just recently where you could only have 25% of people in your establishment. And that's frustrating because that's still a lot like at Starbucks itself. 25% of people is 75 people in our store. So that's, that counts all the baristas that doesn't count the people who are like sitting at like, the tables, those people don't count to that 75%. So, you can just have some, like 60 customers just standing there. Like 65 customers can just stand in our lobby, and that's totally fine. I don't understand how that's okay. So that frustrates me, and I don't feel like they're taking it serious enough. And their response to COVID was too late. Like, people still believe it's not real, or it's not as serious as it is and look at our state, we have the most cases in the world. And that's--I don't even know like, I don't know what to say about it or to think about it. I just am mad about it. I feel like I've done everything I could to not get sick and to not get others sick, just to not have the support from even our government. Our like, local government was hard. I don't know—it--like just them not supporting COVID affected like everything in my life? I feel like.

Kaitlin Rikala 57:00

Yeah, that's definitely understandable. So, on a larger scale or even locally as well, do you have any thoughts on how the local, the state or the federal leaders are responding to the crisis and how they could be doing it differently?

Chontay Littlewolf 57:16

I feel like not blowing it off when it first broke out, would have affected--would have helped me. Like I get what they're saying that like, 'Oh, I didn't want there to be mass hysteria'. But there was mass hysteria. It happened, it just happened later on in the year, like, you couldn't get any cleaning supplies. There was no food ever. That--like it was going to happen. So, I guess my frustration is from like, not explaining to people how serious this was. And then just constantly, like, our president, was constantly blowing it off to not be as big as a deal as it was. or talking about how 'Oh, this is gonna be over in a few months. And that, that's frustrating. I, I don't know, because it just it's not over because they didn't take it serious enough. I feel like other countries have gotten under control, New Zealand that they have had no cases for 100 days, but they went

under an extreme lockdown. And Australia, too, they went down, they went in an extreme lockdown too--so to see that those places their government officials handled it. I would say well, and then to be here in America, and to see our president just be like, 'Oh, it's no big deal, you'll be fine'. And that's frustrating to me. I don't like that. And then he isn't really sending any relief to us, like, as American citizens like this, we got one stimulus check. And I'm not dependent on that. But to me, that's frustrating, because I know people who aren't working or who didn't work for like, five months out of the year, and who could really use more than one stimulus check. So that was annoying. I guess just no real support from the government in that too also. My state is Republican. So, we are affected. So, like everything Donald Trump believes in my state believes in so that was something that's hard. So anytime he said something people just believed it. And that was annoying. Just--Yeah, in that way.

Kaitlin Rikala 59:51

Yeah. And my concluding question for you is: knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Chontay Littlewolf 1:00:04

I—Sorry, I really need to think about this one. I feel like it just all comes down to having a good leader, and just someone who acknowledges like, what something like this is, what—I don't, know, acknowledging like what a pandemic is, and how this affects the lives of everybody in the nation, and how not everybody is okay with people dying. That's something that bothers me. I just want a better government official; I just want a better president who acknowledges the hardships of an American citizen who works during this or even who can't work during this. And I guess just thinking about those people, thinking about the people a lot more instead of just themselves. Because that's how it feels. It feels like the government officials are just worrying about themselves at the moment and like how they come across. And I found that frustrating.

Kaitlin Rikala 1:01:45

Well, that was my closing question. So, I thank you so much for participating and allowing me to interview you for the archive. So, thank you so much for that.

Chontay Littlewolf 1:01:54

Yeah, it's no problem.