

Transcript of Interviews between Amy Russett and Emma Bronsema

Interviewee: Amy Russett

Interviewer: Emma Bronsema

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Location (Interviewee):

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: This transcript has been provided by Otter.AI with a 2nd pass for accuracy and formatting provided by Bryan Paintiff, HST580 intern, at ASU.

Abstract: Amy Russett begins the interview by describing how she initially found out about COVID 19 through a meme and then a week later, things started shutting down. Next Amy talks about how COVID was very intertwined and even weaponized by politicians to swing things in their direction, both in the US and Canada. Then Amy brings up how social media has played a big part during the pandemic, becoming this echo chamber that only shows you what you want to see and reaffirms your beliefs and how this has been a big part in creating the dichotomy around vaccines and COVID in general. When describing how the pandemic has changed her day to day life, Amy admits that now she works from home and does not get outside much, Amy would like to blame this on it being winter but tells how humans adapt and get used to things, in this instance staying at home. Ten Amy describes the feelings she had when she was working retail during the pandemic, specifically how the paradigm shifted during the pandemic and customers began to not see workers as other people that they should be considerate around in regards to COVID precautions.

Emma Bronsema 00:00

My names Emma Bronsema, I'm the interviewer, our interviewee, or narrator is going to be Amy Russett, the interview is taking place over zoom today is January 27 2022. And our relationship is friends, and I am going to confirm that the consent documents have been sent and signed. So the purpose of this project COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response, oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. The project is designed so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to the database. So the purpose of this is to preserve experiences of a pandemic in Canada, and in doing so to allow future historians and students to learn about this time. So I'll start with the first question. It's kind of a multiple step question. So we'll start with what do you recall about the start of the pandemic?

Amy Russett 01:04

Start of pandemic, that's a good question. So I was a student at the time. And I actually, I heard about the pandemic through a meme that a friend sent me about Corona and I was like, What is this what is

Corona? Because it was somebody holding a beer and it was so stupid. I was like, I've never heard of this before. And she's like, You should probably look it up. So I did. And then I read about it a little bit. And then from there, I just remember kind of within, like, I heard about it one week, and then the next week, everyone was like, well, this seems pretty dangerous, we should probably shut down. And then within like, two days, everything was shut down. And at the time, I remember me and everybody else that I was in contact with thought, oh, man, like this lockdown. Like, we're not really supposed to see each other, but it's only gonna last, max a month or so. And I was working at Starbucks at the time and that shut down as well. And I wasn't really scared at all. I was like, this is just routine, this will last not very long. And then after I think like the second month, kind of like, oh, this is going on for a while. And then the third month and the fourth month. And I think probably after that second month I started being like, started realizing it was probably more serious than I originally thought it would be, so.

Emma Bronsema 02:20

Well it's definitely turned to be something that I don't think any of us expected really. And well, having been in this pandemic for two years. And thinking back to what you originally thought, how has that changed?

Amy Russett 02:33

Yeah, I guess now, it's much more of a, okay COVID is gonna be like, whereas at first I was like, yeah, COVID is just a small thing that's going to start and stop, it's going to end it's gonna kind of like be a blip on the radar. And now my view of it is much more, okay, they say is a global, like pandemic, but like a global moment in history that will last for a very, very long time. And I think that's probably changed the fabric of our society in a lot of ways. And it's changed a lot of people and the way that I think the world functions. So you know, at first I thought it was just kind of like a short thing. Now it's like, oh, no, this has changed history in the way that we will go on in society forever. And I don't, I don't think anything will ever be the same. And I think I went through ebbs and flows of the fear that I had attached to COVID. And I think right now, I'm not that scared of it, especially since there's vaccines available. But I think still, it's definitely, yeah, one of those things that is much bigger and all encompassing, and like more serious, I think, than I had thought originally for sure.

Emma Bronsema 03:50

Yeah, definitely. Because obviously, it's changed and is ended up being different from what you originally thought was going to be and has changed life for the future and everything and how we interact with people daily. But why do you think things have turned out the way they have? And why do you think we got to where we currently are and will most likely progress towards?

Amy Russett 04:10

That's a great question. I think there's a lot of different factors at play that kind of created the perfect storm to end up where we are now. Like, there's social factors, there's political factors, and there's like scientific factors, I think, I think just in terms of, like, progressing and where we are now our sort of like

half open half not, but it's not as scary of a thing like that's definitely for science. Like all the people that have worked really hard on developing the vaccine and have worked hard on creating boundaries and guidelines for us to live as safely as possible. But I think also, there's the social factors of just kind of the way that humans function. Like I don't think humans are very, like we're not really meant to live alone. And I think that's kind of reflected in, like maybe cases rising, but also, like, our society looking kind of like it is where it's like half in half out, like, half changed half not you have half of the people who are really, very diligent, I guess about like quarantining and about not seeing people and about wearing masks always, which is, is very good. But it's like, there's a dichotomy between that and the people that really don't care. And I think most of us kind of lie somewhere in the middle. And not is that like, it's, I'm like trying to try to think of the best way to say this. But I think that has shifted the way that our society relates to one another and treats one another, which also has a big impact on I think, how the world works. And then kind of did you go from the political angle as well. Like COVID kind of happened when there's a whole bunch of like, political uproar both in the States and in Canada as well, less so but I think the the weaponization of COVID by politicians, I don't think should be underestimated, either, and how that has changed, how our society is also looking and why we are where we are, why things look how they look, and, and maybe why there's so much fear surrounding it, like, obviously, COVID is a thing that we should be cautious about. And a lot of people have died, a lot of people have been impacted severely. And that's, I'm not under estimating that but more just I think there's definitely a political factor in there where it has been, I think, used as a tactic to sway people's opinions, whether for COVID, against COVID, but in ways to support politicians, and that has also had a big impact. I don't that was not a very succinct answer. But all that being said, I think there's, there's a lot of factors that play into making our society right now look like it is in our world look like it is right now. Because of COVID. Yeah, I don't know if that answered your question.

Emma Bronsema 07:07

No, it definitely did. And, you know, I agree with you. And there's so many different factors involved, and definitely some with a greater influence over others, especially, you know, there's a lot of fear mongering with the media. And it's a hard balance of information that is really important. But also balancing how to not be overwhelmed by the constant flow and headlines are written to grab your attention to play on your emotions, right?

Amy Russett 07:38

For sure. Actually, like you saying that it has made me also think of another thing that has been super impactful, of getting us kind of where we are now is technology but not like vaccine technology like social media technology, because more so now than really ever before we have access to so much information at our fingertips is something I was talking to a friend about the other day is it's like, no matter what your position is, you can find facts to back it up, no matter what it is. And it's at your fingertips, like with your phone or on your computer, you can find enough information and data to support whatever position you want. And I think that has also made this pandemic especially tricky, because critical thinking is not I think the skill of our generation, or the generation before us, especially

with all of this information at hand. And I think that has also created a lot of discourse is that, sure, there might be some like facts or information that can support a standpoint, that might not be the most like scientifically accurate. But because of that, like it creates so much, so much stress and conflict and I think puts us back a lot more than where we would have been otherwise, like you look at the states where I don't know what the vaccination rate is now, but last time I checked, it was like 60% or so. And I think it'd be way higher if it weren't for the transmission of information through social media, and targeting people that are more apt to probably believe that vaccinations are gonna kill you or whatever. So that also definitely has had a huge impact on I think, like where our society is right now and COVID, so.

Emma Bronsema 08:33

And that's definitely the thing that's conspiracy theories too, is they will get enough factual information that you think this is valid, and you get that from sources that you trust. So even going on Facebook, you might not necessarily trust Facebook, but they have links to news outlets that you do trust. So perfect place to not I'm not calling out Facebook or anything. But it's just those social media platforms have links to websites that have a lot of factual information, and then we'll sprinkle in the what ifs, and play on your fears, and oh, maybe the government is out to get you and stuff like that.

Amy Russett 10:07

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, you can totally call out Facebook because Facebook for sure should be called out. Because there's also some, there's I actually didn't watch it, but I was talking to my dad about it. There's this documentary on Netflix called the social dilemma. And it was talking about how, basically, Facebook specifically, but all social media gear's what information it sends to you based off of your previous interests. And it effectively just puts you in a vacuum. So my grandpa, for example, like at the beginning of the pandemic, I'm very thankful he's changed his mind, but at the beginning of the pandemic, he was questioning the vaccine, and he was questioning the validity of COVID as a sickness and disease and all that sort of stuff. But a big part of that was because all of the information that he was getting on social media, which is where he would get most of the scientific information at the beginning, was fed to him very specifically, because the algorithm knows like, oh, he's interacted with, like, very conservative, and maybe a little bit of like, questionable stuff before and he seemed to like it and interact with it, we'll just give him more, and it just creates this vacuum, where you are completely blinded to everything else. So of course, you're gonna believe wholeheartedly if that's all of the information that's being given to you. And same thing on the other side, too. Like, I can't say it doesn't happen to me, I am thankful that, from what I understand my opinion that the vaccine is a valid thing. It's like the, like actual scientific a majority opinion. But it's still it's still a real thing, like, social media creates vacuums for us and that is dangerous when you have your ingroup and outgroup. And especially when it's over something that is life and death. So wild, wild time.

Emma Bronsema 11:52

Definitely is a wild time. And I mean, you're very young, you're in your early 20s. Right? Within your short lifespan, has there been any other health crises that you can think of that you have lived through and experienced in the past? And how does this current health crisis compared to that?

Amy Russett 12:11

Yeah, well, there's actually, it's funny, because I think there's been, like three of them that I've lived through. So there was like, H1N1, and the bird flu and the Zika virus, which were all like, I want to say when I was in my early to late teens. And it's funny, because at the time, I like heard about them, I was like, oh, this is a real thing that's happening and like it have negative consequences, and people are getting sick. But at the time, I had no fear about them, the world didn't shut down at all. And I think that's why I went into COVID being like, it's just gonna be a month, like, it's not a big deal, because I lived through those other things before. And then granted, I was I was much younger. And that could be why I didn't process them as actual big dangerous things at the time. But yeah, I think going into COVID, I had that preconception of, oh, we've had these things before, they haven't been a big deal. The world does not shut down. We'll be fine. You move on you forget about it, and like a month or two. So it's interesting, because I guess there has been other like health pandemics before this. But I've lived through in my lifetime, but just never, never processed them never had any fear. Like they never impacted my life in really anyway, so very, very interesting. How different like those were compared to COVID, so.

Emma Bronsema 13:33

Since COVID, has affected your day to day life, what does a typical day look like for you right now? And more specifically, what are like the big differences from before the pandemic?

Amy Russett 13:44

Great question. Well, I think it's interesting, because I've had a lot of big life transitions, since the pandemic has started. So I graduated university, I've moved in and out of different places on my own and moved cities at one point, like, there's been a lot of big sort of life transitions that I've had. So I'm sure that has an impact on why my life looks different now versus before. But now like a database, I work at home, which I don't think I would have had the opportunity really to do before the pandemic because before that the company that I am working for, they were all office and now they've transitioned to mostly at home, which is great for me because they're stationed in the US. So this is a job opportunity I wouldn't have had before and also looks different in terms of going out and just doing fun activities that I just really can't do anymore and that really sucks. Like one of my favorite things to do is go sit at a coffee shop and drink my coffee and study and that has been a very on and off thing that like hasn't really been awarded to any of us really because of COVID. So there's that and yeah, it's like day to day. The opportunities I guess have been different also to hanging out with people and spending time with people has been different like I dubble hopefully soom to be triple vaccinated. So and so are all my close people. So I've been fortunate enough to open up as a social circle of my bubble and be safe about it. But to have that access to people, which is nice, but not in the same capacity as it was before, like, small

group at church, for example, would have been meeting in person before and, and having fun and like doing games nights and all that stuff and that's just like, not accessible to us right now, so. Day to day is like, a mix between happy because opportunities for jobs and sad because my access to people and ability to build relationships is so limited, just because of like, online Zoom is not a great, not always the best platform to do that in, so. I think there's also to like the the impact of not having much to look forward to, if that makes sense. Like, for example, before the pandemic, you have, oh, we're going to go to a concert, or we're going to, you know, go to the museum, we're going to hang out as a group, we're going to go on a vacation, like I feel like before the pandemic, there's just things to look forward to and, and right now, although it's, you know, going on, vacations aren't day to day, like I think it still has a big impact on people's spirits and how they move through life because when you don't have much to look forward to it's not- I don't know, like, I just don't think there's as much pep in, in- I know my step for sure. And it's yeah, sometimes disappointing me like, okay, we're just in survival mode, like we're just coasting, and I'm not doing horribly, like, I'm blessed to have people around me, and I'm blessed to have a full time job. But also, I'm just okay. Like, I'm not great. There's not much I'm looking forward to. And that is hard. And I think that's impacting people a lot more than they realize, for sure.

Emma Bronsema 16:45

Well, especially being two years into this and, you know, you want to plan a big trip, even if it's like a staycation you want to be able to plan those, but given in planning that it's difficult, because you're gonna have to cancel. There's been so many waves, and it's not safe to be traveling and all that. Yeah. So because you've been working remotely and at your house a lot, do you find your spending more or less time outside?

Amy Russett 17:12

Way less time for sure. I mean, before, like, even throughout the pandemic, I had a couple of different jobs. So I worked at Starbucks for one and then I worked at the drop in center for the other job, and those were both like outside of my home. So that was cool. But now that I'm working from home, I kind of I stay at home, and then sometimes I'll venture outside to go to my car to get groceries and I'll come back and I mean, I think I think the summer might be a little bit different, hopefully. But I know for the winter like people are already cooped up, but I think especially working from home, there's definitely days where I don't interact with the outdoors, which is sad. Like that is hard, especially when you start the day and the sun is just coming up though when you end the day the sun has gone down and it's freezing and you can't really go hang out with anybody. There's so yeah, it's a lot more time at a home less time outdoors for sure.

Emma Bronsema 18:04

And do you think because we're in winter that is mostly impacting your time inside versus time outside? Or working from home and the pandemic in general that impacted the frequency you leave your house?

Amy Russett 18:16

I want to say it's just the winter but in like all actuality, probably not. Like I yeah, I definitely feel like because when you stay at home, I also think something that the pandemic has really created and made people different in the way of it takes a lot more energy, at least for me, it takes a lot more energy to go outside now, like whereas before I could spend literally an entire like 14 hour day outside of my home and come home, obviously be tired, but like get sleep, and then be ready to go the next day. Now a two hour outing is like oh my gosh, I'm exhausted. Like that was horrible. I just need to go take a nap now. And I think that's just because we're creatures of habit. And our bodies adapt pretty quickly. And that definitely also plays a role in it too is that my body's just not equipped, like it was before to go out and to interact with the outside world and people and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, as much as I want to say it's the winter and I'm sure that is definitely an impact, it's probably a lot more just the pandemic and working from home really, than anything else, so.

Emma Bronsema 19:19

That's very relatable, honestly. So you said that you leave your house to go get groceries and do errands and such. Have you been getting groceries since the beginning? Or have you had to get someone else to get it for you or click and collect or ordering groceries? Like how have you found getting your necessities throughout the two years?

Amy Russett 19:39

Yeah, well, for the most part, I've been lucky enough to just be able to go do it myself. I know at the beginning of the pandemic, I lived only a couple doors down from my partner and his roommates who are my friends too and he had a car at the time and I didn't. So at the very beginning I'm pretty sure I would go shopping for my household for like me and my roommates and he would go shopping for his household and we'd just go together. But at various times throughout the pandemic, I've definitely relied on say, like Amazon more than usual. Like, I still get all my necessities at the grocery store and the physical one. But there's a lot of things that I think otherwise I would have probably gone out to search for that I don't anymore. I'm like, Ah Amazon's got it, I'll go with that. So yeah, so I've mostly been able to go out and just get my own things. But still with an acknowledgement that I for sure, probably rely on online shopping more than I did before. Whether that's for convenience, or also for like accessibility. So yeah.

Amy Russett 20:33

So what are you finding that you do in your spare time?

Amy Russett 20:36

Ain't that the question. Well, I think now that things are a little bit less crazy, and the regulations aren't as strict. Actually, most of my spare time I spend with my either my best friend or my partner. But I also have picked up a lot of hobbies throughout the pandemic that I probably wouldn't have otherwise, just because when you have a lot of time to yourself, what else you're gonna do, because eventually, you can only watch so many Netflix shows and you get bored after a while. So I, you know, have taken up more

crafting, like I've started embroidery and sewing during the pandemic and that's been really fun. Music has also been something to pass the time, video games as well. Just got a new switch, that was an exciting purchase to you know, keep my mind occupied. Yeah, so kind of a lot of a lot of different things. But a lot of the hobbies I definitely picked up during the pandemic, for sure. Which is kind of kind of cool I guess, looking back on it now.

Emma Bronsema 21:39

Nice. One, and you actually have time to do those.

Amy Russett 21:42

It's great.

Emma Bronsema 21:43

And is there anything that you miss pre-pandemic?

Amy Russett 21:46

Oh, so many things. It's funny, I think I missed. Well, there, there's a whole bunch of things. It's funny, because I don't know if necessarily my day to day, like, although there's been opportunities that have been allowed to me like working remotely that I probably wouldn't have had if it weren't for the pandemic, like I don't know, if my day to day looks entirely different in terms of the things that I normally do. Like, I still go hang out with, like my best friend and my partner, and I work and do hobbies and stuff. But I think what I miss the most is just being able to see people guilt free. Like I miss just being able to message like old friend of mine acquaintance I haven't seen in a year and be like, hey, let's go out for coffee. Because now there's a guilt associated with that of like, how many people am I interacting with, I need to be careful about that. And I miss not being afraid when I see people like I miss, I miss the days I could like get together in huge groups of like 20 and just talk to people have fun and meet new people and and just kind of be worryfree in that way. Because now there's a whole lot of pressure and then added heaviness and responsibility and barrier as well. So I think those are the things I miss the most. Like it's funny now when I watch Netflix or whatever, and they see, you know, groups of people like where's your mask, like wear your mask, and that's my gut reaction. Or like when they're scenes of people close together strangers, my gut reactions be like, oh my gosh, get away back up. And that's strange, because I am such a social person. I love connection. I love hugging people. And that is not as easy to do. So I think I think that's really the main, the main thing that I miss, and also not having to wear a mask because masks are uncomfy. It's like a whole nother layer of it's funny because I think like before the pandemic, there's always a lot of things to consider like, okay, do I have the time, do I have the money, do I have the resources to go do these things to spend time with these people? And I felt like that was enough. But now having that whole yeah, like added layer of the fear or the guilt or, or whatever. And also like having that and projecting it onto other people, or even like friends and you see Instagram Stories of people gathering in groups and having parties and you're like, what are you doing? You're, this is ridiculous. It's like it's a strange, it's a strange thing. And like a strange added weight that

was not there before. That isn't huge. Like I said, like I'm not I'm not necessarily super afraid of the COVID pandemic, like when I go out. I'm not constantly living in fear that I'm going to catch COVID or fear that I'm going to die from COVID because if I catch it, it is what it is. And I'm also not like carrying a constant fear of seeing people either, but it's just it's the added weight that wasn't there before. That's still like a nagging thing in the back of your mind that I think adds pressure and impacts people's mental health more than they give it credit for for sure.

Emma Bronsema 24:46

Absolutely. So you mentioned you don't really have a fear right now, which is good and it's healthy. And I think for your own mental health it's a good thing. Because you're still being safe, but also living in constant fear is not good for anybody. Did you find that has changed throughout the pandemic? Like at the beginning, was there fear? Or have you kind of been more comfortable just with your surroundings and such?

Amy Russett 25:09

Yeah, at the beginning there is, well at the very beginning, I didn't have any fear. Kind of, like I said, I was like, ah this is nothing, it'll pass, you know, at the time. And then probably like, three, four months in I started developing a much bigger fear, and it wasn't for myself necessarily, because like when you think about it, I'm in the ideal situation, like I'm young, I'm relatively healthy, like my chances of dying of COVID are pretty low. And I always knew that, but what I was afraid of was giving it to somebody that I care about, but is not in my position, like my parents who are over 50, or my grandparents or my friends that are immunocompromised. And that was really where my fear was, it wasn't for myself, but it was for the people around me and the people that I care about, and not being able to go see my parents for Thanksgiving and give them hugs and spend time with them. Like they're my major social support, and not being able to do those things because I was afraid of of them getting sick because of me was hard. But like now that we have vaccines and that getting COVID, although sucks and like not a great idea, is not near as life threatening anymore. Like has definitely subsided a lot of my fear. For sure. So it's it's been an ebb and flows. But I think I think now. I feel like pretty justified not being super afraid for my life, which is good.

Emma Bronsema 26:29

That is good. And you mentioned your family and friends, and what is their mood or feelings towards the pandemic? And how do you think they're responding to the virus?

Amy Russett 26:40

Very, it's varied, for sure. I think most of my friends like I'm like, you make friends with people that are like you. So I think most of the people in my circles are are very similar to me in that, like, vaccines are out we don't have big needs to be scared, which is good. But I definitely see in all of them disappointment about the pandemic, not so much fear, but just sadness and the heaviness, like a lot of my best friends have gone through a huge transition in their life during the pandemic. And that's made it

so difficult. Like, for example, one of my best friends got married during the pandemic. And that was something that's super exciting for her and her husband, but they could only have 11 people at the wedding. And that sucked. And I remember when we were getting ready to do her bridal shower, she was so disappointed because she just wanted to be, you know, showered and love and excitement from people that she loves and that just like wasn't accessible. Or even my dad, where he was planning a huge family vacation for all of us to go to Italy. And that was supposed to happen last year. And obviously that didn't happen. They're planning to have it this year in the spring. But that's also been like it's not going to happen. And I think I see the impact of, of not having anything to look forward to the most and him which is funny because he's normally a very, very, like he's not fazed by much. So that's saying something. So I think it's varied across everybody in my life, in terms of their response to the pandemic, like my grandparents don't seem to mind very much. But, but I think generally, it's pretty similar to me the fact that like, they're not living in fear, but it's still something that has negatively impacted a lot of their life, and it's just a weight that they carry around and have to consider that they didn't have to before, so.

Emma Bronsema 28:27

That makes sense. It's good that you know, you've surrounded yourself with people who take it seriously and who understand the gravity of it, but who are also still able to live life and find the good, where they can.

Amy Russett 28:41

Yeah, well, that's just it. It's like if I find balance between Yeah, between being conscious and aware and and wise about it, but also not letting it completely destroy your life. Because there is there is a fine balance between weighing, you know, the safety of COVID versus your mental health. And I think, during the pandemic, mental health has been a conversation that has been had more than maybe it had before, because a lot more people were experiencing like pretty bad mental health, because when you're isolated, that kind of happens, and that has been a really positive thing to get out of it. But I still see like I still have friends that choose to not see anybody at all, and that's their choice, but their mental health is suffering and I have friends that have chosen to not care at all and it's disheartening because it makes you feel like the sacrifices that you're making are in vain because other people are just messing it up. So you're taking away all of these experiences and seeing the people that you care about the most for sometimes it seems like very little because other people are like spreading the virus regardless. And that's hard. Like that's a hard thing to like that causes burnout so quickly, and I think like especially now in our second year, and having just had it was like a month or two ago having kind of more strict guidelines being established in Ontario. Like you could see the burnout in people because you're like, I'm so done with this, like, we've done this for two years. And half of these people aren't taking it seriously. So why the heck should I and I've definitely fallen into that camp before and it's, it's hard.

Emma Bronsema 30:22

You were saying you used to work at the Starbucks and the drop in center. So when you were there, how do you think your coworkers were feeling about the work you guys were doing? How were you feeling especially your frontline and what affected that feeling?

Amy Russett 30:36

Yeah, so at Starbucks it is very different between the two. So Starbucks, I remember, they were very good and they shut down, I want to say for a month and a half, like the entire all stores except for Drive Thru shut down. And I was not a drive thru the time. So I didn't have to work for a month and a half, but was still paid, which was phenomenal. But I remember going back, they were very careful about very, very gradually opening things up. So they didn't open everything up at first, like they were like, okay, you only have one customer in the store at a time and they have to wait outside wear a mask, and bla bla bla bla bla. But I do remember, like me and my coworkers, especially when like masked mandates were made, and people would come in refusing to wear a mask. It was one of those things where we feel like are we seriously here risking our lives right now for you to have coffee and for you to treat me subhuman because you want your fancy latte. Like is this really worth risking my life, but like, I also need to pay my rent. So there's that too. And that was definitely I think a huge thing. And Starbucks was very good about it. But I remember looking at other coffee shop workers like Tim Hortons or grocery store workers or people like that, and having a lot of friends that were those workers and being like, we're getting paid minimum wage to risk our lives. These people cannot function without us. But we're not seeing any sort of compensation for that. And that was really hard. Yeah, that was that was frustrating. And then at the drop in center was a whole nother added layer. Because it's really important because you're kind of the frontline, for a lot of people to have food, to have shelter to have access to showers like, we're oftentimes the only place where people could go to get their essential needs met. And I only worked there for three months. And that was in the summer of 2021. So the vaccines were just rolling out at the time and things were opened up more than they had been. My I think at the beginning of the pandemic, things shut down entirely. And that was detrimental to so many of the clients. But I do remember feeling and my co workers feeling overworked and unsafe. And it's hard, especially in that type of situation where it's like, these people obviously need us, and we can't go anywhere. And we shouldn't have to like these people obviously need to eat, they need to have showers, they need to have a place to use the washroom, they need to have a place to see each other. But because of all the restrictions, and I think because of the mental state of all of the clients as well, which is not great, especially because of the pandemic, it was hard, it was hard to come to work, it was hard to be there because our jobs had changed so much from what was once like a Support Center to being just an essential service, which doesn't sound very different. But it's huge. Like when you can't sit down with somebody who's having a mental breakdown, because they can't pay their rent, like when you can't sit down with somebody to talk about that sort of thing and to hug them and support them. Like that's hard. And I think that how to that took a toll on everybody like clients and me and my co workers like so it's hard. But it's important too. Like one of those things where it's like, okay, I'm risking my life, but I'm risking it for something that seems important. And that is important. So that's the double, double edged sword, for sure. Interesting, because I feel like retail workers and like anybody who works, you know, in

customer jobs sort of thing. I think before the pandemic, we're always treated as human to begin with. But when you have the whole added level of, I'm risking my life so that you can have access to these things. And yet still to be not treated with respect. Like I remember, when I was at Starbucks, there was a customer that came in, and nobody else is in the store except for like us employees that came in they weren't wearing a mask, and I asked them to put on a mask. And they were like why nobody else is here. And I'm like, What do you mean, there's five of us behind the counter? What do you mean, nobody else is here. There's other humans here. And that's great. You want your oat milk latte? That's fantastic. I'd love to give it to you. But also, it's your responsibility to acknowledge that I'm risking my life right now. And I think I think more so than ever the world is feeling it because there's not as many people who are working in retail. There's a lot more people working at home and we're finding these opportunities because they're there and available and they're struggling, like stores are struggling and restaurants are struggling to find employees and product chains are backed up because there's not as many people to deliver the things. And it's because once you stop treating people like humans for so long, especially when their lives are at risk, you're only gonna get so far. And it's interesting how much I think our society is starting to notice how important those workers are and how undervalued they are. Because like, the world can't function without people that will bring in your groceries like the world cannot function without people who will serve you coffee. It's funny, but it's true. Like, so yeah. Yeah. Like, we're all just trying to do our best right now. Like, go easy.

Emma Bronsema 35:42

Exactly. So now, the vaccine has been out for almost a year, I think?

Amy Russett 35:48

I guess so eh yeah-

Emma Bronsema 35:49

Or at least when our age group was allowed to get the vaccine, it was the summer 2021. So it's been almost a year, how has the vaccination changed your everyday life and your view of the pandemic?

Amy Russett 36:00

It's, well, there is multiple ways, I guess. So changed my own life, in a lot of ways. Like, obviously, that fear piece that we've kind of talked about earlier, I don't walk around and live my life and the world as afraid as I did before. And I also because of the vaccine, have been able to see the people that I love and spend time with the people that I love without being afraid that I'm going to kill them, which has been nice. So I can see my parents, my grandparents without a fear that I'm going to pass something on to them that they can't fight off. In terms of changing the way that I kind of look at the pandemic and the world, though, is tricky, because I obviously, the vaccine made COVID, less of a dangerous thing. But that being said, though, I think the vaccine has also made COVID more of a divisive issue than it was to begin with. Which is funny because it was already sort of a divisive thing like at the beginning. But now especially like you have people who will get a vaccine and people who won't. And they are two different

camps and I think more so than ever, people are at kind of war with each other because of that. And it's hard because it is a life or death issue. And when you have opposing views on things that are that carry so much weight to them. It's tricky, and it divides the world. And I think it is maybe made me a little bit more pessimistic of the North America generally, which is kind of a bummer. But in my day to day life has been good, so.

Emma Bronsema 37:33

that's a good point. It's definitely has made the pandemic more divisive. And we're definitely seeing now one people's true colors and kind of stubbornness, definitely, but also the effect that it's having not only strain on the healthcare system, but also the recent convoy that was trying to be scheduled. I don't know where that's at right now. But it's in opposition this but to be fair, it's in opposition to mandates not the vaccine itself. But yeah, it's definitely been divisive. Even within I know, families are seeing lines divided and see how far people are willing to take it.

Amy Russett 38:10

Yeah, very much so. Because it's, it's hard, because I think before, like North America was kind of already set up to be divided, like, especially with the 2016 election, like that had a huge impact on dividing the world. But I think now when you add in the whole factor of like, oh, this like, literally life or death makes it a lot harder. And I think it's dangerous. And I've been a little afraid at not necessarily like I love the vaccine and I think it's a great idea. And I don't agree with people that don't want to get it. But I also am a little afraid of like the dehumanization of those people and vice versa. Like I'm sure the dehumanization of people that have vaccines with people that think that they are the devil's spawn. And that's something that I've been, like consciously having to fight my own ego on because I'm like fighting is literally not gonna get us anywhere. Like, will I sit down to have dinner with you if you don't have a vaccine? Probably not. But also is this cause to see you as subhuman also, probably not. And how do we balance those lines of like loving people and being compassionate humans and doing our best to help each other out with also like, and I'm just going to separate you a little bit because you're a danger to me and other people that I love, so. It's a it's a hard thing to navigate for sure. How to do it well. I'm not I'm not quite positive yet. But we'll get there. I'm sure.

Emma Bronsema 39:30

So those are all the questions I have for you. But do you have any questions, comments, anything you'd like to add?

Amy Russett 39:36

I don't think so, this has been so cool, I've enjoyed this. Been Fun.

Emma Bronsema 39:40

Thank you so much for being interviewed. Being our narrator is very interesting to hear your point of view and your experience.

Amy Russett 39:48

Well, thank you so much for the opportunity. This is so fun.