

Interviewee: Kat Crandell

Interviewer: Madeline Crandell

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Transcriber: Madeline Crandell

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Abstract:

Kat Crandell was raised in the state of Minnesota, and currently works for Minnetonka Public Schools as a paraprofessional. In this interview, Kat discusses how COVID-19 has affected her means of employment following her graduation from the University of Wisconsin River Falls in May 2020. She describes how the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected her job, as well as relationships with friends and family. Additionally, she voices her frustration with the rising number of cases as people ignore mask and social distancing mandates, as well as the government's failure to control the virus.

Madeline Crandell 0:01

Okay, so today is April 21 2021 at 3pm. Today there have been a recorded 62,904 cases in the United States, so total cases have reached around 31 point 6 million, and total deaths have reached 566,000. And Minnesota cases have reached around 565,000 with around 7,000 deaths. And as of today, 134 million people have taken at least one dose of the vaccine and 87 million people are fully vaccinated. So, what is your name? And do you mind sharing demographic information for this study such as race, ethnicity, age and gender?

Kat Crandell 0:40

My name is Kat Crandell. I'm 22 years old, I'm a woman. I'm white, and ethnicity wise, I'm Chilean.

MC 0:52

So Kat, where do you live? And what is it like to live here?

KC 0:55

I live in Excelsior, Minnesota.

MC 1:00

And what are the primary things that you do on a day to day basis, like a job or activities?

KC 1:06

Um, well, I work every day at an elementary school in Shorewood, Minnesota. It's called Minnewashta Elementary, and it's part of the Minnetonka Public School District.

MC 1:18

And what kind of things do you do at your job? Exactly?

KC 1:23

I'm a Spanish Immersion paraprofessional in second grade. So at this point, the main thing I do is help teachers supervise students and help students with behavioral or academic issues. At the beginning of the year, however, the school hired me and a bunch of other paras to facilitate social distancing guidelines, in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

MC 1:56

Okay, so, we can kind of move on a little bit from that. So when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it? Like, have your thoughts changed since then?

KC Speaker 2:05

Well, when I first heard about COVID, there wasn't that much information out about it. And it also hadn't arrived in the US either. And to be honest, I didn't really think much of it, because I kind of assumed that if it became a big enough threat, that our country would, like, go into lockdown, and no cases would get in. So I didn't really expect the way things went.

MC 2:29

Did you have, like, any certain stereotypes during the time because it was originally from China? Did you have any sort of stereotypes? Or did you just think it was like any sort of, you know, virus?

KC 2:38

I would say just that it was a virus. I do know that there were some conspiracy theories that COVID had actually begun a lot earlier, and that China had like, purposefully withheld information. And to some extent, I do kind of believe that. But I wouldn't say I held many other stereotypes.

MC 3:04

I know, that's very common amongst the population now is conspiracy theories. So what other issues have concerned you due to the COVID pandemic?

KC 3:14

Um, well, besides the obvious health risks, I think that lately there's been a lot of social issues where people tend to be on two like, opposing sides. And it seems that the COVID pandemic has become sort of political. So that is something that has been concerning to me as someone who very like, actively believes in social distancing wearing masks, etc. I find myself getting really frustrated with people who do not believe in that.

MC 3:47

Do you outwardly show your frustration? Or is it kind of like an internal thing?

KC 3:52

Um, externally sometimes, like if I'm at a store, and I see someone not wearing a mask, I won't say it to them, but I'll go up to the nearest staff member and be like, "this person isn't wearing a mask." And then they're like, "Oh, no", and then they go talk to them.

MC 4:08

It's good that you're doing that though. I know a lot of people don't do that. So, also, has COVID-19 affected your job and employment status?

KC 4:16

Um, well, like I mentioned, I was originally hired, basically to facilitate with social distancing guidelines. So the, um, what were originally two classrooms got split into three pods, they call them and so there were only two teachers, right, because originally two classes and one teacher would be in one classroom, the other one in another. And they needed a third person to supervise that other class, and maybe provide instruction if the teachers decided they wanted to do that. The teachers had the option to use the extra assistance however they wanted if they wanted to be more of an academic support, or just supervising or presenting lessons, whatever. But basically, that was what I was originally hired as. Besides that, this job was not what I intended to do after I graduated because I graduated in May, when we were still kind of locked down from the COVID pandemic, May 2020. And my degree is in TESOL, teaching English to speakers of other languages. And my goal was to teach English abroad as a second or foreign language. However, with the lack of flights that wasn't really possible.

MC 5:36

What kind of application process did you have to go through in order to teach abroad and things like that?

KC 5:43

Well, I never actually applied to many other jobs. Because right when I would have started applying is when the pandemic happened, and I figured I would wait it out instead of applying

and getting my hopes up. I did apply for one program through the US government, the Fulbright English teaching assistant award. And I heard in March, I think, of this year, that I was a semifinalist for the program, and this program would have departed this year, June 2021. However, they ended up postponing the program. They didn't explain why I assumed it had to do with COVID or a lack of applicants because of COVID. So somehow, because of COVID, I assume. But, yeah, so they ended up delaying the program even further to January 2022. And they gave me the option to withdraw from the program. And I decided to do so.

MC 6:49

Yeah, I understand that must have been really frustrating. I know, for a lot of people, like their plans were put on hold or postponed and things like that. And then I know for a lot of people, the most concerning thing right now is like being [able] to interact with family and things like that. So how has COVID-19 affected your family's day to day activities?

KC 7:06

Um, well, we're indoors a lot more, we don't really go out as much we don't really interact with, like, extended family members very much. One thing that was pretty significant is my grandmother lives with us half of the year she is from Chile. And she was planning last year, she was planning to go home, I think May 2020. But because of the pandemic, she was not able to travel and go back home, so she was basically stuck here with us. And because she's older, she was especially worried about going out. So the rest of us would, you know, wear a mask, social distance and go to the store and pick up groceries. But she basically never left the house. But she was stuck here with us for two more months-- I think-- until maybe two or three months until they finally started having some flights going out to Chile.

MC 8:03

It was even a little bit more difficult for her to come back to because of the whole restriction thing. And I know after she returned in, like, earlier this year, they banned flights to Chile or she lived by advice to us or something like that. So it's kind of...

KC 8:18

Yeah, yeah, her first flight to come back I think, yeah.

MC 8:22

And then also, as the outbreak really affected how you associate and communicate with like, friends and family?

KC 8:30

Definitely, yeah. I don't really see friends as often. And when I do obviously, social distance wearing masks and, the friends I do see are only like a particular group of like--my most-- my closest friends, I don't really see acquaintances, or old classmates anymore. Just because that would be, you know, expanding my group of close contacts that I wouldn't really be very safe. So mostly I contact people digitally now. Yeah.

MC 9:01

You think it's gonna affect your interactions in the future? Because I know from personal experience for me, thinking about COVID now is kind of impacting the way that I feel about, like, I feel like I don't really need to interact with people as much anymore. I kind of enjoy being inside. Do you feel the same way or?

KC 9:18

Yeah, I definitely feel the same way I have also grown used to being on my own. And then another big concern of mine is that like, I'm also hesitant to make new friendships, if that makes sense? Because I don't necessarily know how long this is going to go on. So yeah, I can't really imagine myself like making a bunch of new friends, you know.

MC 9:45

And then during this time, you know, when we were quarantined and things like that, what is your family and friends done for like recreation and things like that, to kind of pass the time?

KC 9:54

Well, the times that I have seen my friends, we have been outside, socially distanced usually, just hanging out outside has been one of the best things to do. Because we can still be together, but be safe. I've also been doing a lot of takeout food. Many restaurants no longer have dine in options, but we still do a lot of takeout and delivery in order to support local businesses and still have fun together. And with my family, we mostly just hang out in our house. We all play a lot of video games. So, been really sedentary I think.

MC 10:38

And then speaking of self isolation and things like that, what are two things that kind of like, helped you during the pandemic? And how has your like, friends and family kind of responded to like the requests to stay inside and flattening the curve and things like that?

KC 10:56

Oh, what do you mean by like, two things that have helped me?

MC 11:02

I meant, sorry, I guess I misspoke. So like the two main ideas of like, self isolation and flattening the curve and things like that?

KC 11:11

Oh, yeah. Um, well, was mostly I would say, social distancing. That's a big one and wearing masks, washing hands as well.

MC 11:20

And then, has anyone that you know, personally gotten sick during the COVID-19 outbreak? And what was your experience with that?

KC 11:26

Yeah, my aunt got sick. That didn't really affect me, because we don't really live near each other. But I heard about it later. And she was pretty sick. So it made me a little worried. She was fine at the end. And my next door neighbor, actually, about a month ago, tested positive for COVID was really, really sick. She had a lot of symptoms and was just feeling generally awful. And then on top of the COVID, she ended up getting bronchitis. So it's been a month now, but she's still really, like, tired and is having issues breathing. So she's really taking it slow. And I ended up actually having to quarantine because she is like a close contact of mine. As I see her every day to walk her dog, and we usually hang out and chat outside. And while we're outside, I still felt that with like with the handoff, you know, with the dog and everything, we were both touching all over the dog and breathing all over it. So I ended up quarantining for two weeks. But luckily, I never got anything.

MC 12:33

Yeah. And luckily, she's better now, too. And what are kind of your thoughts about, like, these new like symptoms and like, things that are coming out, even after people have recovered? Like, I've heard a lot of people have been losing, like sense of taste and things like that.

KC 12:47

Yeah, it is really scary to me. I think that obviously.-- I guess I don't want to say that it's worse than you know, I think. Let me start over. [Recording paused] Yeah, it's definitely really scary that besides having, you know, the really bad sickness, you'd also have a lot of really bad side effects. And actually losing the sense of taste is kind of a big fear of mine. I'm someone who really likes to eat. And I don't know, I guess it would just be really boring. I think, to not have fun eating anymore. Yeah.

MC 13:22

And then along with, like, affecting physical health, how do you think COVID-19 is affecting people's mental health?

KC 13:27

Well, I think that a lot of the self isolation has affected people's mental health significantly. And I guess I could speak to that, as someone with mental health issues. It's been, hard, because, you know, something that can really help people with mental health issues is like, being social, going

outside, being with friends. And obviously, that's something we can't really do. I guess it from another perspective, I can't really see my therapist as much anymore. And when we do meet, we meet virtually and while it works, it's definitely not as effective as if we had in person meetings.

MC 14:09

Yeah. Well, I know now there is a little bit of, you know, light at the end of the tunnel with, you know, the vaccines and things coming out. So, did you have any, like questions or concerns about the vaccine? I know that you already received it. And did you have any side effects along with it?

KC 14:22

I didn't really have any concerns other than maybe like the overall effectiveness, I mean, there's still a chance I could get it. So I still have to be careful with social distancing and all that. And then there's also you know, the new strains of COVID coming out, which the current vaccine is not super effective against so that makes me a little concerned. But I'm happy to have received it and I did have some side effects after the first dose. I had to stay home from work a couple of days. I was really nauseous. I had a fever and a headache.

MC 14:57

And then what about the second dose? Did you have any side effects with that?

KC 15:00

Uh, no, just like a sore arm I had both times. But that's pretty standard. It wasn't bad. I had like a little rash where I got the shot, but not a big deal at all.

MC 15:10

Yeah. So in general, the vaccine experience was pretty good. Like there weren't really a lot of like, negative side effects?

KC 15:16

Other than that, no, no, I mean, it definitely wasn't pleasant, the first one for me, but way better than getting COVID.

MC 15:24

Yeah, that's true. And then what was your experience getting access to the vaccine and things like that, like, did you know when it was available? Or did you like, make an appointment and things like that?

KC 15:32

Well, there was actually a little bit of confusion with it. Because as I work in a school, we were one of the second groups, I think, eligible to get the vaccine. And our school somehow actually messed up the original, like, application process. So all the other schools basically in the state, end up getting their staff vaccinated before us. And it wasn't until a bunch of staff complained, and we're talking to administration that it finally got figured out that there was some kind of misunderstanding, and our school wasn't on the list. But once they put us on the list, within that day, I got an email asking me to apply to get the vaccine. And the application was really easy, not complicated at all. The only thing I would say is that a lot of the vaccination centers weren't, like, very close. So I hitched a ride with my mom who also works in the school. And we went together to, I think, where did we go? First, we went to Minneapolis. And then we went to--no--first we went to Brooklyn center. The next time was in St. Louis Park, which was a little closer to us.

MC 16:38

Yeah, I must imagine that must have been really frustrating with like, the administration and things like that. And then also, there's been a lot of frustration with, you know, how the government is handling. Or handling the pandemic. So do you have any thoughts on how, like the local or state or even like federal leaders are responding to the crisis? Or?

KC 16:59

Um, well, I think that, in general, I would say most places, did not have as strict of guidelines as I think they could have. There are some places that are worse, in my opinion, like Texas, I know,

has basically lifted all restrictions, which I think is frankly insane. So I'm thankful to be in Minnesota, which is taking a pandemic a little more seriously. But even so, I guess, I have a lot of international friends I went to college with, when they went back, they went back to like, really strict governments. So I saw that, and I think that that was like a better way to do things.

MC 17:41

Do you have any specific examples? Or?

KC 17:44

Yeah, I think the best example I saw was Taiwan, which has done a really good job. And at this point, they're basically like, people can kind of go out and do whatever they want. They don't have to social distance or anything. And they continue to have very few cases every day. But you know, this friend of mine, when she had first got to Taiwan, she had to quarantine, right. And the government basically was keeping tabs on her while she was quarantined. Like, they were tracking her location. And they saw her post, like a picture out of her window. And she lived in an apartment building. So they thought that maybe she was outside the building, even though she was just high up in the building. And right after she posts that, like 10 minutes later, the police came to her door, and were like, were you on the street? And she had to, like, convince them, she's like, no, I understood it from here. Here's the window, I took it from, and they were like okay, and they left her alone. But I thought that that was really good. Like, that's why they've had so few cases, because they've been really good at monitoring people's whereabouts.

MC 18:50

And I know that it's a little, something that's a little bit controversial here. Like in the United States, a lot of people feel like, you know, getting the police and the government involved is like infringing upon their freedoms and things like that. But do you think that is the case? Or do you think the government should be a little bit more involved in, you know, going after people for not obeying the rules and things like that?

KC 19:07

I think the government should go after people more for going against the rules, because everyone has the right to not get sick. It's think it's pretty simple.

MC 19:18

Yeah, I think people are good at being a little bit selfish, too. And then, I know going along with that, about how people are kind of, you know, being really selfish during this time, cuz you're, like experienced during this time kind of changed about the ways that you like, think about your family or friends or, like, community and things like that.

KC 19:35

Yeah, I definitely have found myself really frustrated with some people I know and with some parts of the community that are not as intense about social distancing guidelines, as I think they should be. Yeah, I guess it hasn't been made me pretty frustrated with some people.

MC 20:03

And then, you know, with vaccines and everything, everything is kind of, you think, everything is kind of coming to a close and things like that. So, how are you kind of like planning ahead towards the future? Do you have any plans? Are you just kind of waiting to see how things will turn out?

KC 20:16

I think I'm waiting to see how things turn out again, because as there have been, like, new strains of COVID, and people continue to be pretty careless, and as cases continue to be really high numbers in our country, I guess I don't feel very confident that things are going back to normal very soon. So I think I'm not really making too many plans, and I'm just going to kind of see how things pan out.

MC 20:44

I remember especially, you know, when, during the beginning of the pandemic, last year in March, people were thinking it was only going to last, you know, a few more months. Do you have any sort of prediction? Like what do you think it'll end? Or do you think we'll be like this forever? You know?

KC 20:56

I'm not sure. I think it might continue here for a fair amount of time. But like I mentioned, I know there are some countries where it's basically, I mean, it's basically done, right? So I don't know, it's hard to say.

MC 21:13

And a lot of people I've heard are actually going to try and implement more, you know things, because of COVID into their lives like masks will probably become more popular during that. Do you plan on implementing any of those things into your life afterwards? Even after you know, COVID has ended or?

KC 21:27

Yes, definitely. I think face masks are really great. I actually visited Taiwan, in 2019 in the summer and even though it was summer, there were a lot of people wearing masks. And I adopted it while I was there. Obviously I didn't do what I came back because no one does it in the US, so I felt a little weird about it. But I definitely—I see the benefits. I think I'll continue doing it. I think I will also continue to social distance to some extent, you know, like keeping space between myself and other, like, strangers in public, you know, instead of squeezing by other people and crowded hallways or something. Definitely hand washing even more than I used to, bringing hand sanitizer around. I think it has helped me be a little bit healthier actually.

MC 22:15

Yeah, it can be hard to imagine a time before this because I know I went to a concert in January of 2020. It can be really hard to imagine a time when we didn't have to socially distance and things like that, that would definitely not be able to be possible now. So. Alright, well thank you so much for answering my questions Kat. We're done with the interview. So thank you!