

**Interviewer:** Julia Kaeding

**Interviewee:** Alicia Boldt

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**Transcriber:** Julia Kaeding

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**Abstract:**

Alicia Boldt is a 28-year-old special education who lives in Augusta, Wisconsin. She grew up in Augusta, a rural farming community, where she now teaches special education for 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In this interview, Alicia shares her experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic including concerns for her students' education, adjusting her curriculum to virtual and online learning, and learning how to be a new mother. She shares her concern for community members not doing their part to 'flatten the curve' and hopes for a better future where her community can continue to find ways to support each other during difficult times.

**JK:** Today is November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, at 6:04 PM. Eau Claire county has 7,438 total cases of COVID-19, with 89 cases added today. There have been 60 total deaths and two deaths added today. The United States has had a total of 12.8 million cases of COVID-19 with 178,000 cases added today, and there have been 261,000 total deaths in the US with 2,216 deaths added today.

So if you could please state your name and share some demographic information about yourself such as your age, race and gender.

**AB:** I am Alicia Boldt. I am 28 years old. I'm a female. Um, where I live, right? I'm white and I live in Augusta, Wisconsin with my husband and my seven-month-old daughter. She's seven months old today so if you hear background noise, it's probably her going to bed. [chuckles] Um, I think I hit everything, right?

**JK:** Yeah!

**AB:** Yes! Awesome.

**JK:** Okay, what are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis, such as your job, extracurriculars, or hobbies?

**AB:** I am a special education teacher in the town that I live in, in Augusta, and I teach 6th through 12th grade students with learning disabilities, autism, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, just kind of Cross Cat. [Cross Categorical] which is what you do in a

small district. My family owns a small hobby farm, so we spend a lot of time there. We like to be outdoors hunting, fishing, that kind of thing.

**JK:** Well, so you said, you're from Augusta, Wisconsin. What is it like to live there?

**AB:** It's a super tight knit community. If somebody knows something about you, the whole community probably does. But it's been kind of interesting in this time, especially because you kind of see how old school mentality is in a small community, and how kind of almost narrow minded we are in a small community, but on the flip side of that everyone is super supportive and caring and kind of bands together whenever there's something crazy, like the times that we're in right now.

**JK:** When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts and how have your thoughts changed since then?

**AB:** I distinctly remember sitting in one of my co-worker's classrooms in March, and I was at the time eight months pregnant and I remember being like, "I don't know why they're talking about shutting down borders. I don't know why we're doing all of this, like it's the flu." And I sincerely remember being upset because it was a professional development day and we didn't have any students in the building that day and I like knew that we were on the cusp of shutting down school. I remember being, like, super upset and thinking it was not a big deal and being like, "why in the heck are we doing this?" And then now, my grandma is actually just recovering from COVID and so it's like, hit a lot closer to home. And she's the first person in our immediate family that has gotten it, so now I understand, and obviously, we all should understand that it is a big deal, like people are dying left and right. And we haven't been out to dinner in months, we haven't been out to have a drink in months. We don't really see anybody outside of our students and our immediate family and because it is a big deal, and it freaks me out [laughs] um, and it's just a lot closer to home now. I totally get why we reacted that way we did in March.

**JK:** So going off of the stress that it's created, what issues have most concerned you about the pandemic?

**AB:** Um, I guess in my line of work, one of the things – and having a brand new baby – one of the things that really concerns me is, like, the social cues that a lot of our young kids and our students with disabilities are missing out on because all of their interactions are with people with masks on. And so all of the things that we teach them to look for as far as nonverbal cues, when they're communicating, a lot of them we can't teach them, we can't like, reinforce because they're not seeing people's facial expressions, they're not able to read that. And a lot of our students with speech and language struggles, like a lot of how they learn, how to form those sounds, is by watching somebody's mouth and they're not getting that. I worry a lot about child development

because of masks and they are so important, and I totally support us wearing them in the school, but that's the flip side of it, it's like, we will have classes of preschoolers and Kindergarteners that will have spent a year and a half only seeing people in masks by the time this is all, by the time the school year is over. So that makes me really nervous and I think that it's not directly affected by the disease, but it's because of something with, or, with the virus. So that is scary. I'm also concerned about, like, long term effects that we don't know yet. Just the unknown is really scary. So the long term effects of the of the virus. And then the last thing that like really makes me nervous is the mental health of a lot of our youth and adults. I mean, this is none of us have experienced anything like this, so I think that mental health is, across the board, is suffering, it's really scary, because there's long term, like there's things that our kids won't get back, like their last prom, or their last, like, a normal graduation, or homecoming, like these kids won't get that back. And they don't, I don't know that they understand, like the gravity of that now, and the memories that they're missing out on now, but in the future, they're definitely going to look back, and it's kind of a big bummer.

**JK:** Definitely. Um, so you've talked a bit about not going out to eat or not going out to the bars or going out to different public locations. So how has COVID-19 affected you and your family's day to day activities?

**AB:** We found like different ways to spend our time, like I said before, we're a big like hunting and farming family, and so none of that has changed. In fact, it is even more of a getaway now than it ever has been. So that's, that's been nice that one of our biggest hobbies as a family is something that we can still do together. But we also used to, every Tuesday night, we used to go out for pizza or a burger and like, that's not something that we do anymore; going out to eat was kind of our thing. And so we don't, it's very weird to think about, like, the last time that I went out to eat was a long time ago, I don't even know when, um, so that's been kind of different. But we also like, welcomed a child in April. And so like, everything's been shut down. And we've also had a kid since this has started, so I don't know how much of it is a change because we have a baby and how much of it is a change because of the virus. So it's all kind of [baby growling] that's her, if you can hear. She's growling at us. But that I don't know how much of it is because I'm now a mom, and how much of it is a virus, it all kind of meshes together. And so I guess it's hard to say what COVID-19 has done to our family versus just being a new mom. But we it's made us a lot closer with our immediate family for sure because we're spending a lot more time with them than we would have, like the downtime that we would spend on the weekend with our friends we're now spending with family instead, which is, I think, very powerful and great. And it's really, I don't take my time with them for granted anymore, that's for sure.

**JK:** No, definitely, there's so many healthy people who get sick, and then suddenly die, things like that. So it's really important that we're enjoying the time that we have with our family and taking, not taking that for granted, like you said. So you've said that you had a baby and there's been challenges adapting to being a new mom and being a new parent but what are some of the biggest challenges that you faced during COVID-19, in your household, that you—that might not be attributed to having a child?

**AB:** I would say, we're both—my husband and I are both super stressed out. We're both teachers and so we are navigating these crazy waters of COVID for the first time together. While a lot of our struggles are the same, because we are in the same profession, it's hard to know how to navigate those and not take it out on the other person, I guess. And then because of COVID, we haven't been able to have as much help with a new baby as we would have otherwise. We haven't been able to welcome a lot of our friends into our home to meet her and that's been, that's been hard and that's directly attributed to COVID. Because otherwise, we would have people in and out of our door all the time seeing her. And so I worry about the things that she misses out on in her first year. She's not going to remember this [unclear] but like, as a mom, I get nervous about those types of things. So I think that's been the hardest thing is, like, trying to figure out these new stressors without taking it out on each other. And we spend a lot more time together now than we would have I think. [laughs]

**JK:** What have you, your family, and if you know about your friends, done for recreation during the pandemic, like have you started baking bread like other people, stuff like that?

**AB:** We walk, in the beginning we were walking a ton because it was a spring and I was trying to walk the baby out. [laughs] So we went, we were walking a ton and taking the dog outside for walks. Just trying to get outside as much as we could. We also started watching Dave Portnoy pizza reviews like our job because he was doing like that at home pizza reviews and unboxings. And that was kind of a funny way to like, [JK laughs] pass the time. I'm trying to think what else we did. During, when we were, like, in quarantine, we just spent a ton of time outside, a ton of time outside. I did a puzzle [both laugh]. Trying to get into zoom meetings and things like that with students during that, but we've spent a lot more time doing things outside than we normally would have. And so now like, going into the winter, I'm a little nervous about what that's gonna be like, [JK: mmhmm] I'm going to be going stir crazy [JK: mmhmm] in our house. Yeah, we've been lucky that it happened when the weather was nice.

**JK:** Definitely. When the pandemic first started, how were you concerned about your own health? How did this affect your family?

**AB:** It just keeps going back to being pregnant when it all started, like I was, we were very worried when we when it started. In California, in New York, there was a lot of—we were reading a lot of stories about women that were having to go into labor without their significant other. And so, I was really nervous that that was going to happen here. And luckily it didn't, we got super lucky. I think they saw the toll that that was taking on new moms' mental health and a lot of places aren't doing that anymore. But we—so we were able to have that piece together but on my 36th week of pregnancy, Derek wasn't able to come into appointments with me anymore and so I was just really concerned that I was going to find out something was wrong with baby and then have to, like, navigate that on my own. And we were very lucky and she's healthy and beautiful and awesome. That was that was scary. And then just like knowing what the right thing to do with a new baby was, because obviously everyone wants to come and see her and so do we

let them see through the window? Do we let them in? Like, I can't ask anybody for advice on this because nobody's experienced it. I was more worried about her, and I still am because there's not a lot of information out there about how it affects babies, so that makes me really nervous. But, and when it started, especially I, like, I've kind of eased my worries. And now we're just going through the motions and going through life because this is our new reality. But at first that caused me a lot of anxiety. Yeah, now I just like, it's hard to not feel like it's inevitable that it's going to be in our house at some moment because everybody and their brother has had it, I feel like [JK: mmhmm] and so how we've avoided it this long, I have no idea. But knock on wood we have. So I get less anxious about it now because it's I feel like it's a matter of time, like it's a ticking time bomb and try not to worry about things I can't control. [laughs]

**JK:** You've talked a bit about mental health and physical health with your students and yourself. How do you think as a whole around the country, people are handling the pandemic?

**AB:** Um, I feel like it goes in, like it ebbs and flows. Like, I definitely feel like we're on a roller coaster of emotion. And there's days where I'm like, "I'm fine, I'm doing great, I'm thriving." And then there's other days, like I just want to cry in my room and, and everyone that I have talked to at least around here feels the same way. Like, they definitely cope with it some days better than others. But we have seen a huge influx in our school based mental health referrals. So there's been a lot more of our students that are struggling and their parents are noticing that and reaching out for help. We've also seen a lot more students that aren't getting the help that they need from home. Just because a lot of parents in rural communities don't believe in mental health struggles and that's a constant battle that we're fighting, but even more so now, because these kids are losing out on opportunities, or they're stuck at home, or they can't go to school and socialize, or they've been in their third quarantine and we're three months into school. And so it's a constant struggle, I think for these kids. And that's something like I said, it's so hard because we can't control that and it's the nature of the beast. But I think that that is universal and when I've talked to other teachers from other districts, they're seeing the same things in their kids too. And that's it's really hard. And I think that that's a serious concern that goes with this virus for sure.

**JK:** How has COVID-19 affected your job and in what ways?

**AB:** [laughs] In every way! [laughs] Well, in March when we all shut down, that was really hard, so all my students have IEPs or Individualized Education Plans and so in those plans, there's specified minutes that we have to hit in order to be following the law set forth by the State of Wisconsin and so when COVID-19 hit and we were all—the State of Wisconsin shut down all the schools, we kind of got a pass, I guess, on those like, we just had to prove that we were meeting it, like attempting to reach out to our students, that our students had access to us, that we were putting forth—so we documented those minutes that we were spending, consulting with our students. And then now going into this year, we've had to rewrite all of this paperwork so that we can include what the minutes will look like if we get fully shut down, if we continue in a hybrid

model, which we're in, and I'll explain that in a second, and if we get to go back to full five days a week, and so our paperwork is now a million times longer. [chuckles] The progress in our students that we saw going into March of last year is, for the most part has kind of diminished and we've had to start over and rewrite a lot of our paperwork to meet where our kids are, and hold additional meetings so that we can talk about how to proceed. And so that's been hard. But we—right now we're in a hybrid model, so we see half of our students on Monday, Tuesday, and then they have Wednesday, Thursday, Friday virtual and the other half, Thursday, Friday, and they have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday virtual. And that's how our Middle/High School is operating. Our elementary school is back—is full five days a week, because they have the space to space those kiddos out. And it's a daycare nightmare for parents if you have your first grader home three days a week like, what do you do? [JK: mmhmm] [laughs] But with our students that—a lot of my students have executive functioning struggles, so they have a really hard time knowing, when they have this list of homework, knowing where to start and just, like, how to even get through that mountain of homework. So we've had to use a lot more like visual schedules and a lot more like, planning out like a ton of my time that I spend with them on Monday and Tuesday. So a Monday, Tuesday kid is planning out how they're going to spend their virtual days, so that sucks up a ton of our instructional time when we actually have them. The biggest like loss of all of this is time, I feel like, and time is what we need with these kids. And so that's been hard. But on the flip side, they have become very proficient in using technology. And that's, I think, an unforeseen benefit of this as all of our kids are one to one with Chromebooks, and they are learning how to—they're way more tech savvy than I am now, like, it's crazy. They're like “Mrs. Boldt, all you have to do is click this button and it shows you all of this,” so they are doing great with that. It's just once they get into their assignments, how do they start? How do they know that they've hit all the marks to get the assignment done. And trying to find ways to support students that are on virtual days while we have students in our classroom at the same time is difficult. And so our Wednesdays are full of Zoom meetings, or if we have kids that are credit deficient, they're coming in to try to make up some of those things that they missed when they were on two-week quarantines, and it's—I feel like we're building the plane as we fly it, I guess in our job now. And I'm very I'm very fortunate that I'm in a district where we are able to see kids face to face, even if it is just two days a week, especially in special education, like how do you meet occupational therapy needs for a kid with cerebral palsy when you can't even see them in person, like it's—we've had to get very creative and I will never take a five day a week— five day in person a week school year for granted again, [laughs] I definitely, definitely miss that time with those kids. And then we do have some kids that have elected to go full virtual and they're doing that through the Wisconsin Virtual Academy and that still if they have an IEP, we still are required to meet those minutes so it's very interesting because I'm Google meeting with a kid on the curriculum that I didn't design or I've never seen before. [JK: mmhmm] So we're just trying to do the best with what we can and it's—I just laugh every time everyone asks me about it, because I don't know what else to do. [both laugh]

**JK:** What are your future concerns with COVID-19's effect on your employment, your employer, and the economy in general.

**AB:** As far as my employment goes, I'm— the point of being a special ed teacher is to, like, teach yourself out of a job or to have students no longer need special education like, that's our goal. And I worry that there's— it's going to be a lot harder for us to close the gaps in order to do that now, because while we do have students in person two days a week and we are still providing them instruction, it's— we're not seeing gains that we normally would and we're having to make up for the lost time of— some of our students didn't engage at all when we went virtual in the spring and so we're having to make up for them being gone from March until September and those gaps are a lot harder to close now. And just like general apathy towards school when it's like “out of sight out of mind,” and then you get there for two days and we're like, pushing you, pushing you, pushing you and I worry about— that the love and the fun side of school is going to be lost on some of these kids where it was a struggle in the first place. And so, I do, I worry about long term outcomes for a handful of our kiddos that don't have that support at home, school is a social thing for them, now, it can't be a social thing for them. I worry about how to make that fun for them again when we do go back five days a week.

I also— my dad also, as you asked about the economy, my dad owns a small business and he, luckily, he is a car repair man and tow truck driver, and people are still going places and still driving cars. And that's an essential business and so luckily, his business itself hasn't taken a huge hit, but what has been really hard is like when his employees end up getting quarantined and the fallout of that, because he is limited in his staff members and he's short staffed as it is most of the time. And then when you get one person out, and maybe they ate in the break room at the same time as another one and so now they have to quarantine and it's just the domino effect of that I think is really hard on businesses. And so he's not able to take in the amount of customers that he normally would because he's short staffed. And so he's been very fortunate, but I like see the trickle-down effect of this in— through his business. That's really hard, but I do think that people are understanding the value of certain professions a lot more now than they ever did. Like, I always have valued health care professionals, but my sister-in-law's an X-ray technician and she's eight months pregnant right now, scanning COVID positive patients daily, and I just like feel for her. And I definitely— like I hope that as a country, we can value each other a lot more through all of this and I hope that that's one positive side effect that comes out of it.

**JK:** Mmhmm. How has COVID-19 challenged you as an educator, do you have any specific examples?

**AB:** I thrive as an educator on creating relationships and those like, impacting my students through that, like, that's always my step one, is creating the relationship and let the learning follow that. But in order to develop strong relationships with kids, you need to be able to spend time with them and do things that aren't necessarily academic to get to know them and we just don't have the time for that. And that's been my biggest frustration, is time. Because our in-person days are so valuable that like to sit down and play battleship with a kid to get to know them on the first day of school, that wasn't a priority and wasn't something that we could do because we had to get them set up on Google Classroom and get their Chromebooks and get their hotspots and make sure that they understood how to navigate that. And then now we're three

months in and I'm like, "shoot," like, I really wish that I would have been able to establish a relationship with a 6<sup>th</sup> grader before he started doing ABC behaviorally, because I would be able to intervene on that a lot better if we had a better relationship. And so that's been the biggest downfall is just time, like I can't do the things that make me love education as strongly as I would be able to otherwise. And so that's been a tough thing to adjust to for sure.

**JK:** Has it been difficult to adapt your lessons and curriculum to online learning?

**AB:** It's been, I mean, yes, [**JK:** mmhmm] it's been super interesting, just the amount of time that it takes to, like, figure out some of the programs that we're trying to use so our— we're really lucky, our librarian is amazing and he pushes out a ton of different learning platforms for us, and so things that we're using for the first time or like Flipgrid and things like that, and that's allowing our students to interact in a different way and that's been good. But the nice thing for me is that I've already had Google Classrooms and e-readers and things like that set up for my students to give them access to general education curriculum [**JK:** mmhmm] so that piece has been, like, has been helpful that we already had that established, but just turning all of the things that I would have a normal worksheet for digital has been very interesting. [both laugh] And I'm trying not to, like reinvent the wheel, and I'm trying not to waste time, like with the fluff, like, as long as they're getting the content, but then it's also really boring if you don't have the cool fluff, I don't know. [**JK:** mmhmm] So it's— also I co-teach two math classes and trying to, like, teach kids solving equations on an interactive notebook is, like, way more difficult than I thought. [**JK:** laughs] And then we've been doing a lot of like— in eighth grade math, one of the standards is learning how to graph linear equations and so we have Desmos, an online platform for graphing, and so we've been doing that, but then we realized, like, "oh my gosh, they can put the points in here and it graphs it for them, they don't know how to make a graph on graph paper." And so, then we have to, like, take a step back and be like, "alright," now we need to like, in out in-person days, we need to focus on this more. And so, it's just like, those types of things keep popping up that we wouldn't have anticipated. So like I said, we're building the plane as we fly it. [both laugh]

**JK:** How will the lessons the pandemic has taught you influence how you will teach in the future?

**AB:** I definitely will value time with my kids more. And when we are back to five days a week, and a kid wants to go off on tangent talking about life, I can tell you, I will be a lot— I won't be as quick to shut them down on that and redirect them back to the lesson plan because, like they need that stuff and that's what builds those relationships. That's what a lot of like, I think about my biggest life lessons in high school and it was not what was in the lesson plan and so I will never take that for granted again. There are a couple of things just from like a pure academic standpoint that have been really good though and our middle school team has developed a "Week at a Glance," I guess, website and so, like, just a one stop shop for our parents to go and they can access all of their students' Google Classrooms from there, they can go if they're an



eighth grader and click on eighth grade Week at a Glance and every teacher and every class that they teach has like day by day what's going on, so that when our students are quarantined or have extended absences, they can just go on that, click the link, get it to their Google Classroom, and they can still interact that way. I think that that's something that we're going to continue doing just because it is nice so our parents aren't like, "hello, once it's in skyward, then it's already late, and then I don't know how to tell them that I can't keep my kid up on stuff," well, here it is and now you know, five days ahead of time what's going on, on Friday. So that's been something that's been really good that we're going to continue to do. And I think that having our students one to one with Chromebooks gives them access to a lot more content than we could have otherwise, and so that's going to stick around, and I'm excited about that, that'll be good.

**JK:** How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community?

**AB:** That's been, like, the frustrating thing, I think in all of this is, I love my town, and I love rural communities, and I will never leave one but what has been frustrating is like when we go in— like I have a grandma who's sick in the nursing home, and I haven't been able to see her since March, and then you walk into the local dollar store, and I see a nursing home employee in there without masks on because there's a sign on the door that says "mask or no mask, we will serve everyone," and that's frustrating, because I'm like, I literally can't see my grandma and you get to work with her every day and here you are putting everyone at risk, so that has been frustrating. And I think it's just like, it's people that have grown up in a small community and have never left a small community and they don't have like, I don't know how to phrase this even, they don't have any other perspective other than one here. So they don't necessarily see how this is affecting people on a global perspective. And that's— it's really frustrating. Or, like, I see my students' parents walking around the grocery store without a mask on and then I have to try to make them wear the one at school. And, like, it's hard to follow through on that when you're at school when you're not expected to at home. And so it's not the student's fault. It's not the 7<sup>th</sup> grader's fault. I mean, they're— it's getting reinforced at home that masks are dumb, or "I'm not going to do that because I'm not going to be a sheep to the government," and like, that kind of thinking is been really frustrating. But another— one thing that is on the flip side of that that's good is that we've had a huge surge in supporting local businesses because it's hard to keep afloat when you are a bar or restaurant at a time like this. And so I think that our— we haven't had any local businesses close because of the pandemic since March and so that's been really good. That's been I think— I think it will get people [baby crying] to continue to shop local, which will be awesome, which is awesome for our town and awesome for the economy of our town, and we've all kind of banded together in that way, which has been really nice.

**JK:** How are people around you responding to the pandemic negatively or positively?

**AB:** [baby crying] There hasn't been a lot of positive responses. [laughs] I do think that like, on social media, you definitely see these posts and I posted one yesterday about like, me and something good that's happened in 2020 to try to, like, see the flip side of things but it's

definitely hard. I think parents are more eager to kind of like jump-- not jump down our throats, but eager to like, finger point to their teachers at school or their coaches, because they're stressed out and it's an easy, it's an easy target to take that frustration out on whether it has anything to do with what we're doing at school or not. That's been definitely something I've seen as everybody's just a lot shorter with each other. Also though, like when you'd go to the grocery store, and you see somebody that you would have seen, out and about at whatever community event, and you see them there, it's— you see a lot more people excited to see each other and so that's a positive, I think, like everyone is cherishing the time that they get, whether it's in passing at the grocery store, at the next gas pump, or whatever. It's— everyone's just craving that social interaction. That's a positive side of how people are reacting but I definitely think like, the mental health of everyone around us is suffering because these things that we depend on to keep us going, we can't have it if we're being safe, you know?

**JK:** Mmhm. Self-isolation, and flattening the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic, how have you, your family, friends, and community responded to requests to self-isolate and flatten the curve?

**AB:** Well, my husband and I were on quarantine and that was very easy, because we had a new baby, so we wouldn't— we wouldn't have been going anywhere anyway. [laughs] And once April hit, and then in the summertime, I think everybody around here kind of loosened up because it wasn't necessarily like here in our backyard yet. And so people started, you know, I think like, having more gatherings and things like that. We, I think went to— we went to two weddings in August, because like I said, we didn't know anybody that had had it and so it felt like, you know, we felt kind of untouched by it, I guess. And then once it did get here, we really like, locked ourselves down. And so now, the only people that we see outside of work is my parents, and my brother and sister-in-law, and my husband's parents, and his brother and wife, and other than that, not really. I don't know that we would even be seeing that group of family members, if, like I said, we didn't farm together like we can't avoid it. My mom also works at the school with us, so we see her every day. My brother and my dad work together, so they see each other every day, so we definitely have kept our circle very small. And then anytime I do see anyone else, it's on accident out and about, and we have masks on and that kind of thing. My husband and I are very diligent about wearing masks, just because we're afraid of what we might bring home to our baby if we don't. But I— like I said, when this whole thing started, I was a skeptic about flattening the curve. I was a skeptic about how severe it was. And I think like, that's our natural— it's a natural instinct as humans to question things, and especially something this bizarre and out of left field, like, what, how could this be that bad? It definitely now there's no question that it's, it's legit, and it's real. And so we are trying very hard to do our part and, and flatten the curve. I can't wait till we don't have to say flatten the curve anymore. As I'm saying that I'm like, “ahhh!”

**JK:** There's so many, like, key phrases like “unprecedented times,” or “strange times,” like that, it's what you hear in every email, or every class, something like that, so it'll be nice to not hear those anymore.

**AB:** I can't wait until this time is not unprecedented anymore.

**JK:** Yes. [both laugh] What have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

**AB:** Well, it's the crazy thing in this too, is that it's an election year, and so like, could tensions be any higher? And then you have like a mental health crisis on top of it like, oh, my gosh. So we've been trying to stick to local news as much as possible, because like, I can't— like there's days that my mental health just can't take it and then I have to tell my husband like, I can't, I can't watch the news today, like I can't, I don't want to hear what the numbers are, I don't want to— I don't want to know what's going on with the election, I don't care. Like I can't, I just want to know what's going on inside of our four walls, you know. [**JK:** yup] But we definitely have tried to get our news from every perspective, especially in election year, because it's— I don't know that there is a new source right now that isn't super liberal or isn't super conservative, and so in order to try to get— wrap your head around everything that's going on, I feel like you do have to dip into all sources. But the biggest thing that we've been doing is our local news channels for sure. But then when something crazy happens, I mean, sometimes you got to turn on CNN or Fox News to view the crazy right? [both laugh] But yeah, definitely. From my perspective, I try to stick to the local channels so that I don't lose my mind. [both laugh]

**JK:** Do you think that there are any important issues that the media may or may not be covering?

**AB:** I wish that I could hear more about like, yeah, we hear this vaccine is coming that this is— all this is like going to be awesome. Great. I wish I could hear more specifics on that. I wish that they hadn't waited until after the election to cover it because it's such a big deal. Because you hear, like “oh this vaccine's coming, but like, what about it? Like, how are we going to distribute it? Like what?” And maybe they don't know that yet and like, that's been the perspective I've been trying to take in all of this is like, nobody knows what they're doing, because how can they and so I'm trying not to get that frustrated with it. But that is one thing I wish I could see more of. I also wish that we would cover the good a little bit more. I mean, there's a lot of good that's happening in our small communities and I don't know that it's getting recognized because you don't get the reaction from the good things, you know, as you would, from the bad thing. So so much screen time is getting spent on like, “this is happening here. And that political thing happened here. And Trump said this now” and like that kind of thing, or “oh, Biden did that,” you know, like, and I wish that we could cover the good a little bit more, and I think that that would really help the mental health of everyone watching. But it is kind of crazy, we have heard far more things go— have come across our police scanner late— in the last month than ever before. And so I do think like, we need to cover the good more than ever right now and highlight that.

**JK:** Mmhm. Have municipal— or how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

**AB:** We have a new mayor this year and he is very, like, pro giving our kids, like, opportunities. And so I run our high school student council and we do something every year called Trick or Treat Street and so normally in a non-COVID year, we would have our high school student council members dress-up and they set up a table outside of a class or like in a classroom and the elementary school students, on the night of Halloween before trick or treating in town starts, they walk around the high school and go trick or treating inside the school. Then our local businesses sponsor rooms, so it's like \$50 to sponsor candy for a room and then we advertise that local business on the room. And so we do that normally, but we wanted to make sure that trick or treating was still going to be happening in town, and our mayor was like, “absolutely, we're not going to take that away, I'm going to encourage people to do it safely, whatever.” So we did Trunk or Treat, we did it in the parking lot with pre-bagged candy, and hand sanitizer, and gloves, and social distancing, and masks and whatnot. And he's been— he was very supportive of that. And then they've done a couple of different things in our— in town. They did like a fall festival, kind of a thing where they had vendors spread out in a grassy area in town, just like, small home businesses, like, people that make crafts and things like that, or I don't know, sell candles, whatever, that kind of stuff. He did that to kind of help support smaller businesses or people that are doing businesses from home and whatnot and tried to do it as safe as possible. So he's trying to— our mayor's trying to support those ways to help people interact, which I think is great. But on the flip side, it always makes me nervous, like, what if this is a super spreader event or something like this. **[JK: mmhmm]** But he's been really great about that. I have our— it is very interesting when people that I didn't, like, see as government officials prior to this whole thing, now I definitely see how much control they have. Like Lieske Giese [Director of the Eau Claire City County Health Department] I'm not even positive of what her title is at the health department, but like, it was so crazy how an expert in that field, like, maybe wasn't somebody that we ever looked to for guidance before, but now, like, everyone hangs on every word that Lieske Giese says and I would never want her job because I'm sure there's— she gets phone calls every day, but it's— that has been very eye opening to me. So definitely when I'm thinking about like, our municipal leaders and thinking about, like, our government officials and things like that, and I don't necessarily think of a head person at the health department as somebody to look to for that. So that's been a total shift, total mind shift **[JK: mmhmm]**

**JK:** Around the country, how do you think like, individual states and federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

**AB:** It has been very interesting to see, especially in an election year, like red states versus blue states, like which states have shut down for schools and which states have locked downs and mask mandates. And I do think that that's very interesting and I hate that trying to keep people safe has become like, a political game and like, you can see if it's a red state, you can guess what mandates they have in place like, I hate that like, or vice versa with the blue state. Like, I think it's become more about politics than keeping people safe and trying to beat this thing. I do think that that's very interesting. **[JK: mmhmm]** I think it's very interesting in states like Wisconsin, how we have a Democratic governor and a Republican Supreme Court and sometimes it's like, it

doesn't matter what the legislation that is passed is it's going to get shut down just because they're, you know, it's so it's so polarizing and that's, like very sad to me. And, like, as a teacher, I feel like people assume that we're liberal by nature, but I've never affiliated myself with either side and at this point, I don't want to, like, [laughs] it's almost embarrassing, you know and so I like it's, it definitely has politically— this has made me question some of my beliefs for sure. But yeah, it's just very interesting to see how political affiliations from state to state have changed mandates.

**JK:** Definitely. How has your overall experience with COVID-19 transformed how you think about your family, friends, and community? And in what ways?

**AB:** I guess I definitely thought that— I don't know why I thought this looking back, but growing up in Augusta, I definitely thought that maybe our community was a little bit more open minded. And I thought it would band together a little bit more on something like a mask mandate. So that's been eye opening. I love this town, I will never leave it, but like, that has been very interesting to me. It definitely has made me value my immediate family more. I've always been very close with my parents, and my brother and my— and his wife and my nephew, like they are— we spent a lot of time with them prior to this, but now that they're basically who we spend all our time with, I wouldn't change that. And I think that like, that will continue even once we can branch out. So that's been awesome. It is very interesting to see like, which friends you're able to keep in touch with when you can't hang out with them anymore. And so I definitely have reevaluated the strength of some of my friendships, I guess. And so that's been interesting, that's not something that I thought I would be doing at 28 years old. You know, that's like something you do when you're 17. [both laugh] But yeah, like that. So that's been, that's been interesting, but I definitely have grown a lot closer to my immediate family through all of this.

**JK:** [unclear, dropped Internet connection] What do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

**AB:** I think once this is all said and done, and hopefully, when we can look back and laugh, [both laugh] laugh that we've lived through this and be like, “what the heck just happened?” I hope that our communities find even more ways to band together as communities and like, more events that we can do to have fun. Like we have our local Bean and Bacon Days once a year, but what else can we do as a community, just to celebrate the fact that we all get to, we get to live in this great community, and we get— we have great small businesses, and we have great community members. And I hope that we find more ways to celebrate that and come together more than just like once a year, like cheering for over a demo [demolition] derby. Like, I hope we can find more ways than that to just celebrate each other. And, like, I just hope that as community members we can, when it's all said and done, like I hope we don't— I can't go to the grocery store and be like, “oh, so and so's here and so and so and so's here, I wonder if they're gonna get in a verbal altercation in the corn aisle, you know, [both laugh] like I, I hope that, I

hope that we can all come together and realize how important everyone is. So I hope that that's something that we see in the future.

**JK:** Okay, that was my last question. Thank you for letting me interview today!

**AB:** That was really fast! [both laugh]

**JK:** It goes by very quickly! [both laugh]