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**Interviewee:** Pa Cha Vang

**Interviewer:** Isabelle Becker

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**Format:** Video recording, Zoom

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**Transcriber:** Isabelle Becker

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**Abstract:**

Pa Cha Vang is a student at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She graduated high school during the pandemic. In this interview, Pa Cha discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected her, including moving from Winona, Minnesota to Minneapolis during the pandemic, finishing high school and starting college, and what she does on a daily basis. She describes how she stays in touch with her friends and family. She also describes her experience with the vaccine and volunteering at a vaccine clinic. Pa Cha also shares her concerns about the pandemic and mental health, and she touches on her personal experience with racism during this period.

**Isabelle Becker 0:03**

My name is Isabelle Becker Today is April 21, 2021. It is 3:30pm. Currently in the US, there are 31,602,676 total cases. And there are 565,613 deaths. In Wisconsin, there are 592,262 cases and 6721 total deaths. In Minnesota, there are 558,850 total cases with 7044 deaths. Currently the 26% of the US is fully vaccinated.

**IB 0:43**

Could you state your name? And then do you mind sharing some demographic information such as race, ethnicity, age, and gender?

**Pa Cha Vang 0:52**

Yep. My name is Pa Cha, and I'm Hmong American. I'm 18 years old and I identify as a cis female.

**IB 1:03**

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Alright. So where are you living right now?

**PCV 1:08**

I am living up in Minneapolis [Minnesota], I go to the University of Minnesota.

**IB 1:15**

Alright. What are the primary things that you do on a day to day basis?

**PCV 1:20**

Usually, I go to class online, have food [laughs]. And I also do some of my hobbies, which is just like listening to music and doodling and just talking to my roommate.

**IB 1:38**

And so what did-what is it like living in Minneapolis [Minnesota] right now and going to the U of M [University of Minnesota].

**PCV 1:45**

It's definitely just sort of -the past events that happened, especially with the George Floyd trial. Things were getting kind of hectic, and you could see the National Guard and everything. But for the most part, it's been pretty well, I live in pretty quiet neighborhood. And yeah, things are pretty alright, up here.

**IB 2:08**

Yeah. When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts on it? And how have they changed since then?

**PCV 2:16**

Initially, when I first heard about COVID-19, I just kind of thought that it would go away. And that it wasn't a big problem.

**PCV 2:26**

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But

**PCV 2:27**

As time went on, I realized how serious the COVID-19 is, especially with just my grandparents and my relatives who are immunodeficient. So compared to now, I think I was definitely less concerned about how COVID-19 would affect- I guess, just everyone in general, but now I'm pretty concerned, I guess. [laughs] [Both speaking- unclear]

**IB 2:58**

Yeah. Do you want to talk a little bit more about your concerns?

**PCV 3:05**

Sure. I guess like, it's, it's really great that like 26%, I believe, right? Are people are- adults in America are fully vaccinated. I have been watching the news, though. And I've noticed that there are a lot of like racial disparities among like, just vaccines, and most people can make appointments online. But some people don't even have access to like the internet, or some people don't even have a phone. So it might be harder for them to actually get the vaccine, although it's available to all adults now.

**IB 3:50**

What issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

**PCV 3:57**

I think, one issue in particular, probably just like, mental health. In the beginning of COVID-19, I worked at a long term care facility in a nursing home. And I've noticed that working with the residents, they became more lonely as they were more isolated. They were very frustrated, and they just didn't understand what was going on most of the time. And that was pretty concerning. And then you also had like Donald [nervous laughter] Trump, for example, say that, like China was the root of all of the problems and that in that manner, like I did, actually receive some like, racist slurs [nervous laughter] in that long term facility because of the information they were given about COVID-19 through watching the news. But again, like I think that loneliness and just mental health in general is a really big problem in terms of COVID-19. In.

**IB 5:16**

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So if you're okay with talking about it- I'm really sorry to hear that you encountered some racism, because of this. Are you willing to talk more about that?

**PCV 5:26**

Yeah, I guess like, there, there are people who, like have fought in the war and there are some certain prejudices. But I do think that the idea that, let's say this illness that is causing everyone to become isolated, and for people to not see their families anymore, being pinpointed on like a certain group, and certain demographic, like Asian people, for example, like, definitely, like, I can see where the residents are coming from, or those certain residents that have discriminated me. However, it's just pretty upsetting at the same time, because I don't think any of that should be put on one community. You know?

**IB 6:16**

Yeah. So are you still working there or not?

**PCV 6:21**

I am not working there anymore since I've moved up to Minneapolis.

**IB 6:27**

How has your schooling been affected during the pandemic?

**PCV 6:30**

I would have to say it has been kind of a roller coaster. I would say that I did pretty well, like in person for the most part. But after a transition to going online, it's changed so many things. I've had to learn a lot of things about just like, time management in general. And I feel like I've almost experienced like a burnout like, my first semester of college, because there was so much to do and so little time. And yeah.

**IB 7:14**

Were you- So you just recently moved to Minneapolis [Minnesota]. So you did classes online from home for your first semester?

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**PCV 7:23**

Yes.

**IB 7:23**

How was that transition to college while still being at home and then moving to Minneapolis during this pandemic?

**PCV 7:33**

Yeah, so initially, the first semester was kind of hard. It didn't even feel like I was going to college at that point. Because I was with my family. I also had to help like my youngest brother do Zoom as well. It was pretty hectic. And it didn't really feel like I was going to college. The transition was actually probably the hardest part because I didn't know what kind of course load I was going to get. Because it's my first year of college. I didn't know how it was going to be like. However, my second semester I moved up here, and it was a little easier because I could prioritize more time for myself. It's still a little hard though, because I feel like communication is better when you're in person with a professor or a TA. Or even like your peers, and you can discuss like a problem you don't understand. There are like group chats and stuff and they are beneficial. But when you have like 80 or 100 people in them, it can get pretty hectic and not everyone's answer is going to be-I mean, not everyone's questions going to be answered.

**IB 8:55**

And the transition from moving from Winona [Minnesota] to Minneapolis [Minnesota], how was that?

**PCV 9:03**

It was pretty intense. [laughs] I-Winona [Minnesota] is a really small town and you can drive in it pretty easily. But when I came up to Minneapolis [Minnesota], it was kind of hectic because I was learning how to drive in a really busy city. And it was kind of intense, but I like it. I like city life.

**IB 9:29**

Were there any differences you noticed with how the pandemic is addressed? Going from a small town to a big city?

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**PCV 9:40**

Yeah, that's pretty interesting, actually. I guess college wise, in general. I feel like they both kind of handled it in the same way. The protocols were kind of the same. I will I have to say, though, I do know some people who still go to, like college in Winona. And the vaccine was more available to students in Winona rather than in a big city like Minneapolis, because they were able to actually have those resources for those students instead of the students up here, like, in a more efficient manner, I guess.

**IB 10:31**

So have you received any doses of the vaccine?

**PCV 10:37**

I have. I got my first dose. I believe like, a couple? No, no, no, I can't remember. But a couple weeks ago, and I'm getting my second dose on Friday.

**IB 10:50**

Did you experience any side effects with it?

**PCV 10:53**

Oh, I didn't experience any side effects, except for just like a sore arm for like, one day?

**IB 11:03**

Do you or anyone you know, have ever had any questions or concerns related to the vaccine?

**PCV 11:12**

I- Not that I know, in particular, I think that maybe my grandparents do. Probably, I think they're mostly just concerned that they'll actually get COVID after getting the vaccine, because it's kind of like the flu. But I think that was their only concern.

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**IB 11:38**

And so what was your experience getting vaccinated and with getting access to information about the vaccine?

**PCV 11:47**

Yeah, so my experience was pretty positive. I'm pretty privileged to have internet and a phone. And I also volunteer at the clinic-at one of the COVID vaccine clinics, so I was able to actually get my vaccine there. So I had a pretty easy access to information and the vaccine because of those things.

**IB 12:16**

And have you, or anyone else you know, gotten sick during the pandemic?

**PCV 12:23**

Do you mean like, caught COVID or?

**IB 12:27**

[both speaking-unclear] Yes

**PCV 12:30**

Not that I know of. But yeah, I don't know anyone who's actually gotten COVID.

**IB 12:40**

And how do you see the people around you responding to the pandemic?

**PCV 12:48**

In my close circle, I think everyone's pretty following the protocols pretty safely. If I go into town, I definitely see people not wearing masks and partying and everything. But I think it really depends because in one block, you can see like maybe two people wearing a mask, but then on

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that very same block, you can see like three other people not wearing a mask. So I think it depends, but yeah.

**IB 13:24**

Have you seen people around you change their opinions, day to day activities or relationships in response to the pandemic?

**PCV 13:31**

I would say yes. I know that some of my friends like don't eat up as much as they would because of the pandemic or some people will change the scenery and like where they meet up, so they can be like six feet apart. So yeah.

**IB 13:55**

And what have you and your family and your friends done for recreation during the pandemic?

**PCV 14:05**

That's a-That's a hard one. [laughs] We mostly- my family we like, we mostly just go outside and just hang out in our backyard or like walk around our [?] park. My friends and I, we still meet outside as well. There hasn't been like too much, I guess, recreational fun [laughs] except for just going outside.

**IB 14:40**

So how are you managing day to day activities in your household?

**PCV 14:45**

Yeah, so my roommate and I have like a schedule, for example, to do cleaning duties like every month. We kind of just communicate in that sense for some-about cleaning duties, for example. I also just have like a schedule that I have to complete certain things throughout the day to make sure that I'm on the right track for school.

**IB 15:21**

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What have been your primary sources for news during the pandemic?

**PCV 15:25**

Yeah. So, on my phone, actually, I can see the news if I go to the homepage, so I get my news, usually from there. I can also, I usually also get news from like social media in like, maybe like, one day, I want to go on YouTube, and I actually still see some news on there as well. So it's basically everything on like, my [laughs] phone, I guess, is where I get my news.

**IB 15:56**

Has it changed how you've gotten your news at all?

**PCV 16:03**

Like, what do you? [laughs]

**IB 16:08**

Like the sources you use to look at? Has that changed at all during the pandemic?

**PCV 16:11**

Ah, okay. I-yeah, I will have to say I do fact check more, because I feel like news, especially on like social media, you know, I don't necessarily know where that's coming from, I still usually get my news from relatively the same source, like CNN or like, other channels like that, but yeah.

**IB 16:41**

How have you been fact checking?

**PCV 16:45**

I believe there's a fact checker online. I can't exactly remember the name. [laughs] But I do look at that one.

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**IB 16:57**

Do you think there are important issues that the media is or maybe is not covering?

**PCV 17:08**

I feel like, yeah. I don't know what else to say. I always feel like there's something like, in like, the big picture, and like, everyone has to hear about this one thing, but I feel like there are also just like, so many problems in this world. And I don't know how each problem [laughs] can be addressed all at once, you know. Like, for example, like right now. COVID-19. Right. I think that that's a pretty big issue. But I've been watching [laughs] this TV show called Escaping Polygamy, for example. And like, I don't think that's been on the news since like, couple of years ago, you know? So there's, there's a lot of different things going on, and I do think that there's usually just one big focus a lot of the time.

**IB 18:10**

Have you been watching a lot of shows like that, the Escaping Polygamy during this pandemic?

**PCV 18:16**

Yeah. I find them really interesting and just educational in general, to just learn about what's been actually going on in the world [\_\_\_\_?], yeah.

**IB 18:28**

Is that something that you used to do before the pandemic as well? Or has it really started recently?

**PCV 18:34**

I think that I did start it before the pandemic, but I think it's like grown and I've kind of like, had a variety now that I actually watch and what kinds of things I'm learning about.

**IB 18:51**

So with the pandemic, there's a lot of talk about self isolation and flattening the curve as ways to help the situation. Have you done any of that?

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**PCV 19:03**

Yeah, I will have to say I don't really see anyone at all [laughs] and I usually just stay in my room. I usually just like video call my friends and like, I don't like go out as much like, I don't go to the store unless I need to for groceries. Also, with my family, like I don't see them like all the time and I usually just video call them just to make sure everyone's safe [\_\_\_\_?].

**IB 19:42**

So how has COVID kind of changed your relationships with your family and friends and your community in general?

**PCV 19:50**

Yeah, I definitely feel like I don't-I'm not able to have the same connection with my friends and family as much, because I am so self-isolating. Like, I feel like there is this spark that just happens when you're with someone in person. And it's different from seeing them, like on a video call, you know? I don't think it has changed a lot though. Like, I still love [?] [laughs] my family and they still love [?] me. So it's not a lot, but it's still like, Oh, I miss your presence, you know?

**IB 20:47**

So how do you think municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak? How have they responded?

**PCV 20:57**

Yeah. So Minneapolis [Minnesota], in particular, I believe that, Tim Walz, our governor, has like, put on restrictions in the beginning. They were for a couple of months, I believe, I can't exactly remember. I think that nowadays, they're kinda like, lifting them up, because people are getting the vaccine. A lot of people have access to it now. Our-my college in general, have been like, changing up like social distancing like- well not changing the guidelines, but [laughs] it-in initiating the guidelines for social distancing. And just making sure that there's like a curfew. When we first started in the first semester, there were like, definitely curfews for students, because of COVID-19, and other things like that.

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**IB 22:03**

Do you want to talk a little bit more about those curfews?

**PCV 22:07**

Yeah, I wasn't up here at the first semester, but I have heard from my friends that it was it was kind of crazy. Some people actually didn't even follow the curfew guidelines. And I definitely do think that that probably just affected everyone else's safety. But they did say that it was pretty hectic. But for the most part, it was pretty relaxed after the curfew was extend, well not extended, but they had a later curfew [\_\_\_\_?].

**IB 22:47**

Was that for the whole city or just for your campus?

**PCV 22:50**

It was just for my campus I believe.

**IB 22:54**

How did they enforce the curfew?

**PCV 22:58**

I believe that they had the RAs in like the dorms, kind of like, watch out for like, people who were going and just kind of enforced that curfew. I'm not particularly sure. But like, they also like send emails to students.

**IB 23:21**

Do you have any thoughts on how local state or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

**PCV 23:28**

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Yeah. I do think that it's kind of odd. I did hear that like Texas, like, basically had their mask, like, wearing protocol lifted. I can't-I can't exactly remember, but I think that's-that it's pretty crazy how some states just differ from one another, especially when it has to do with like, just people's safety in general and the community's safety and health, yeah.

**IB 24:06**

Yeah, so how has the pandemic affected your travel with these guidelines and the different things that states and cities are doing?

**PCV 24:17**

Yeah, I remember, I believe, like, my family didn't travel to Wisconsin, like at all during this time. [laughs] Like, we'd just stay in Minnesota like for the very first weeks because it was said like Wisconsin had a lot of cases and like, we didn't know what to do. So we just basically stayed in town and didn't go out. we only used our car to go get groceries or things like that.

**IB 24:50**

So Winona [Minnesota] is right on the border of Minnesota and Wisconsin, so how did you know living just across the river from Wisconsin, you know, what was that like with the different state responses?

**PCV 25:08**

Yeah, it was, honestly, a bit concerning. Like you don't know who's from Wisconsin or who is from Minnesota when you're wearing a mask. And I guess I was just kind of concerned for the most part about everyone's safety. Because you just don't know who's actually from like Wisconsin, with more COVID cases, or who's not. Or who's practicing COVID 19 protocols? Yeah.

**IB 25:46**

So you're a senior in high school last year during this pandemic. How did that kind of affect your life? [laugh]

**PCV 25:59**

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[laughs] Yeah, I'm not gonna lie, like, I was as pretty sad when it first started, because I was gonna get to go to like, Big Nine and play in like select band. And I had a lot of different other ambitions that I wanted to fulfill, [laughs] I guess, by the end. I didn't get the graduation [laughs] that I wanted, I guess. But I think that our school really made the best out of it for everyone. And they were pretty flexible in the way that they delivered, like, just education and how they made my senior year kind of feel like a good close-closing experience. [laughs] But I definitely do think like, it was kind of sad, not being able to see my friends who might not be able to see anymore, you know. But, yeah.

**IB 27:02**

What kind of things did the school do?

**PCV 27:05**

Um, so although it wasn't the graduation, I wanted, we did have like kind of a drive by [laughs] graduation, we were still able to lock down and receive our diploma. And I actually was able to give a speech still, that was recorded. I think that it was pretty nice. Because when we were driving by there were people with signs, and balloons and everything, and there was music playing. So it was it was pretty nice to be celebrated [laughs] for that day.

**IB 27:47**

So you mentioned that you were in band last year. I was learning if you want to talk a little more about the clubs you're involved with, in and if you've joined any, in college.

**PCV 28:00**

Yeah. So when I was a senior in high school, or just my high school [laughs] career in general, I was a part of like, band, for example. I was also part of orchestra a little bit, and the jazz band. I think that those were probably my big main ones. I was also part of a nonprofit group that helped businesses in Nigeria. And I was also a part of the National Honors Society, and I served as the vice president for that. I was also in the Spanish Honors Society, and we kind of just spread the culture of Spanish speaking people [laughs] throughout our school. I was in Student Council for a little bit. [laughs] And I also did soccer [laughs] for a little bit. So I was kind of doing a lot of stuff, but it was a lot of fun. But now, I joined a public health group, actually. We have boards coming up, and I'm actually running [laughs] for the positions. And I also joined the pre-med group at the U of M and from that I was able to get a medical student mentor. And for now that's all I'm involved. [laughs] But yeah.

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**IB 29:40**

So how did the pandemic affect what you're able to do with those groups? Both like at the end of your high school career and then now in college.

**PCV 29:52**

It did cut off right at the beginning. [laughs] So could you repeat what you said?

**IB 29:58**

Oh, sorry.

**PCV 29:59**

No, you're good.

**IB 30:00**

So how has the pandemic affected what you're able to do with those clubs and groups, both at the end of high school, and then now in college?

**PCV 30:09**

Yeah, 100%. So, like, I was able to, like volunteer a lot for like the National Honor Society, because, you know, we could do things in person. When COVID-19 came around, [chuckles] we weren't able to volunteer anymore. Even like my first semester of college, like, I wasn't even really able to do anything except, like, go to meetings. And those meetings were mostly like, educational based, which was really nice may I say, but like, the pre-med group, for example, does a lot of volunteering. But we definitely were not able to volunteer our first semester of college as much as you would when you were in person. I also feel like going to college now, I wasn't able to make [chuckles] as many friends as I did from like clubs in high school where I can meet different people and stuff. I think it's just a little harder, making friends over Zoom than actually being able to see people face to face.

**IB 31:20**

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What kind of volunteering were you able to do?

**PCV 31:25**

So I wasn't- you mean for this year?

**IB 31:32**

Yeah, you were talking about how you were unable to volunteer as much as you would normally with your-

**PCV 31:37**

Yeah, okay. Okay. So, with the group, we weren't able to volunteer at all until like, our spring semester now. There were a lot of like, drive- not drive-bys. But like, where you could drive and like, deliver food to people. That would be one volunteering experience. And then I also am volunteering at the [\_\_\_\_?] Ward [?] Foundation, at their community market where I just pack food items for people who order them. And I also volunteer at the vaccine clinic as just like a greeter and observer and make sure people are doing okay, before they get your [?] vaccine.

**IB 32:28**

How long and how often have you been volunteering at the vaccine clinic?

**PCV 32:34**

I've only done it like, once a week for like the past, like, two or three weeks. [laughs] So it's not that long. I just found out about it from that pre-med club. And then I signed up for it like a week later. And yeah.

**IB 33:02**

So has your experience with the pandemic transformed how you think about your family, friends and community?

**PCV 33:09**

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Yeah, I definitely do feel like now I appreciate my family a lot more than I did before. [laughs] It's, it's kind of crazy, how I guess isolating everything is and all you have left is your family [chuckles] in your house. I definitely have grown to appreciate them. Even if we don't have the best of days sometimes. I think I've grown to appreciate the people in my household and what they do for me. And the connections that I get with them, you know? I also appreciate my friendships more, because not being able to see someone in person definitely just makes me me sad. Maybe the other party sad as well. I think I appreciate just human connection a lot more in general because of COVID-19.

**IB 34:20**

What- what were the biggest, or what have been the biggest challenges that you've faced during the pandemic?

**PCV 34:31**

I think one of the biggest ones that I've experienced is probably just burnout. I think after coming from like, a really accelerated like, well rounded [laughs] high school career. And going to college for the first time I experienced burnout and how much like time I was giving the people and how much time I was actually getting myself. I just experienced like, feeling, I guess, empty in a way, like low fuel, just not having motivation to do anything. That was probably my biggest struggle. Also just, again, just isolation in general. I, I think I'm an extroverted person. [chuckles] And I get my energy from being with people. So it was kind of sad, and I think I definitely felt really isolated from everyone during the quarantine, especially, because I get my energy from being around other people.

**IB 35:47**

Oh, what sort of things have you done to try to help with that?

**PCV 35:52**

Yeah, again, like, I usually just try to video call people, but everyone is so busy all the time. And it's hard to find a time where everyone's free to call or do anything of that sort. But I tried to go outside, actually, I think that being outside in the sun actually makes me feel just a little happier and warmer. [laughs] But other than that, I think that at least spending time with my family has helped or spending time with my roommate now has helped me.

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**IB 36:37**

Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

**PCV 36:50**

I think that- I think what everyone, like individuals, just people in general, and like the community needs to know is that we can't rely on one person to fix the problem. Because I think often, like, in America, especially like, we usually look to the president to fix things or make things better, but I think it's more than one person, it, it takes a whole community to actually get something done. And if you just rely on one person, it- nothing's going to get done, because everyone needs to be working towards the same goal to make sure that everyone is okay.

**IB 37:46**

Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you think would be a good thing to bring up?

**PCV 37:57**

I, I think I just wanted to add in that, I think social media has played a really big role during quarantine and just COVID-19 in general. I began to like see, like a lot of people post about the news and post about, like, different things the CDC has said. I think that being able to have like a community of just staying informed, and you know, having someone [laughs] just like post like, a positive like happy thing for people to see every day's is really nice. Although there are a lot of cons [laughs] of social media as well, I think that it can also bring a lot of people together and keep people informed about what's going on in the world.

**IB 38:56**

How has it affected your social media use?

**PCV 38:58**

Yeah. I think like I usually went on social media just to check on how people are doing and everything. But now, strangely, I go onto social media [laughs] just to like, check up with like the news. A lot of people that I've met at the U, like they are the most like informed people [chuckles] that you'll ever meet, and it's pretty nice to see what- what's actually going on today.

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**IB 39:34**

Well thank you so much for doing this oral history. I going to end the recording right now.

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