

Interviewee: Katherine Running

Interviewer: Bennett Running

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Abstract

Katherine Running was raised in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She currently resides in Fargo, North Dakota. She is currently occupied as a graduate student and a lab researcher at the USDA in Fargo. In this interview Ms. Running talks about how the covid-19 pandemic has affected her professional and personal life. She also discusses how people have stopped trusting science and facts.

Bennett Running 0:04

Do you have to give permission? Or is it just going now?

Katherine Running 0:07

Just going.

BR 0:09

Today's date is April 22 2021. The time is 7:31. In the USA, as of today, there have been 31,666,546 positive COVID cases and 566,494 deaths. There have been 106,385 positive cases and 1484 deaths in North Dakota. And as of today, they're 26% of US adults have been vaccinated. Katherine, can you go ahead and give us some of your basic demographics that your race ethnicity? Age?

KR 0:52

Yeah, sure. I'm 25. I am Caucasian.

BR 1:01

Okay. And you live in Fargo, North Dakota?

KR 1:05

I do.

BR 1:08

So on a day to day basis, what are the normal things you do?

KR 1:16

Right now I normally go to work. Um, I work approximately nine to five at the USDA. in Fargo, I am a graduate student, and I conduct research on wheat genetics.

BR 1:37

Has COVID-19 affected your job in any way?

KR 1:41

It did, I guess it still does now, but less. So initially, we weren't. We weren't allowed in the building. Like at all, they just shut down and said everybody worked from home, I guess we I shouldn't say shut down. You were supposed to work 100% remotely. But when you do research in a lab and in a greenhouse, you you can't do that stuff from home. So a lot of our research was put on hold. And we shifted more to writing papers and doing lit reviews and analyzing data stuff we could do on our computer. And as we slowly transitioned back to work, we started initially with one person could be in a room at a time. And so we trying to split that up among the why we each got like a four hour chunk. So I could work from 10am to 2pm. The lunch rooms are closed, we can only have one person in a bathroom at a time the drinking fountains are closed. You have to wear a mask I know percent of the time, which is fine. But I would say it's slowed down or research a lot slowed down work just because we had to stop doing stuff. And then even when we could do stuff, you could only be there for four hours. And experiments that you do in the lab often don't work within a four hour time window, you have to do something, and then eight hours later do another thing, or six hours later move something to the fridge. And it just it didn't work within a four hour timeframe. So even though we could go to work, we couldn't actually complete our stuff.

BR 3:39

Okay, so it said a pretty big negative impact on your like productivity, like in the timeframe of you being able to do things.

KR 3:48

Yeah.

BR 3:53

When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it? and have your thoughts changed since then?

KR 4:03

Yeah, I'm actually when I first learned about it. I was in the midst of organizing travel for graduate students to go to an international symposium in Canada. And so I was constantly checking numbers trying to determine if it was going to be safe for me to send students to another country. Meanwhile, I couldn't go to that conference because I had international travel planned for a different work thing in Mexico. And we are constantly checking is it safer there than it is here? Are we going to be stuck there? I think our concerns were more so about restrictions on travel and I don't think anybody knew I mean, I certainly didn't know how long this was going to go on for or how deadly it was going to be. It was, it was so new that we were just like there's just a few cases. It probably not a big deal. But like, airports are shutting down just in case or they're limiting travel just in case. And it certainly become more than just that, more than just a few cases in a city that probably weren't going to come in contact with.

BR 5:43

So your your colleagues that you were trying to, or students you're trying to arrange travel for, they didn't actually end up being able to go?

KR 5:53

No, I, I decided that I wasn't comfortable letting them go, because I was worried that that Canada would shut the border While they were there. And that we wouldn't be able to support them while they were there in any way. I mean, primarily financially was my concern. If they're stuck there, I don't know how long they're going to be stuck there for and I don't have funds to keep them fed and housed in hotels. But the very next day, after I cancelled it NDSU cancelled all travel for university purposes, international or out of state. And the out of state was honestly a big issue at first, because Fargo's on the border of Minnesota, and so be have a large percentage of our campus that lives in Morehead, and works in Fargo. And they had to get like special permission that they were allowed to cross borders for work. And we do a lot of planting not me personally. But other plant scientists have field locations in Minnesota. So they all got these, like printed forms that they could put on their cars that allowed them to cross borders for work.

BR 7:23

So there's a lot more more hoops to jump through to continue working if you lived in Minnesota?

KR 7:30

Yep.

BR 7:33

What issues have most concerns you about the covid 19 pandemic?

KR 7:41

Mistrust of science, I think would be my number one. I think mistrust and misunderstanding, I think that a lot of the public was, is unaware of how science works, how we, we gather evidence, and we reanalyze. And you come up with new conclusions based on the new evidence that you get. And it's always it's always changing. It's always evolving. It's always growing. But people perceive the changing conclusions. And the new information as just lies like, well, they don't know what they're talking about. scientists don't know anything. Because last week, they told us x and now they're telling us why. And why should I believe them? They're gonna tell me a new thing next week. And I think that if the Trump administration had taken the pandemic more seriously, and responded quicker, and asked people to stop travel to stay at home, if they could to close restaurants to close bars. If we had done all of that sooner, I think that a lot less people would have died. I think this pandemic would not have lasted quite as long as it did in the United States, or as it is, suppose it's still going. But I think we should have listened to the experts and I think we should have listened to them a lot sooner.

BR 9:31

Yeah. Has COVID-19 changed your employment status?

KR 9:40

No, I just changed what I do. But I'm still full time research assistant and graduate student. It just what I did during my hours changed.

BR 9:56

So it's a slight shift in what you actually do. What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your, I guess, on the economy more broadly?

KR 10:11

The economy? Honestly, I haven't thought about the economy that much more. So thought about potential long term health effects that we don't we don't know a lot about yet. I guess my parents, and I have some friends that we're trying to look to buy property and right now, I know it's a bad time to buy a house. People are offering over asking price on houses before they've even seen the property. And it's just not a buyers market.

BR 10:57

How has COVID-19 affected you and or your family's day to day activities?

KR 11:06

I guess day to day, we canceled a lot of our normal outings. I used to do trivia with friends once a week or we go to local breweries. And don't do that anymore. We got a lot better at meal planning, I would say like, we buy all of our groceries like one time a week instead of a few times a week, like, Oh, I'm on my way home from work. Is there anything we need for dinner tonight? You don't do that anymore. It's like you get it when you go into the grocery store for the things on your list. And that's the one time we shop during the week, just try to limit our number of outings, I guess and we reduce how much we see our family and who we see. I guess there's there's people that we've chosen not to see, because we know they're not taking the necessary precautions. And if they're not safe, we're not safe with them. So you didn't have big Thanksgiving, or we didn't have a big Christmas, we never big Easter. We're just we're skipping things that normally wouldn't have.

BR 12:41

As the pandemic changed what you eat, like you said, you only go to the store once. So has that changed the foods that you consume?

KR 12:50

I think so. I think well, maybe it's possible we eat healthier, because we are planning where when we don't have a plan. It's like, Oh, we don't have a plan for dinner. So we're going to have a frozen pizza. Um, no one took anything out to thaw the night before. So we're gonna have a frozen pizza. But if we plan ahead, we do lots of that. And I guess we're not going to trivia so we're not having, you know, burgers and fries once a week when we go out to a bar. So overall, probably healthier. But at the same time, I also feel like I'm snacking, way more because not doing anything in the evenings. Like what else is there to do? We have consumed a lot of microwave popcorn a lot.

BR 13:52

Have you guys tried new foods in the lockdown started eating new things?

KR 14:01

We have I feel like we're getting I mean, we also just moved in together in March. So it was just the very beginning of the pandemic. So we'd never lived together before and we're trying new recipes together, got new recipe books. We got recipe books from his mom and my grandma. I have some my mom's recipes. And I guess we're trying to mix it up by selecting different recipes. We definitely get in a vegetable right? We both absolutely love broccoli. And when we're meal planning and trying to think of a vegetable, all we can think of is broccoli. And I have to like we have to consciously say like we have to pick a different one. We can't just have broccoli every night. You're supposed to have the color wheel. You know?

BR 15:04

Has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate and communicate with friends and family? And if so, like, in what ways?

KR 15:15

Yeah, I would say that I communicate with my family more, especially like those outside of my, like immediate family. My parents, I've always been good about talking to them on the phone, but my family started doing like a weekly game night. And we didn't do that before the pandemic, we, I guess, we all had busier lives. And during the pandemic, there was no other conflicts. So we were able to get together and we play games, over zoom, done games with friends over zoom. I had zoomed before the pandemic, but it was like once a month, for a meeting for work. And that was it. And now everybody zooms all the time. Zoom fatigue is a real thing.

BR 16:23

What have been the biggest challenges that you've faced during the covid 19 outbreak?

KR 16:33

I'm incredibly lucky to say this, but my biggest challenge was just not seeing my family. I work was very flexible and accommodating. And we had I guess we had the money to be okay, and safe. Even if something did happen to our jobs. We weren't ever worried about what would happen to us financially, if one of us lost our jobs, we had enough savings that we will be okay. And we were both able to work from home, which meant I wasn't incredibly concerned about catching covid. So I just I miss my family, and I worried about my family. And I, my dad, and both my uncles are educators and worried about them having to go back to work and work in a setting that potentially wasn't safe. I worried about my mom, she was she's a nurse, and she was working with COVID patients. And every time somebody texted and said that, you know, they are having symptoms, they have to quarantine at home until they get a test result. I was so worried and so nervous. And I just wanted to be with my family. But I couldn't.

BR 18:19

Did you get together with your family at all, during the pandemic be able to see them?

KR 18:26

I did. Um, and I'm incredibly lucky in that regard to because eventually my it became safer to see my family. My fiance and I were not a risk to them because we worked ourselves. Or we worked where we were the only person in a room and my parents work from home or worked masked

and we felt we felt comfortable seeing them because we knew that their circle of people that they were seeing was incredibly small and safe. I mean, safe in a relative term as safe as you can reasonably be. Actually, we saw my my fiance's family. They they got COVID and then after they recovered, we were like Well, I guess we can't get COVID from you know, you've already got it. At that point, we knew that the chances of getting reinfected after truly after having COVID was very low. So we felt alright seeing them we saw them around Christmas time.

BR 19:54

So there's a large like a lot of things went into your mind of calculating risks and stuff when you arrive. I just see people,

KR 20:01

Yes, you're gonna see who they see where they work, what safety precautions they've taken at work. I think that and we've just never had to think about before.

BR 20:19

Yeah, no one's ever had to think about what their other people are seeing, like, the rings of interconnectedness.

KR 20:28

Yeah. And I mean, you know, if someone at my mom's work tests positive, and we were planning to see my mom, we can't until my mom's waited a certain amount of time, and she's taking a test. And I've never cared about that. If my mom had a co worker that was out sick, she wouldn't even tell me. But it's your social responsibility now to tell someone if you have someone you've been in contact with, has tested positive.

BR 21:08

What have you, your family or friends done for recreation during COVID-19? Has that changed, like pre pandemic versus current pandemic?

KR 21:18

I feel like we're just worse at recreation. as so many of the things that we, we did for fun we did in groups. So we haven't really done a lot of that at all. Um, we got a lot more board games to play at home. And we've watched all the Marvel movies. That was a big commitment to me, because there are so many of them. And we watched a lot of Netflix series. I would say like, we spend more time cooking because there's nothing we don't need to like, eat quick to go do something with friends like you have, you have more time so you're having like more involved, meals, and meals helps delineate the end of the workday for me when I'm working at home. Like

once I start cooking, is the end of the workday. We're now into the evening we're going to cook a nice dinner, we'll have a glass of wine and will watch TV together. And it kind of helps me separate work time. And after work time is when you're working at home, like this space isn't separated. So I needed a more clear separation, I guess.

BR 23:04

Have you like modified your environment to create that separation like a physical separation?

KR 23:13

We did set up a desk downstairs. Um we don't both have a work from home space, which is somewhat annoying and complicated because somebody needs to work on the couch. And initially, that was my fiance who sees no problem with staying on the couch all day. But if I stay on the couch, my back will hurt. So I got a new office chair and set up a desk and I worked there. Then I had to bring once once the USDA opened again, I had to bring my computer there. So I had like a desktop computer at work and no longer needed the desk at home so then I got the couch and kolding got a desktop

BR 24:11

Are you done working from home?

KR 24:15

I'm not required to work from home. But I'm allowed to work from home and I think I'm more productive having that option. I found that I'm I'm better at writing and doing my like boring computer work kind of stuff in the morning. So I work from home, work on the computer a few hours and then I go into work in to live work and greenhouse work in the afternoon. Any computer work or stuff that I need to pay a lot of attention to like I'm doing data analysis or something. It's hard to focus on while I'm at work, because there's so many other people there. I share our office with three other students. And it's busy, and I'm easily distracted. So there's slightly less distractions at home. We did get we got work laptops, which we've never had before. But they bought us work laptop, so I can work on my work laptop from home, and then go into work when I need to do stuff in the lab.

BR 25:40

How has the pandemic affected your schooling? Because you said you're a graduate student?

KR 25:47

That's a great question. Um, all of my classes were online. And overall, most of my teachers have probably never taken a class on how to teach. And so they do 100% lecture. very dense, and expect their students to just take it all in. And that's hard enough in person. And when it was

moved to online, it was, it was nearly impossible. I had a professor who didn't share his screen, or audio for weeks. We're an online class. And at that point, it was optional. You could go in person, or you could watch from home. And so everyone who was in person was like, yeah, there's no problems. He's lecturing, there's a screen right there. We can hear him, we can see the slides. And I'm at home like there is a black of square. And I hear nothing.

BR 27:17

So how did you, how did you overcome that?

KR 27:22

I think I had to change my, my study habits, I had to study a lot harder because it was harder for me to learn from lectures that were recorded, I guess it was a lot less interactive. When everyone was at home, I feel like students were less likely to ask questions. To make comments, the end those discussions are often what helps me learn most rather than just straight talking for 15 minutes. Um, I, I changed I guess. I mean, study guides, I used highlighters and colored pens and wrote definitions and did practice problems. And in the past, I've just been a good enough student that didn't really study. But it was harder to learn from home.

BR 28:39

In an ideal world, would you go back to in person lectures or, like an online version, where teachers have been taught how to teach online?

BR 28:53

Yeah, I mean, so I did take, I took one class about teaching from a highly qualified, an excellent teacher. And honestly, I don't know if I've ever learned more. It was such a stark contrast to the stuffy old professor who's never been taught how to teach anything. It was it was, it was great. I mean, we had breakout rooms and we work on Google Docs together and breakout room and then go back and share what we did. And it was it was so productive, like we did. We did things that we couldn't do in person, because in person, you never work under the assumption that everyone in class is going to bring their computer and have access to all of these resources. I suppose it's so hit or miss. Teaching online can be very effective and it can be also incredibly ineffective. And it 100% depends on the teacher and the resources that they are capable and willing to use.

BR 30:19

Sort of a case by case basis on that. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community? This could be clubs, school, church job, any of that.

KR 30:38

I guess the only like club that I'm in is a graduate student club and we moved our monthly meetings to online. We normally do social events and volunteering events. But as it turns out, our social events have always centered around food. And doing things like an international pick potluck, or picnic or not, not safe. So we kind of just canceled all of our social events. We normally do a soccer game between the plant sciences department in the plant pathology department. And we have now cancelled that three times. In the spring, we cancelled it and said, Well, maybe in the fall, and then in the fall, we cancelled it and said maybe in the spring, and now I'm here again saying sorry, guys, we still can't do it maybe in the fall. And it's kind of just been like that, for every event. Like no picnic, guys. Sorry. So volunteering in the spring. We didn't volunteer, physically together, we individually, went to a local parks and picked up trash and took a selfie. And I just made a collage of everybody's photos and was like, Alright, here's our evidence. Like, we did a good thing today. But normally do more fun things. We do STEM education events with local high schoolers, we transplant tomatoes with Girl Scouts to do cooler stuff in person together as a group, and it's just kind of hard to volunteer, alone and not in person.

BR 32:53

Were you able to do like any educational things for students online?

KR 32:59

We didn't. There, he definitely existed. So we normally do something called avenues of scientific discovery. That's for local high schoolers. And that's normally in person, I had an awesome booth plan this year, we are going to extract wheat DNA, and they had seeds from 33 different species that they are going to look at the seeds and then try to guess the plant that it came from. Maybe like flip a card and learn fun facts about that crop. But we didn't we couldn't do that. Instead, they gave us the option of making a video that would just be sent to a classroom to watch. And I didn't we didn't participate in that. And part of that was I didn't, I didn't want to make a video that because I couldn't interact with the students through a video. If it was something live or resume, that would have been different because so much of teaching is like engaging your audience, physically looking at your students and being like, they don't get this I need to rephrase this another way or they thought that was really cool. So we're going to go with that and responding to I guess their their feelings and the product that they're creating. If they're struggling with something, it's normally quite evident if you can watch them and hear them, but it's a lot harder through just a video.

BR 34:48

Yeah, I think that goes back to your hit or miss on online things with just teaching in general?

KR 34:54

It's I yes, it's teaching in general is a lot harder online. So it's it's hard to be upset with my teachers who were thrown into something with no training. They didn't sign up for that.

BR 35:19

How are people around you responding to the covid 19 pandemic?

KR 35:29

Depends on my, my close friends are responding very similarly to me. But I live in a town that has a college. So there's a lot of college kids, you are having house parties and have been having house parties since the beginning. And they weren't taking it seriously at all, because all of the data was showing that younger people are less affected. So bars were open for a long time. And I live in a state that is quite conservative. And mask usage was rather low. It wasn't mandated for a very long time. And even then it was not enforced. And then it was lifted really early. My cities, I think, still has a mandate, but it's not a statewide thing. So it's kind of up to businesses for a while to just put up signs and hope for the best. It was kind of frustrating knowing that you're doing all of the right things, and being safe and seeing the COVID cases in your city rise and rise and rise, because that means that there are people in our community that weren't doing the right thing. And they were putting lives at risk and didn't give a crap.

BR 37:31

Has masked usage gone up or gone down since people have been getting vaccinated?

KR 37:37

I would think I'm down. But that's not a ton, just like people feel safer. And they're more likely to forget where I used to before it was it was so serious like at work, you wore a mask. But if you were alone in a room, you could take it off. And as soon as somebody walked in you like put your mask right back on, because we were so worried about keeping each other safe. And now all of my colleagues have had both vaccinations. And I realize that my colleague was talking to me and she was masked, but I didn't have my mask on because she had just popped in. And like we talked for, like, three minutes. I mean, yes, we were she was at the door. And I was like 10 feet away in my office. But it was three minutes and I was like, Oh my god, like I'm so sorry. I didn't realize that I didn't have my mask on. I honestly forgot about and there's no way I would have forgotten about it before because it was it was always on your mind. My car has like 10 masks in it. And you never forget to leave the house without one because you have one in your purse, you have one in your pocket. You have one in your car, you have one in your backpack like they're everywhere. I think that people feel safer once they're vaccinated and they're just, it's not they don't think they need it. They're just less worried about it.

BR 39:33

Because there's less of a like a weight on your shoulders about it less of a worry. Self isolation and flatten the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. Have you your family and friends and community responded to request to self isolate and flatten the curve?

KR 39:55

I guess anybody that I knew that came in contact with a positive person had to go home and self isolate and get tested. And the recommendations have kind of shifted. Right now there, they were recommending that you self isolate and wait to get tested until I think we my work was telling us that five days after exposure. So wait to get tested until five days after exposure. And so those four days between exposure and your test you required to work from home. And then after you got your negative result, if you remained asymptomatic for a total of 10 days, like from exposure, you were allowed to go back to work.

BR 41:01

You were following the CDC, and requirements, like to the letter?

KR 41:07

Yeah. But I also I work for a government organization. So it was serious we followed any rule that we could find. And when they were unclear, we went with basically, whatever was the safest. So if you weren't sure if you should do I don't know. If you should go home, even if you had a negative test, you you went home, you just work from home. Whatever, whatever seems safest, is what we did.

BR 41:56

So safety was a very big priority in your department, your office?

KR 42:02

And it was on campus, too. They had rules there about only one student in the office at a time they close the lunch rooms. There's hand sanitizer stations everywhere. And just general, we had to keep track of like, where and when we were so that we could see if we were even in spaces that an infected person I guess had been in. So even if we weren't in the same room with them at the same time, we could look back on our records and be like, well, the infected person was in this room an hour before you were there. So you should get tested. And I think we've like we've backed off on that now because we just know more about like, it's not really spreading that much through surfaces. But initially, it was like, minute by minute, I was in this room from 9:00 to 9:15.

BR 43:14

Were you keeping like a written journal of that somewhere?

KR 43:20

Yes, um, we had to, I guess we messaged like one person in our lab. And they had like a spreadsheet that they would put it in. And then the morning to check in and say that we were not sick. So for months, the first thing that I was seeing in the morning was all of my lab mates saying not sick, not sick, not sick, sick. It was honestly quite relieving to see every day that they were still okay.

BR 44:02

Um, anybody you know, other than your fiance's family gotten sick during the COVID-19 outbreak?

KR 44:13

Yeah, two of my co workers got it. One it was it was relatively mild. She felt kind of crappy for a few days but she was able to work from home for the majority or quarantine because she just felt fine. The other felt really crappy and still feels pretty crappy. For months after she recovered, she should feel shortness of breath and her heart would race. And she was positive in the summer, and she's still having shortness of breath. And um less frequently now, though.

BR 45:25

So she's coming up on a year of these just recurring symptoms?

KR 45:34

Yeah, it's probably July, so a little less than a year, but that's a long time. And I know it was it was quite frustrating to her. She has a toddler who's always on the go and wants to do all of the playful things with mommy and, sure, run around for a little bit and then feel short of breath.

BR 46:08

So what other ways do you think the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting people's mental and or physical health?

KR 46:18

I think, I think people realized that they needed other humans a lot more than they thought they did. Um, I think people that even identify as an introvert, we're like, holy crap, I'm lonely. And we're lonely, we're, we're bored. We're easily distracted at home where we're struggling to focus at school and work. Because there's a global pandemic, there are other things to think about. And

also, in the midst of this, we had a tumultuous election, sorry, I could not think of the word that was quite stressful for a lot of people. And it just seemed like every time we turned on the news, there was another awful thing happening and everyone was experiencing the awful thing alone from home.

BR 47:53

Do you think mental health has become a much bigger issue during the pandemic?

KR 48:00

Absolutely. I think that it's, it's maybe become more socially acceptable to acknowledge that you have mental health problems. And it's just because everybody's having a problem. It's more normal work. We had mental health webinars and stuff that we've we've never had that before. The need has never been great enough that someone's like, you know, what we should do? Should have a webinar about mental health and self care and never did that before. I think a lot of people are struggling and a lot of people are talking about how they're struggling. So it's just, it's more common. It's more normal. It's more Okay.

BR 49:07

Um, you said that you're fully vaccinated. Have you or anyone you know, had questions or concerns about the vaccine?

KR 49:17

Yes. I've, I've had conversations with people who are nervous about vaccines in general, people who don't normally even get the flu shot. And the main thing that they're they were worried about was how, how fast it seems like this vaccine was created and made available. They want to wait too. See if there are long term effects. And while that's reasonable, I don't think that any long term effect is going to be worse than dying of COVID-19.

BR 50:20

That's a rather permanent effect. When you receive the vaccine, did you have any sorts of side effects?

KR 50:32

I did. Um, I felt like crap. I so I got my vaccination. My first, my first one was fine. I just had an incredibly sore arm. I woke myself up at night, trying to like roll over and my arm pain woke me up. And like, I have never had a vaccine that hurt me that bad. The actual like injection was was totally fine. It was like hours later where I was like, oh, like, what is that, um, but the second one, that vaccines so I got it at 10am. And by six, I was starting to spike a fever, and chills and a

headache. And parts of my body hurt that have never heard before. My fiance got his second vaccine the same day. And we were just talking about like, whoa, I like didn't know that, like, your cheek muscles could be sore. Like, parts of me hurt were sore that had just never been sore before. I was so aware of it because everything was sore. But it's probably only about like, 36 hours that I felt like crap. And then I was fine. And it's, it seems like from the people I've talked to, I've maybe had it worse than other people. Nobody else in my lab spiked a fever. And Colton was able to go to work. The next day, like he never got a fever yet a mild headache. But I was knocked on my blood. I slept for a long time. And I got up to like, have applesauce and a glass of water.

BR 52:41

You missed a day of work because of the vaccine.

KR 52:45

I did.

BR 52:49

What was your experience of getting the vaccine? Was there any troubles like?

KR 52:57

Um, I guess I drove to a very rural city to get my vaccination. I'd been looking at the numbers for what towns had available vaccinations and how many, and I just kept seeing that these rural towns had available appointments. And you could you could schedule them, but with like 10 minutes notice, like if it was 6pm and you checked, there will be available appointments at 6:30 and 6:45. And 7:00 was like nobody's getting vaccinations in the sounds. And my town was further behind. We were on the I guess a lower phase of vaccines. So I signed up for one in a rural city and got it there. It turns out if I had just waited two days, I could have gotten it in my own town. But I didn't know that. So I drove an hour and 10 minutes both both ways twice. Which also meant that I had to like take a morning off work each day to physically get the vaccine.

BR 54:38

Did you fiance have any trouble understanding when the vaccine would be available to him?

KR 54:45

Yeah, that was weird. Um, that the advertising for appointments was a little unclear. Phases of who was available to get a vaccine was dependent on the county. So in some areas of the state, the vaccine was open to everybody. In some areas of the state, it was open to phase one, B. Or

phase one C, or it didn't know. And, but then, in the evenings, when they, the clinics had available appointments, and they were short on time, they wouldn't open it up to everybody. So even if it was phase one, B, they'd be like, Alright, everybody, 16 and older can sign up tonight. Get here in 15 minutes. But when you filled out the registration, it asked you for like, what category of phase one B, you were. But Facebook posts that anybody over 16 years ago. So I, I wasn't sure if we were, like jumping online. When we when I brought him I was like, I don't really know. But I think that we're doing the right thing that they have a shot that's gonna go to waste if you're not here. And it turns out, we were right, the nurse was very happy that he had showed up. But I don't think a lot of people knew also, it was only on Facebook, like you have to be following like the county health board to see these posts. And I know a lot of people are not

BR 56:51

Was Facebook on your primary news sources during the pandemic?

KR 56:57

You know, it probably was, I follow a lot of news pages on there. So when they post articles they show up in my feed. And that was probably where I got my most news, my the news that I got like specifically to my state I got from the North Dakota health page. And honestly, they had a very informative page on there's a separate page for COVID infections and vaccinations and you can go county by county and see the percentage of people vaccinated in each county. And it's interactive and informative. I, early on checked it daily to see how many people in my county had COVID. I was just hoping every day that it wouldn't be more than the day before.

BR 58:13

How have your news sources changed over the course of the pandemic?

KR 58:20

I can honestly say that I had never been to the North Dakota health page before the pandemic. I guess I shifted to more local sources. Because there was just so much pandemic news that the national sources couldn't cover it. And regulations were state by state if not city by city. Their rules and recommendations were changing constantly. Some states said you couldn't have events over like 100 people, but it would still be allowed in a different state at the same time. And I had to go for sources that were closer to home sources that were going to give me North Dakota news and Minnesota news. And I guess I still checked Wisconsin news because that's where my family lives.

BR 59:29

What do you think are important issues that the media may or may not be covering?

KR 59:45

How it's, I guess there's a few. So I think that people are unaware of the long term effects of COVID and part of that is that we don't know. But we do know there are some. And so even I guess that the thinking that if you're young, you can get COVID. And it'll be mild and you'll get over it and be fine. is, I think naive. I think there are other risks that people are unaware of. And that could be, I guess, more broadly shared. And I think that media is not covering how COVID disproportionately is affecting minority groups. The both, like, the literal effects of more, more of them proportionately are dying. And it is affecting their job stability and their income, and their housing more so than is affecting other people.

BR 1:01:28

How would you want them to cover it more?

KR 1:01:31

I guess the same way they're covering everything else. I want, I want numbers to be shared, I want instead of just saying, like, this, many people died of COVID. What percentage of black people like a COVID die, compared to what percentage of white people they get COVID. Die. Numbers, convince people, they can understand numbers. It's it's a fact that they can't really, I guess they can dispute but it's harder to dispute, it's easier to understand than just saying more or less. And I think those numbers exist, we just don't talk about.

BR 1:02:44

How is your faith in the media changed over the pandemic?

KR 1:02:52

Oh, gosh, that is probably source by source. There is. sources that I have absolutely no faith in and there are sources that I have some faith in. But my most faith is often in comparing sources in getting the same news from multiple sources, reading off the CDC web page. Although I also know they're, they're limited in what they could say, because the government could control what they could post. Honestly, I followed a lot of scientists on Twitter that were posting updates and opinions and their experiences and expertise and articles that a virologist shared. I probably trust more than your local grocery store manager. So I guess I was more picky about where it was getting my information, because there was so much misinformation that you had to be very careful where it came from.

BR 1:04:23

So was Twitter also one of your primary sources for information?

KR 1:04:31

Yeah, I that's where I mean, I follow scientists on Twitter, because I am a scientist and so I engage with other scientists on Twitter. And I don't do that on Facebook. Facebook is more personal life, I guess. So I would see news articles on on Twitter as well.

BR 1:04:59

How have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak

KR 1:05:07

Slowly and mildly.

BR 1:05:20

There was no great rush to enforce CDC guidelines? Did they push back against CDC guidelines?

KR 1:05:33

We were very slow to adopt them for sure. I think that even like when CDC was making like recommendations that you don't have large gatherings, we were still like, we still had restaurants open. And they're like, Well, you can't have a wedding. That's huge and has a lot of number of guests. But we can still have restaurants open, like, that's fine. And so it was. It was like they're trying to not explicitly break the rules and get away with everything they could, because we don't want the government telling us what to do.

BR 1:06:25

Do you think that's because North Dakota is more rural state, except for the few large pockets of urban development? Do you think that the state overall being more rural, had an impact on that?

KR 1:06:42

I do. Um, we're very rural state. And those rural communities are used to be pretty independent. And they saw the pandemic as being a big it's a thing. It I mean, outbreaks happen in big cities and their role city, so never gonna affect them. But it just, it just wasn't true. They, for the most part, like outside of your big cities in North Dakota, people didn't wear masks, and they got COVID. And a lot of them died. Yes, we have a small state population. But we didn't do that well, just because we're spread out. It should have been, we should have had an advantage, I guess, for having such a low population density. But I think, because we thought or because we have a low population density. I think we thought we were safer, and we maybe weren't as careful as we should have been.

BR 1:08:01

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

KR 1:08:16

Yes, so we're, we share a border with Minnesota and there was quite a contrast between North Dakota's response in Minnesota to response. They have more democratic leaders. And their response was quicker. And if you look at their guidelines, they were often more harsh. So I mean, hypothetically, if they said you couldn't have an event with more than 20 people in North Dakota would be like you can't have an event with more than 100 people. And so they were just more stringent in their rules and they they were quicker. We held off we didn't really enforce anything and lifted them in November. Which really doesn't make any sense.

BR 1:09:26

As your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends and communities, in what ways?

KR 1:09:38

I have family members that didn't take her seriously and are sharing this information wildly on Facebook and I'm disappointed in them. It absolutely sucks to see you There you are interested in sharing stuff that to me is just blatantly false. I was let down. And I find I'm judgmental of my friends and family members that weren't taking guidelines seriously. I mean, I didn't see them. I didn't hang out with those kinds of people. But it's my mistrust. And I guess disappointment in them is going to last well beyond the end of the pandemic.

BR 1:10:59

How is your distrust and disappointment, how will that affect your interactions with them in the future?

KR 1:11:08

I think I'm going to be more careful. I don't want to bring up certain topics around them that we could disagree on, not because they don't want to have a civil discussion with them, but because I think that they're going to face my facts with utter nonsense, and it will be unproductive and just make us angry at each other.

BR 1:11:40

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

KR 1:11:56

When it comes to public safety. Don't waver. Don't be slow, be clear, and be quick. And science needs more funding. You need to believe scientists and scientists need to be able to share their work unfiltered.

BR 1:12:26

Those were some rather profound thoughts. Well, thank you so much. That was the end of my questions. But if you have anything else you want to add about your life, your experiences of the pandemic.

KR 1:12:41

I don't think so. Hopefully everybody will be vaccinated soon.

BR 1:12:49

That's a good goal. Alrighty.