

Transcript – Mary Murphy and Amanda Knox, class of staff

Narrator: Mary Murphy, Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist, and Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

Interviewer: Mary Murphy and Amanda Knox

Interview Date: March 27, 2020

Interview Time: 10:00 am

Location: Zoom

Length: 44:18

Amanda Knox: Okay, good morning. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist. It is Friday, March 27, 2020, and I am here with the Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist, Mary Murphy, and we are currently self-isolating in our homes because we are in the middle of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

So we are doing this interview today to start growing our archive of COVID-19 materials and we thought that we are women at Brown, so we should also be telling our story about the Pembroke Center during this weird time. So as I was thinking about this interview, Mary, I thought maybe it would be interesting to start from the beginning of COVID-19, which I think started in December of 2019. What did you [1:00] think when you started hearing the news coming out of China that this was happening? And then kind of further down that track, did you ever think that we would end up in this place because of it?

Mary Murphy: Yeah, it's crazy. Well, so good morning, Amanda. It's so nice to be doing this interview via Zoom from our homes. So I was just speaking with my partner, Jim, about when we first started, when we first started, when we first heard the word "COVID-19," or Coronavirus, as it was, I guess, first referred to as. And I, so, I guess it was December, but I really I think it was actually I think it was January, I think. I just interviewed another student and she's from Nanjing, China, and they started getting worried around, around the middle to end part of January. So I think that's sort of where the, where the date was. I don't know, [2:00] maybe you have an earlier memory of it. And I looked back at my Facebook feed and, this morning, and I think it was February 26th was the first time that I made a post about COVID and it was about Vice President Mike Pence being appointed the "COVID Czar," which is like, and I made this comment like, this is, oh, no, like everybody needs to run. Like this, this could be very bad, depending on what his leadership turned out to be in this area, and at the time, we didn't

know. But, but in that post, clearly, there's, I'm already conscious of COVID-19. And the reason being is that we had, at the Pembroke Center Archives, had a trip, curatorial trip planned to the Lombardy region of Italy to collect the papers of Marxist feminists who did a lot of their scholarship and work in the 1970s and the '80s, who want to give us their papers. And so I was planning [3:00] a curatorial trip to that region with the director of the Pembroke center, and potentially another graduate student. And so, news articles started popping up that travel to Italy was suddenly dangerous due to this emerging virus coming out of Wuhan China. So that was, that is literally what put it on my radar I think so early was this curatorial trip that we had going to Italy. What about for you? What are your first memories?

AK: So if I can just pick up on that real quick before we switch over to me, I think it's really interesting that we also, I don't think realized the severity of it, because I remember for a while you were kind of going back and forth. It wasn't immediately clear that no, I should not be going to Italy. We were having these conversations of like, should I go, shouldn't I go? Will it be that bad? What, and we were also already having conversations [4:00] of travel bans before that was really a global thing like it, okay, so you could get to Italy, can, can we get out of Italy? And so the answer's "no, we need to stay put," weren't really clear yet in that moment.

MM: Yeah. And yet the idea that it would come here, I don't think as it started, that was not in my mind. The problem in my concern was what if we go to northern Italy, we're in Rome, and they do something like make it difficult to get home? Like, what if we got stuck there while they endured this, you know, this problem, right? Which is, we just didn't understand the severity of what that, what that meant.

AK: Right. Exactly. I don't for me, I you know, sit down and watch the news every morning while I have my breakfast, and I was watching all of these stories coming out of China, [5:00] and then as it kind of spread more across Europe, and it just still – it was sad and I felt scared for them, but I didn't necessarily feel scared for me or for us. It still just felt like such a distant thing. And I don't think it started to become real until Brown began sending out their initial communications, which I think happened probably around the same time as your Facebook posts. It was towards the end of February. And we were getting almost daily communications of

reassurance I guess that the Brown Bio-Med departments were paying attention to this, were already taking precautions against whatever, and kind of pre-planning. And even then I was seeing the emails and I thought, wow, this is weird that now we're having the conversation. And I remember I said to you one weekend, I went to Target just to stock up on like a thermometer and some ibuprofen just in case and like these were the things that we thought we would need just in case you have a fever [6:00] or you don't know if you have a fever or whatever. And even in that those beginning moments in February I went to Target and it was wiped out. There was no ibuprofen, no Tylenol, no thermometers, there was nothing and I was, even telling you about it almost felt like it was a secret I was supposed to keep that I was looking for ibuprofen.

MM: Yes.

AK: Everyone was kind of like secretly putting things in their basket.

MM: So I, that definitely happened. Yes, for me too when we did the first – I felt like a jerk leaving my house to go do the first grocery shopping when I had it in my mind that I was going to get some like extra supplies and I didn't even quite know what I thought about that. And I actually researched what to have on hand for a hurricane. And then I think that's what I did. And so then when I went shopping, it felt like, [7:00] like, I almost feel like I was betraying people in some way by doing the shopping. I was, it was a strange feeling.

AK: Right. I think, so we, Erik and I had been talking about getting a BJs membership. BJs is like this wholesale, buy in bulk, kind of grocery shopping thing. We'd already been talking about it just to make grocery shopping potentially cheaper. But at this point, I was like, no, we're going pull the trigger. Brown was already telling us to stock up on non-perishable items. Just in case we were stuck in our home for months. And I was like, why would we be stuck in our home for months? But you know, we'll do it anyway. And I bought like six boxes of pasta, and five boxes of macaroni and cheese. And just like this weird stuff that like we eat that stuff, but even then, I still was thinking, well, we're not really going to need any of this.

MM: Yeah.

AK: But I don't think the severity of it really hit me until Brown's communication became more [8:00] infrequent. I feel like towards the end of our time on campus, all of a sudden it was, the communication was more of a trickle. And to me that felt like, okay, people are panicking and/ or people are taking more time to plan this because it's going to affect us far deeper than we expected it to. And so those last couple of days, I was kind of sitting in the office with this panicky feeling, but also this feeling that I've consistently had that I am panicking too much and not enough. Because we just, we didn't know then, we still don't really know. I don't know what I'm panicking about. You know? Like, I know that this is a very severe thing and that people are dying. But there are so many back and forth stories of it's not that bad, it's way worse than it sounds, that I just I feel like I don't know whether I'm coming or going. [9:00]

MM: Yeah. I think, for us at the Pembroke Center, and I think for this interview it is important, I think because Director Stewart-Steinberg is Italian and, or has an Italian family in northern Italy, I think that she raised alarm bells sooner and more, in a more dramatic way. I think that she voiced a fear of what could be coming. So I think in that way, we reacted sooner than other departments on campus. I actually know, I feel that to be true. I think Suzanne was more honest with us about the potential of what was coming. And as a result, the Pembroke Center started, we started taking steps before other departments did such as like the library and things like that. They were – we were able to pull the trigger and I think, remember the day we moved collections out, out of our office? [10:00]

AK: But, but first tell me what did you think that day we got called in for an emergency staff meeting and we all met in Suzanne's office? What were you thinking in that moment?

MM: Yeah. I thought we, I just thought it was coming. I thought that, I thought it was serious because we are not a very strict Center. I would say we don't work under like a lot of rules and like pressure and Suzanne isn't a strict boss, so to speak. So she has a lot of faith in us to, to run our own work and do the job that we need to do. And so when she called that meeting and put down the hammer, and was like, "Come to my office now. We're like, we're meeting," and we all gathered in her office, we just sat around, and she was deeply concerned. You could tell that she was upset in the end. [11:00] Although very professional, but she was concerned. And I think at

that moment she was telling us which again, was ahead. I mean, she was forward leaning, that she was like, put our emergency plans into place like within your own units. If you have an idea of what you want to do, or how you might do this job from home, begin taking steps to do that work. And I think it was that afternoon that you and I literally went back to the office and started you know, pulling collections off our shelves and moving them out of the building. What about you? What is your memory that?

AK: I have two. One was, again, I left that meeting feeling a little bit panicky, because everyone knew that the axe was going to fall, so to speak, but we didn't know when and so it was this constant like everyone is still on campus, still do your work, but also make sure you have work from home, [12:00] and like trying to toggle between making sure you had enough work for everywhere that you were going to be.

I also left feeling kind of excited because I knew that we were going to get to the point of doing oral histories like this. It felt like that moment in history where, where the archivists really had to do their jobs at this point. You know, we do our jobs every day, but we needed to start day one, making sure that we were going to get this information – I started printing out all the email communications we were getting from Brown – And it just felt really exciting that, I just knew that we were going to be part of this movement of collecting this story.

But I also remember of that day as we're moving collections out of our office, it was one of the sunnier, warmer days that we had had in early March, and the students were everywhere. They were just laying – every spot of grass in Providence was just covered in students on top of each other, playing Frisbee, [13:00] like all of these people in one place which we knew, we knew that China was in a lockdown, we knew that other, that European countries were getting into lockdown, that being right on top of each other was not the best course of action. And then you and I were making these moves to be able to work from home because we knew kind of danger was imminent. And the students around us, like the world around us was not reacting in that way.

MM: Yes.

AK: And so it was almost like I wanted to stand there and scream like, "What are you doing?"

Start packing up your dorm room, like we are not going to be here much longer,” but also wanting to do it quietly because what if we were overreacting, or you don’t want to incite panic, you know, like, nobody has the full story of what’s happening. And so just trying to like make everything work to pretend like life is going on as normal when it is the least normal it has ever been for, for most people right now, it’s just so weird. [14:00]

MM: I remember I think I said to you, doesn’t it kind of feel like the ’38 hurricane like everybody was at the beach –

AK: Right.

MM: And you and I were like literally hauling all these boxes and like shoving all of our supplies into our car, and then it was like beachgoers on the campus. And I just remember thinking this is like the ’38 hurricane. Like, they’re not paying, what is going to happen here? And I totally get it. They’re kids, they’re young, they don’t want, they didn’t want their school experience to be ended in trauma, which it has. I mean, now speaking to students, you really feel just how sad this is, especially for seniors. It’s just being, it’s really sad. So I do feel for them. So maybe we should talk about now about, what do you think? Maybe life at home or what do you think?

AK: Yeah, sure. Just very personal side note. You know, we have this chalkboard in the kitchen that is usually our [15:00] menu board, but has turned into our wedding countdown, because as of today, we’re supposed to get married in 13 weeks, and I’ve amended the chalkboard to say we’re getting married in 13 weeks parentheses hopefully.

MM: Oh, God!

AK: So even the chalkboard is losing faith.

MM: Yeah, so why don’t you tell your listeners what this has meant to you and about what you were thinking you were going to be doing this spring and now what’s going on?

AK: Even while it's, so we got, my partner Erik and I got engaged in November and started planning a wedding because I'm not the long-engagement kind of gal, although it seems like I may have to be. You know, by December, I had a wedding dress. We had a bridal party. We had our date for June 26, 2020. And even as the news was coming out of Europe, it just wasn't hitting me until a couple of weeks ago. I was like, okay, this might not be happening. [16:00] So I've been following all sorts of blogs that I shouldn't be reading for my mental health of #BridesofCOVID19, and all of these couples who have had to postpone their weddings for a year or more, hopefully reschedule, some people have just cancelled. The new thing the wedding industry is doing to create more money in the midst of panic is "changed the date" notices. So not only have people spent money on "save the dates" and invitations, but then you get to mail out "change the dates." So it's just, it –

It also occurred to me though, that as I'm having this personal moment of like, on the verge of mourning the loss of something that I thought I was going to have, or a turning point I thought I was going to hit my life that's going to have to be postponed or just at least different than what I thought it was going to be, this isn't even the first time in recent memory that something has happened like this. And first of all, [17:00] you know, it's a wedding, you can get married in 100 different ways. There are people literally dying right now. So I am trying to keep all of this in perspective, how lucky we are that so far all of our family and friends are healthy and have been unaffected by this other than, you know, what everyone is doing working from home and things like that. But it also came up in my feed that, you know, I wouldn't have been thinking of weddings in this time, if I wasn't also planning a wedding. It's just not a thing that occurs to me and probably most people. But during 9/11 [2001] this was a thing that happened because after 9/11 you know, travel in the country just stopped. And so anybody who had weddings or guests who were supposed to move around, that really got disturbed. And so I've been finding this weird kind of community of people who have been through this and who are going through this who are finding ways in a very corny way to kind of put love first so to speak, or, at the very least, like, keep everything in [18:00] perspective of, of what's going on. But then also this like mental health movement for, for people in general of like it's okay to not be your most productive you've ever been while you're working from home in the midst of a global pandemic, it's okay to mourn the loss of your wedding date because of these, like, it's okay to feel sad and to feel mourning even of your work friends, not getting to be with your work

friends, and, you know, I haven't had a conversation with you about your dog, Mouse, in I don't know how long. You know? Like mourning the loss of these things and allowing yourself to be sad and to be a little less productive. I think in a lot of ways, as this is literally pushing everybody further apart, it's bringing people, it's building community in different ways, too.

MM: Yes, I totally, I totally agree with that. It's been you [19:00] know, such a, such a strange time, I think. And I also have been thinking a lot about, of course 9/11 and what that time felt like, just around concepts of fear. On that day, that was, on 9/11 I was in Savannah, Georgia, just starting graduate school. It was the first week of graduate school, which was then canceled. But I remember that day feeling fear, because my brother is a flight attendant, and I remember, and one of his routes was San Francisco, what was it? San Francisco to New York was one of the flights. And so I remember that was the day that I felt fear for a moment until we knew that he was safe. And I am feeling fear again. I mean, I think that there is a level of anxiety that we're, that is like visceral, like you're afraid that you could get sick. And of course, I also thought about the day I was riding on a train when Lehman Brothers collapsed in '08 I think it was, or maybe [20:00] January '09. And I had just started a new job at the Schlesinger Library. And I remember I was on an Amtrak train coming out of New York when I was reading the *New York Times* and it announced that Lehman Brothers had fallen. And I remember feeling like a dread, like, oh, we're I, you know, this fear that I, like a palpable fear that I was going to lose my job. And I think now, which I didn't, gratefully I did not. But now, it's a fear I'm feeling not only for myself, but other Americans who are, we're all feeling fear around our health. I am currently not feeling fear about my job. Other people are feeling both of those things as the economy just shrinks down, and people are losing their jobs, and they're afraid of getting sick. So it's both things. And I think for me, my kind of anxiety levels COVID-19 has kind of changed everything. I think maybe here is where we should talk about [21:00] our outfits today.

AK: Do you like how fancy I am today?

MM: So we –

AK: This is my at-home outfit.

MM: So we you know, so you and I talked about this that, that you wanted, you wanted to get dressed today, like there was something to do today so you wanted to get dressed, and I wanted to show people who are listening, I wanted people to know what people wore during this time. And so for a lot of my days, I do spend basically in my pajamas or an equivalent, right? And so I'm wearing this sweater. I've had this sweater since, since the '08 Recession. I feel warm and safe, I feel safe wearing it. And so I find myself like around the house in this sweater. And then in a pair of yoga pants. And I think that there's going to be this like, when people are collecting the clothes that document the history of COVID for women, women's history, they are going to collect yoga pants because that's all that we're wearing. [22:00]

AK: Yeah.

MM: You know, it's just. And then my routines have changed. So when I was going to work, I'd start with dealing my dog, Mouse, taking her to daycare or getting ready to stay home. And then I would shower, get pretty, and get ready to leave the house and be a professional. And now, it's like, we're in our warm cozy clothes, you get up and you begin to work via home for much of the day, at least for me, and then about three o'clock in the afternoon I'm like, okay, I have to take a shower. And so then I'm doing my routine, but we're turning right back to comfortable clothes. And then you're kind of fried by late afternoon looking at Zoom or looking at a screen all day long is like very difficult. And so then you kind of try to unwind and I think so for me, my anxiety level is low in the morning. All of this we're always in our home, and then the afternoon you get tired, and then in the [23:00] evening, as you begin to dial back into the news, I feel like my anxiety level starts to go up. And I have to say by bedtime, bedtime is rough. It's a rough time, especially if you watch Rachel Maddow, my God. It's terrifying! And so it's really about managing that anxiety level and taking care of yourself. I've been doing a lot of my anxiety out loud talking with Jim, my partner, my partner, Jim, I'm sure he won't, he wouldn't mind me saying he's been talking in his sleep, which he never does. Just about, just a little comments, like just little things. And I think that that's maybe his way of getting out his stress about it is literally overnight. So. What about you in your home?

AK: It's interesting, you, you. Yeah, so the routine. I'm very much a scheduled person and, you

know, for all of the anxiety like I'm generally also an anxious person and so this is just like [24:00] anxious 2.0. And so for me to feel in control of this moment, I need to maintain my schedule. So I set my alarm for 6am every day, but I've noticed this past week I slept past the alarm every single day, which is not what I – usually the alarm goes off, I turn it off, I'm out of bed and you know, I have a hedgehog so we're cleaning her cage and like, you know, taking a shower, doing the whole thing. And I just, I can't manage to like be rested right now. But, but I'm trying so I get up in the morning and I hit the shower, do the hedgehog's cleaning and, and then I, I cannot watch the news because the news just fills me with so much stress and anxiety because like I said, it's just, you know, you, you hear the President say one thing and then people say that it's something different and there are just [25:00] so many stories right now it feels like even in science like people can't be on the same page or at least we can't get a consistent story about it. And so I would just rather not know. Like, somebody will tell me when we're allowed to leave our homes again and then I'll leave my home you know. So we start our morning watching Everybody Loves Raymond and I brush my teeth and I sit down in our as yet undecorated man cave and do my work. But it is you know, we try to go for, we go for a couple of miles of walking in the afternoon to try to keep ourselves active. I signed up for an at home yoga challenge, so I get a yoga or strength video every day, which in some ways is good because I was not doing that when I was at work so I'm trying to keep my body moving, but also in ways that are going to calm me down. And I think it's really interesting the way you connected mental health kind of to your sweater. I brought [26:00] Exhibit A. This is my bathroom that I'm almost always wearing except for right now. But, but I will put, you know, I mean, no, I was going lie, I don't put real clothes underneath. I put a sweat, sweatpants and a t-shirt and then my bathroom full of tissues and my glass of water and I just kind of walk around the house like a zombie. And I feel like, one it's just cold in the house, but two, when you wear your bathrobe, it's generally bedtime and wind-down-time and so there is something mentally about wearing your bathrobe that says like you're supposed to be calm right now and like, you are safe and things are okay. And so there is definitely something about that element that makes it easier to kind of navigate the day.

But also I just feel gross, of course – So this is my brand new blazer. It came in the day after we were all told to work from home. So it's like, you know, I just had to feel like I could wear grown up [27:00] clothes and jewelry for a minute. Because I'm just not, there's no need to

be. And even when we're like Zoom meeting with the rest of the staff, I think it's really interesting that everyone is also wearing at home clothes, you know what I mean? Everyone in that way, everyone's allowing each other to be vulnerable and find comfort in the ways that they can, if that makes sense.

MM: Yes, I think that that, I think I'd like to make a point about that. I think that that has been wonderful. So I think – two points I'd like to make about exercise and about familiarity. So exercise, at least, we are keeping track. We're kind of running our own experiment here in our house just about how our habits and behaviors are changing. So we are keeping track of our weight. And we're keeping track of how many steps we're putting on.

AK: Good.

MM: And this was reversed because we noticed right away that we were walking our dog constantly because it's something to do. [28:00] Now I'm seeing like memes online about dogs refusing to go for any more walks, 12 walks is enough for the day or whatever. You know, we're putting, Jim and I, we are, we've logged like about 15,000 steps a day, since we've been home. We'll work for a little bit, break, take Mouse for a walk, work for a bit. And so you get into this kind of rhythm where you would go to the watercooler at your office or go get a cup of coffee, you're actually home and everything is closed. What we are allowed to do for our listeners is you are allowed to, as of March, end of March, we are allowed to leave our homes and walk through our neighborhoods, keeping at least a six foot distance from the nearest pedestrian that you might see and pass. So we are, so that's like something to do. And so we were putting on all these steps and then we were talking and we're like let's kind of like keep track of this and see what happens. [29:00] So I think people are experiencing an uptick in exercise and general, and potentially overall health for folks who don't get sick.

AK: Right.

MM: And then I was going to make one other point and I forgot.

AK: Clothing and familiarity.

MM: Oh, yes. And so then I've, we've also had, you know, work meetings we're all doing via Zoom and it's been wonderful. When one of you know, when one of our colleagues the Associate Director of the Pembroke Center, he has these two beautiful mastiffs. And they meandered into our Zoom staff meeting. The Director of the Hay Library has this beautiful black cat and she was leading a meeting on Zoom and the cat pounced right onto her keyboard and like, stretched around and she had to like lift the cat off her keyboard. Another colleague whose little girl wanted to come in and so she joined the meeting and sat on his lap while we did the meeting. Just really, another colleague whose husband was like making money coffee behind her in the [30:00] kitchen. It gives you these moments to see people how they are. And I think in some ways, maybe there's a more enriched level of work and conversation and connectedness because of that.

AK: Yeah. 100%.

MM: Well, so let's see, what else should we – Is there anything else that we want to talk about while we're, while we're here?

AK: What are you, how is grocery shopping going for you because it has been a major challenge. I have seen it as a major challenge because we are right now we're still allowed to go to the grocery store, but I don't want to go into a space where everyone else is. I don't want to pick the produce that 10 other people have picked up and check how firm it is. And so we've been trying to order groceries and have them delivered to our house which has gone very well one time, but [31:00] most places, including Walmart, Stop and Shop, Whole Foods, BJ's, they run out of these slots, like at unprecedented rates that we can't, we can't really have our groceries delivered. So we have to go out, but I'm not making menu items the way I usually do. And so we go out and we get this, this, and this, but then we realize we don't have other things. And so I feel like we're almost going out more because of it.

MM: Yeah. That's really interesting.

AK: But then the delivery just isn't an option. And Erik did go to Whole Foods the other day, and they were only letting I think it was 20 people into the store at a time. And then when he got to the grocery, the checkout line, there was tape that everyone had to stay behind as people checked out.

MM: Yeah, so I know – So that's what governor Raimondo, so Whole Foods is actually adhering to Governor Raimondo's request for grocery stores to limit the number of people inside the [32:00] store, a number of grocery stores are not limiting the number and I, and now Gina yesterday we heard her daily briefs which she goes through Facebook streaming every day at like 2:30 or 1:30, which I have been watching. She's basically threatening to bring the hammer down and, and restrict those stores by the state for them, you know, to cut the number of people going in. Yes, we have struggled with grocery delivery as well. We signed up for, we tried Whole Foods, and we are still waiting for our first Pea Pod delivery.

AK: Oh, wow.

MM: I had to request a delivery time. I was able to snag one two and a half weeks ago for the first delivery to happen on the first of April.

AK: Wow.

MM: So in the meantime, of course, even though I did do my like secret, I thought it was crazy shopping, it's not, it wasn't all the right stuff, right like we can't eat mac and cheese for two weeks and, you know, [33:00] we found out that baking, baked chicken, that's not part of a chicken is terrible. Like [inaudible] something is like better. So we're, we're finding what's terrible and what, what works. But it also means we have to kind of fill in the middle.

AK: Right.

MM: So, my partner has, I did one grocery shopping on, I wore, my routine is to wear latex gloves. I don't wear a mask because we don't have masks. And we don't want to use the masks

when other people could be using the masks. So I put latex gloves on as I get out of my car. And then I go in and I just, you kind of it's like playing bob and weave. You step away if a person steps up to the food. If an aisle is crowded, you don't go, you don't go down it. So it's kind of like whack a mole you're trying to like get the things before everybody else comes [34:00] in. And then you're just hoping that the checkout person is safe themselves. I had a young kid at the station that I went through, no gloves, and I didn't love that.

AK: Yeah.

MM: So then after I get out of the store, then I remove the first pair of gloves and I throw them into the garbage on the site there. Then I put on another pair of gloves –

AK: Oh wow.

MM: To move the groceries from the basket into my car to get home. Once we get home, we're then spraying every item –

AK: Yeah.

MM: Down with multipurpose cleaner. The exterior of the packaging. So even like the, literally, I mean, I know you're probably doing it too. Picture you're like loaf of bread inside a plastic bag. That all gets sprayed down with a multipurpose cleaner first, before it goes into our cabinets. We're struggling with what to do with the produce, the vegetables, the fruit. [35:00] I'm just rinsing everything really well and we're peeling what we can peel.

AK: Right.

MM: So nothing is eaten with a shell. Like the exterior of a cucumber, that's all being peeled before eating. What about you?

AK: We, the minute I mean, I don't know, part of my, as you know, when I moved part of my

like managing my stress was making everything clean, clean, clean. And so I'm worried that if I, if I start doing that with groceries that by the end of it, I'm going to be there with like every grape and a Lysol wipe. So I, in a lot of it, we're kind of taking the risk. I have not bought any latex gloves because I'm not really sure where I would find it. And I don't know what I'm supposed to be leaving available for healthcare workers. So we just kind of go for it. We stay away from people at the store. If there's like a Lysol wipe to wipe down the handle of the cart we do that. [36:00] Then the minute we get home, I run out to my car with a Lysol wipe, clean off the steering wheel and the sides of the car doors. And we wash our hands and then put the groceries away and then wash our hands again. So it's just, I don't know, and how much, I mean so far knock on wood. We aren't ill, but part of me almost feels defeat like what's the point? Like, we just went into a grocery store full of people. So you know?

MM: Yeah, yeah.

AK: You know, I don't know.

MM: It's really just, we just don't know.

AK: Right.

MM: And this is where we have to kind of let go.

AK: Exactly.

MM: You can only control so much of it. And I'm kind of doing a lot of like work and like, mental thinking about okay, so what if we do get it? How are we going to control the anxiety around having it?

AK: Yeah.

MM: Because I think for me, that's where people must, I'm really feeling for people. They have

to be digging deep if they start to get sick. [37:00] I've been thinking a lot about how do we man, how do you manage the anxiety of being sick? And my heart is just going out to anyone who is suffering in their families right now, around that anxiety.

AK: I saw on World News Tonight with David Muir last night that there was a family where the husband got ill, and they're telling people right now I've been hearing to have kind of like a sick room set up in your house for when it happens. And this family, the husband was staying in the bedroom and they set up an ironing board. And so the wife would go in and put the meal on the ironing board and then leave and then the husband would get up and like get the food off the ironing board and never leave that room and she would not have contact with him. And they were also having their children stay in their own separate rooms. And they were just Zoom meeting with each other in their own home so they wouldn't spread it within them. [38:00] And then another person, another family, the wife was so ill she ended up at the hospital, but they have a small child. So if the husband were to catch it, they have no family in the area, like what do you do with your kid? You know, so it's not even just the anxiety of "I'm ill." But then also I feel like people are really taking on the responsibility of who else have I affected by being ill like, who else did I spread this to? And there's a huge fear about making other people ill too, which I think is interesting.

So I was saying when this all started, that forcing people to work from home was going to be really hard for Americans because of this incessant need to always be working, but also the self-importance that I think Americans really have about, you know, what I do is so important, I am essential, even though you know, whatever, that now, now people are kind of going back on that, on what I was predicting [39:00] and caring for other people in ways that we ordinarily wouldn't.

MM: Yeah, I think, well, I definitely have been a little concerned about what happens if Jim and I were both to get very sick with a mouse.

AK: Yeah. Right.

MM: Because we have a dog that has special needs, and is basically fearful of strangers. And I

guess, you know, I guess I would see if our daycare, dog daycare provider, which is still operating, because there's very few people who work there, but a lot of dogs who go to play there. And also for first responder families, they have a lot of their dogs just because they're working constantly now. And animals don't seem to be catching or transferring the virus. So it's kind of a weird space. I guess I'd hop that they could take her, but it has certainly occurred to me. I cannot even imagine the level of anxiety times a billion if you're considering a human and your own child care.

AK: Yeah. [40:00]

MM: God bless. I don't know. I know that Governor Raimondo yesterday is the first state in the nation to partner with care.com.

AK: Oh wow!

MM: The state, the state is going to be paying all the costs. So if you need a sitter for an elderly person in your home while you go to work or your child, you can now go to care.com and request that help, the state will cover it. If you are out of work, she wants people to go there and sign up to be paid through care.com to be a caregiver for situations just like this. If they're in a, if people are in emergency mode, and they literally do not have childcare, and are sick, they are looking for really heroes to step up and do that childcare. And the state of Rhode Island is going to pay for it. For I think the next three months she's doing that. So that's kind of cool.

AK: Yeah. And right now, just to say, you know, as of March 27, what I'm hearing is they're [41:00] thinking that this is going to take like six to 10 weeks to run its course. But also yesterday, or the day before, President Cristina Paxson sent out an email saying that they've decided to postpone commencement for 2020. And that they're hoping to do it maybe by October. But something she said that I thought was really interesting was that even if this is over by the regular commencement date, it's going to take a long time for people to get back into their regular routines and especially with something like commencement, where it's so multifaceted and requires the work of literally everybody, that you know, not only is this such a weird

moment, but I think also the recovery period after coronavirus is going to be another fascinating time and probably a long period of time.

And also to go back several minutes to your point about 2008 [42:00] and your job, Brown has now entered a hiring freeze, which so many places have at this point, just because of the financial hit that the stock market has been taking, and just everyone is taking this point. So it's going to be, it's going to be really interesting going forward. But I'm hoping maybe soon, we get to have another interview to say that we made it through and that it, you know, that it was over, that it's over. So.

MM: Yeah, let's do that. Let's, we should end the uplift if we can and do another interview so people can see like part one and part two.

AK: Yeah.

MM: And I, maybe we should end here just by saying that we're interviewing each other today. And we're also collecting other interviews. And so they're starting to roll in, interest in contributing interviews. And I think feeling useful in this time is like, very empowering and like I feel useful conducting these interviews. [43:00] I also feel useful telling the story for the record. So I feel like I don't know. Thank God for the Pembroke Center!

AK: I keep saying as much, so I'm in a contract position that's supposed to go until June 2022. So the, the problems with the stock market and the hiring freeze is kind of scaring me, but in this moment, we have to be so thankful for, for what we have and not be worrying, like, we do not have the luxury of worrying about three years from now right now. So I am so eternally grateful to have been hired by the Pembroke Center with a very generous gift from Shauna Stark, and to be able to be doing this work and still connected to so many amazing people at Brown and at the Pembroke Center, because if I lost my job right now or didn't have a job, it would be, it would be a tough road period, a tough mental health road. [44:00] Yeah, this has been really a godsend in a lot of ways for sure.

MM: All right, well, I think that's a good spot to leave it for now. And I think Godspeed and we

will be in touch so if you want to stop the recording, we can –

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