

Transcript – Sara Matthiesen, class of 2015

Narrator: Sara Matthiesen

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

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Amanda Knox: Good afternoon. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the Assistant Archivist at the Pembroke Center at Brown University. It is Thursday, May 7, 2020, and it is 2:30 in the afternoon, and I am here today with another one of our COVID interviewees. This one suggested to us by Felicia at the Sarah Doyle Women's Center. And if you would like to introduce yourself now, please.

Sara Matthiesen: Sure. So my name is Sara Matthiesen. I am currently an Assistant Professor at George Washington University in DC which is where this interview, where I am doing this interview from. I teach in the History, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Departments at GW. And I was a graduate student in American Studies at Brown University. I started my PhD there in 2009. [1:00] And prior to coming to GW, I actually held a Presidential Diversity Postdoctoral Fellowship at Brown for two years between the, completing the PhD and starting the job at GW.

AK: Thank you so much. I would kind of like to start at the beginning today and ask you if you remember the first few times you were hearing the word Coronavirus, COVID-19. What were you thinking as this was starting to emerge in the news around here?

SM: So I think the first thing that comes to mind is actually conversations I had, a number of conversations I had with one of my students who is an international student, a freshman at GW, who is from China, and is one of those students who comes to your office hours religiously, and so we [2:00] were checking in every week. She was telling me about her parents and her brother and sister in law's experiences of being in quarantine and how they were dealing with that situation, how she was feeling being separate from them during that. And then also updating me about incident in, unfortunately, increasing incidents she was having on campus of xenophobia

and anti-Asian racism that were spurred by the media coverage of Coronavirus when, I mean, certainly at that point, it was still, it had not, wasn't, there weren't cases of it in other countries. But as it spread and certainly by the time there were cases in the [3:00] US those stories had accumulated quite significantly. She did not only have stories, her other friends had stories. So that is sort of the first thing that comes to mind when I think of it of like, how did this get on my radar? What is my association to the Coronavirus? It's really through that student and her experience.

AK: Were you concerned at that point? I imagine your concern was mainly for the student, but in the back of your mind were you thinking at all that this could potentially come here and that we would end up in this situation now of social distancing and isolation?

SM: So, I, I think that I was fairly, I don't know if it is, if it was ignorance or [4:00] denial or simply being consumed by other more immediate events that were happening around me. I was pretty involved with the, with Bernie Sanders' presidential run and so I feel like when I answer that, when I try to reflect on that question and answer it, my mindset goes to being sort of like consuming presidential politics 24/7. And, and as Sanders' position in the race precipitously declined and as there was a consolidation around the now presumed candidate Joe Biden I feel like the overwhelming emotion I had of that experience was a lot [5:00] of political despair. And so this is a roundabout way of saying that. It was definitely, it was sort of like buzzing in the back of my head, especially as I was reading reports from Italy and realizing that, you know, countries were, that it seemed people were not learning the lesson of prior countries. And I certainly didn't have hope that we would, that we had an administration that had any capacity to learn from those experiences, despite I think the efforts of people who were really trying to sound the alarms. But for me personally, it was, I was not, I was not surprised when things unfolded here the way that they did, but it's not as if I was one of the [6:00] people saying like, you know, thinking daily about how this was the thing that was going to be coming down. It was very much, I mean, this sounds, this is unflattering, but, "That's okay." Like I was very consumed with American electoral politics and like I said, it was in the back of my mind, I knew it was happening in other places. I did not have faith that we would be able to take a different course. So I think as things unfolded, I didn't have shock, but I don't think that I was obsessively

tracking the developments of the virus before it got to the US.

AK: And I'm glad you bring that up because you're by no means the, the first interviewee to say that. My questions [7:00] have really, it's occurring to me have kind of come up in a vacuum where like we're doing COVID interviews. And so that's what we're talking about. But to give some historical context here in the United States, this news of Coronavirus is coming out while we're in the middle of impeachment trials and a presidential race. And so now you're in DC, would you, we don't, we don't really have that documented in our oral histories that much right now. Is that another aspect that you'd like to talk about before we continue on?

SM: Yeah, I mean, I can say a little bit about it. You know, I, I do – DC, living in DC you can choose how much, how like, how much of electoral politics and everything that accompanies that is going to be a part of [8:00] your daily life and your social world. And so while I certainly don't consider myself, like, in some ways, I have quite deliberately not made that a major part of my social world. But it just so happens that my partner works, worked on the Bernie campaign. So I was, there was like a very intimate way in which I was getting constant updates. And, you know, my personal investment in the outcome of the race was amplified by the fact of her job with the campaign. So you know that, that is a pretty like DC thing that she worked at headquarters and I think that I learned way more about like individual people involved with the campaign, individual people on other campaigns, than like I would have ever otherwise. [9:00] It's true that being in DC, there are a lot of people who either have direct connections to federal politics, or just make it their sort of have like a duty of being kind of a political junkie. And so certainly it's not so much that you feel that politics are happening in your backyard, at least that's not really how I have ever felt. I've only been here since 2017. But that's not really how I have ever felt. It's more just in your social interactions, your casual conversations with people, that is going to be, that is always going to be a topic of conversation. And so certainly, you are correct, that like impeachment and the presidential race, at least in the conversations I was having with people, were pretty [10:00] all-consuming during this period.

AK: And so also to stay on the topic of DC for a little while longer, as Coronavirus was starting to get closer to the United States, were you seeing any changes in DC or, and by that I mean DC

and then also just kind of like your community, were you seeing things start to change as this was becoming a growing threat?

SM: I'm trying to remember like, when in the university started indicating about it. I don't, I don't really remember, [11:00] I don't think I really remember any kind of, you know, minor changes that might have like gestured towards what was coming, to be honest. Let me think about this. Yeah, I mean, it feels like when, if I try to reflect on it, when it became, it was sort of like it was it had arrived completely is when, is my relationship to its presence in my professional and personal life. You know, of course I was following the, you know, the media coverage of it as cases were starting to increase [12:00] in the US. But what, what stands out most vividly for me, I guess, is when the university was trying, GW was trying to decide, you know, was it going to send students home. Spring break was coming and was it going to send students home for the entirety of the semester? Was it going to double the spring break and have them come back? And so I think, once, you know, I remember talking to my students, maybe a couple of classes before our last in person class and talking about reports out of New York City that there was hesitancy around closing public schools because so many kids were dependent on free lunches and free breakfast through up through elementary and high school public schools. So those are some [13:00] memories of like, institutions playing with how much can we prolong this? Like, how serious do we need to be about it? That in between period, which of course, like feels like forever ago. And now, you know, I'm sure the, the idea that anyone had any, was like wishy washy about whether or not to close things down is kind of hard for people to believe, but there was a period when there was a lot of uncertainty about what to do and partially, you know, in, in many ways motivated by the consequences of what it would mean to cut off so many people reliant on institutions for a variety of immediate needs. So that's what comes to mind.

AK: Sure. And, I mean, I can only assume at this point your, [14:00] your classes are completely virtual? So were you, did you have time to start preparing your students for this transition?

SM: No.

AK: And then what was your experience with the transition to completely online and virtual

learning?

SM: I did not have time to prepare my students for the transition. As I said, GW itself was quite unclear about what it was going to do. And I very, I remember the last week we were together, I taught Tuesdays and Thursdays this semester. So I went to class on Tuesday, and everyone was like, “Do you know what’s happening?” Like, “Are we, do I need to like,” I remember a student saying, “Should I pack extra clothes in my suitcase for spring break in less, in case we’re home for like longer than we expect?” [15:00] And I said, you know, that I don’t think that could hurt. Like, you probably can put an extra pair of jeans in your suitcase. But that was how quickly, like Tuesday no one knew it was happening, Thursday, we had gotten I think the day before that, or maybe it was Tuesday afternoon, a notice saying that students would go home for two weeks instead of one week, and that they would return after the two weeks. Which of course, you know, I don’t mean to be overly cynical or ungenerous towards my institution, but I, I’m sure that they knew that we were not coming back after two weeks of spring break. So I had one session with my students, many of whom had already gotten out of dodge. And so I think my class, I taught a class of 50, [16:00] I think you know, maybe there was like half the class there that day. And we sort of troubleshooted, or tri, tried to triage what moving online would look like in the time that we had together.

I was very concerned about immediate needs that students had, you know, students who weren’t able to go home for spring break and letting them know what housing services were available for GW and what your situation needed to be to have an exception made for you to stay in the dorms. So we did a lot of, really before we got to like curricular concerns we did a lot of immediate material security concerns.

So you know, I, I don’t know if other universities were able to give faculty and staff and students a heads up sooner than GW. [17:00] GW is not great with communication so I imagine that there’s probably a way that it could have done better than what happened at my institution.

But in terms of your second question about how moving online has been, you know, I think that I have been, I am grateful, because my, I’m sure that I’m not alone in saying that this situation has clarified people’s priorities in an incredibly short period of time. And so for me, you know, I understood that from even from that short triaging session of like, what do you need? Can you get home? Do you have a place to stay? That my students had much greater [18:00]

pressing concerns than, you know, are you going, are we going to stick to the syllabus schedule? And so I think that I, I am grateful that I took that perspective with me when we transitioned online because it meant that I was able to really scale, to, to alter in the time that we had, how we would continue as a class for the next six weeks. And what the most important things for us to accomplish in that time, remaining time were going to be. I know a lot of faculty who I think got totally freaked out by the technological challenge of moving online. I mean, there are some faculty who like have never even used Blackboard or Canvas and, you know, much less know how to use those platforms to virtually stream themselves into their students' living rooms. So I, [19:00] and I also know faculty who, for, you know, took a different emotional response, which was, well, I'm going to make up for the fact that we can't be meeting together by giving more work and doubling down on rigor so that there's nothing lost in translation. And I'll kind of compensate in that way. Those were not my concerns, and were not my approach. And I think, I mean, I'm happy, I don't know if you have more questions about the details of teaching, but, you know, I think that being compassionate and figuring out what content you know, I told my students on the last day we had together in, in real time, in "IRL," that I, like I wasn't going to, the goal for our remaining time was not for me to like dump a bunch of content on them virtually, but that we would, that I would brainstorm, based on their feedback, how [20:00] we could continue to have a meaningful exchange and how they could continue to relate to the material. And so I think that approach worked well. For me personally, I know that my students were very grateful that there was a continuation of the course. You know, it's not like I threw up my hands and said, this is a futile endeavor. So there was a continuation, they had structure. Many of them told me that the lectures were, you know, they looked forward to the lectures to keep them sort of on track with their day. But there was also flexibility and compassion for the fact that now students all of a sudden are living at home if they are able to go home. They are sharing a computer with siblings who are also learning online. You know, there's like five family members who need to be using the wireless at the same time, there's nowhere in the house for people to do work. Some students have not been able to get back to their families in China. I've had multiple [21:00] students who, like have either been stuck in the US because they can't get back home or when they do go, they do manage to get back to China, they're being quarantined for 16 days and so can't access the material or, you know, speak with their peers on group projects. So anyway, flexibility for like, the real challenges that this moment presented to

students lives. And I, I think that that was, for me, that was the right approach.

AK: And if you're comfortable taking a personal point of view, all of this news did happen so quickly, but did there come a moment where you started preparing yourself and your household for having to be at home for two months, and maybe more? [22:00] And if so, what did that preparation look like?

SM: Yes, there were many moments. I remember a moment when my friend texted me, this was before DC had an official shelter in place but it seemed like it was on the horizon. And my friend texted me that he was waiting in line at Trader Joe's and there was nothing left on the shelves and so he had grabbed whatever items were still there. And up until that point, I had resisted, you know, I have a lot of opinions about how media has covered this moment. And so I think I was trying really hard not to get overly, overly activated by the urgency and fear, [23:00] a lot, what I think was a lot of fear mongering that the media has been doing in its coverage of the pandemic. And, and so I did this weird thing where his text kind of was like the thing that broke my critical distance and I went to the grocery store and you know, tried to like, I don't know, I didn't even like stock up on anything but it just like all of a sudden felt like I needed to do that. And I even remember talking to a woman in the grocery store, she was taking pictures of the empty root vegetables table that's in the produce section. And I was, she was like, I was like, "This is ridiculous. Like, there's going to be more food. What, what, what are we doing?" And she's like, "I know it is ridiculous." And I was like, "But we're making it happen. Like we are doing it right now as we are commenting on how this probably isn't really necessary." And she was like, "You're right, but [24:00] it's okay. And here we are." So I was very like aware of how, of an internal conflict, I guess, that I was experiencing in how I responded in that moment.

And then I think once the Shelter in Place Order was officially handed down in DC, I found that to be, even though I knew it was coming, and even though my family in California had been in shelter in place for I think, by that point, at least a month, if not longer, and I had been hearing from them what the experience was like, I think that order was very significant psychologically. Even though it didn't really, like materially change anything about how I'd already been conducting myself because of course, by then I was teaching online and I was avoiding, you know, everything was shut down, and I was trying to adhere to the public health

[25:00] guidelines about social distancing. But for some reason that order was very concerning for me politically. And it brought on a lot of political despair about how I was going to continue to engage in activism in DC and oppose the activity that was happening in Congress around any kind of relief related to COVID and the accompanying economic crisis. And there, so that, that was a very particular moment, and I don't know if that is related to preparation, but it was kind of, I do remember sort of the shelter in place reality settling in in different stages.

And I'm sure I'm not the only one, and you can relate, to say that, you know, [26:00] the emotional ride of this situation has been unlike anything I've ever experienced. Like I don't think I've ever experienced, I have never transition through such extreme emotions so quickly, so repeatedly in a day. And so, you know, for me, I guess a preparation that I took, especially after the Shelter in Place Order was very, brought up a lot of feelings of powerlessness, was to like double down on my meditation and therapy and actually, like teach my students. I did some teaching to the pandemic and I shared with them what I had found helpful because I realized that if I was going to maintain any kind of compassion for myself and others through this [27:00] experience, I was going to have to deal with some pretty hard emotions to keep vulnerability as like the first response as opposed to fear, or blame, or anger, and judgment, all of which like cut us off from being able to connect with people. So that's, that's maybe more than you asked for. But those are some of the transitions I experienced and some of the resources that I drew on.

AK: And can you tell me, have you been able to participate in activism, political activism at all? Have you found ways to do that?

SM: Yeah, so I'm, I actually have and I work with kind of like a random gathering of organizers in DC that I guess were like, officially a climate group. [28:00] And before the pandemic happened, we had been planning a week of action on Earth Day to May Day. And there was going to be an action every week, every day of the week that in some way shut down part of the city and disrupted business as usual to get attention to not only the climate crisis writ large, but local issues in DC. So we had partnered with the Black Lives Matter chapter in DC to draw issue, draw attention to health care deserts in a predominantly Black and low income part of the city, to the way that environmental justice is a racial justice issue. We had a partner for every day of the week that was highlighting how frontline communities were most impacted by various



aspects of the climate crisis. And so when [29:00] the pandemic happened, you know, we spent a lot of time on Zoom trying to figure out what a socially distant form of protest looked like. And of course, we were not the only people trying to figure that out, like everyone in the organizing world I think has spent a lot of time like trying to get a hold of this really challenging organizing landscape that the crisis presents. And so what we ended up doing is like, you know, the platform or the model that emerged that we did successfully implement for Earth Day to May Day, which recently happened, was that we had an online component of every action so they're being called action [R?]. I don't know if you've participated in any. They are seemingly infinite now. [30:00] We all, we every action had an online component so that people could participate from home. And we also tried to pair every action [R?] with a socially distant in-person protest. So we always had masks and gloves, we had someone whose designated responsibility was to make sure that everyone remains six feet apart. We always did very short actions so that we were not spending a lot of time you know, forgetting that we were supposed to remain six feet apart. And a lot of our actions were organized around getting visuals that we could live stream to the action R and then circulate on social media.

So one action R we did was to, Jeff Bezos has a house in DC and there's been a lot of organizing from workers at Amazon in the face of COVID and [31:00] the company's refusal to provide paid sick leave to provide PPE [personal protective equipment]. There's been retaliation for workers attempting to organize. And so we had a very small team of people paint a mural in front of Jeff Bezos' house that transpired amazingly quickly, like within the space of an hour and a half that said, "Protect Amazon Workers." We live streamed the painting of the mural to the people who were on the action R so that they could feel part of the action. And then those people online were given an ask of, you know, helping to circulate the image, but also to help amplify the specific campaign demands that Amazon workers had been developing since the pandemic hit. And of course, many of these issues are preexisting to the pandemic, but the pandemic has highlighted what happens when [32:00] crisis hits a workplace or a government, or any institution that has not been well taken care of and is not a resilient structure and can't weather something like this. And I think we're seeing that across many areas of life, not just in a company that sort of tries to make as much profit as possible by exploiting its workers, but also in our healthcare system, in our unemployment state systems, in our system, in our institutions of higher education. I think we are really trying, like confronting what it means to have consistently

divested from things, places and institutions that are supposed to take care of people and now they can't when we need them to take care of people the most. So that, that was more than you asked for, but [33:00] yes. I have been able to do activism and it's been really gratifying and sustaining and challenging. And there are a lot of people, like really brilliant, amazing, courageous people thinking about, much, you know, like thinking about what to do in this moment politically.

AK: It's amazing what people have been able to come together and do, period, and then in the face of a pandemic, to still try to make the world a better place. So I'm really glad that we got that in your oral history today. Before I move on to a very specific question, would you like to talk a little bit more about your thoughts on media coverage and COVID-19?

SM: Yeah, I can say some things. I mean, I'm, what do I want to say? I know that [34:00] I said earlier that I felt like the campaign, the campaign, the media had contributed – I think the media has made it a definitely very scary situation way scarier. And, you know, that is in some ways, not necessarily the media's fault because it is a, it's pretty dire to like watch the administration like have no clear plan of action to say, to give, you know, medical advice that could cause and has caused [35:00] people actual physical harm; to use the pandemic as an attempt at, like an opportunity at political jockeying every chance it gets, like that's really scary. It is really dire. At the same time, I don't know that CNN, I think it's CNN, like needs to have like its death count clock in the upper right hand corner of every segment that it runs. I don't know that, I don't know how much any of us can actually absorb about COVID at any, like any given day and there really is, you know, I remember in the first days of [36:00] being in my like staying at home and being socially distant of like, checking, really obsessively the news because I knew that like something must have happened again and I needed to like be caught up with it and I had to stop because I quickly realized that like, not only was it making me feel worse, like mentally and physically but it was also like it was also – what do I want to say? I think it was making me, like I was losing sense of my own [37:00] intuition about how to relate to this thing; about like, what organic emotions were, like what emotional responses were genuine and specific to me and my experience and my ability to make sense of what was happening. Like it was so much noise that I was losing track of my own like, my own ability to like, stand firmly and get rooted in my

experience. And so it was, I think, for me that when I had that realization, it made me feel like there's a threshold for how much I personally can consume, which I imagine is also true for most people. And that it was really cutting off my inability to do what I was mentioning earlier about, like responding to this moment with vulnerability and compassion as opposed to take, like sort of [38:00] crouching in fear and becoming suspicious of everyone or becoming judge, judgmental of everyone and how well or not well they were social distancing, and wanting, you know, having my head explode every time I read something about Trump. So, you know, I don't think that that is terribly profound, but it was my experience of relating to the media and I, I have not, you know, I don't, the pandemic is no, this isn't unique to the pandemic, but the, I tried to remind myself that the media is really invested in getting people to consume content 24/7 because that is how it turns, it makes its revenue and [39:00] there is a way that fear is an incredibly powerful emotion that consume, is all consuming and like makes you obsessed with consuming more and more information of like, trying to reassert your safety or your sense of wellbeing in the face of fear. You think that if you get more information somehow that will be able to happen. And I think that a lot of media outlets to take advantage of that and not just related to the pandemic, but certainly a crisis is a, an opportunity to double down on those kinds of tactics. And so I guess that's what I would say.

AK: So, to get super specific here, some of your research focuses on reproductive rights and reproductive justice, and that's definitely a topic that has been coming up in the media [40:00] lately because of the pandemic and different ways that governments are considering essential businesses and things of that nature. So would you share some thoughts – this is obviously current events, but some thoughts you have on reproductive justice in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic?

SM: Yeah. So I think the thing that most immediately comes, or okay, I'll just say what I have seen in the media most often is how conservative legislatures are using this to further restrict access to abortion. And so we have seen, with varying degrees [41:00] of success, state legislatures say that abortion is not an essential service essentially, essentially, and cut off access to that form of health care. And, and so, you know, I may, I was sort of alluding to this at least internally when I was talking about the media. But I have found there have been so many, so

many webinars of people talking and analyzing the pandemic, from a variety of perspectives, but one that I have found, one person that I do find myself like, willing to listen to and not get sort of overloaded by, is, and who has been making the rounds quite a bit, is Naomi Klein, who wrote a book called *The Shock Doctrine* that has sort of [42:00] had a resurgence in this moment because she basically talks about how moments of crisis can be used to make what once seemed impossible possible. And she has a positive spin on that, which is that movements, you know, a crisis is up for grabs to anyone. It's up for grabs to people who want to make, to move the world closer to one that we envision as having more justice and equity and peace. But it's also up for grabs for people who want to double down or perhaps, yeah, double down on their access to power and resources and expand their access to those things. And so I think we can literally list, probably create a very long and disturbing list of the ways that that [43:00] latter process has already unfolded in relation to the pandemic, but I would certainly put the restriction of abortion rights in that category. You know, the important thing about *The Shock Doctrine* is that a lot of, and I'm sure that you've seen a growing prominence of this narrative in, you know, think pieces on the pandemic, that crises are used to usher in what formerly seemed impossible, but there's always a before the crisis that can, that is very useful in terms of ratcheting up the stakes of that before and so I think in relation to abortion, the decades long effort to chip away at abortion access is an important component [44:00] of being able to use this moment to dramatically accelerate that decades long process by, you know, saying, right, because it's temporary, saying you, we have to shut off access because it's not an essential service and so actually that makes getting an abortion unsafe. And the concern about moments of crisis is that, and the way that people successfully take hold of them to make these changes, is that what is implemented as a temporary measure eventually never goes away and just becomes the new normal. So that's I think one thing that I've seen in the media the law in relation to the question of reproductive justice and injustice that has emerged via, in the wake of the pandemic.

I think the other thing that [45:00] I haven't, I don't know if I've seen it articulated in precisely this way. But the, I think we should definitely consider the working conditions of a group of people that have been deemed essential workers. I'm thinking of home health aides and domestic workers, and even nursing home aides. That these are people who I don't think we often associate with reproductive rights because typically we think about reproductive rights as being about the ability to limit one's, to like make the right, the decision to not have children or

to obtain contraception so that you limit pregnancy etc. But as you probably know, or if our listeners don't, reproductive justice encompasses – also thinks that the right to have children [46:00] and have the resources to raise them in healthy and safe environments is, is just as important as the right to not participate in those, in that practice. And so essential workers that have been doing the reproductive labor and caretaking necessary to keep society running are very much bearing the brunt of the social costs that the pandemic has laid at our collective feet. Although I think in, with their case, like we see how it hasn't been laid there equally or distributed equally. And so any working conditions related to jobs that we might put under the broad banner of social reproduction, the social reproduction being the things required to [47:00] have a society keep reproducing itself and have and be sustained, I think is a reproductive justice issue that we, in some ways is like being put on people's radar in a, to a degree that maybe hasn't been before. Because essential workers have become so front and center in this pandemic. Now, they have largely become front and center through kind of like this hero worship narrative where if we all like clap for them at the same time every night that somehow is enough of a thanks to them bearing the brunt of the risks and costs of this pandemic and the economic crisis that it has engendered. But I think a reproductive justice framework would ask us to do much more than that and to say, you know, ask us to [48:00] really put our money where our mouth is, and say that if we're going to deem people who literally help society, take care of all of us, whether that's in infancy or end of life, or you know, as we age, not to mention just like the daily work of cooking and keeping our house clean and keeping everyone fed, that if those people really are essential then we will actually need to value them and we need to not send them into work with no PPE and we need to provide paid sick leave and we need to make sure they have bargaining rights and are making a living wage. And I, I don't know if others would qualify or categorize that as a reproductive justice issue, but the way that I think about [49:00] the political, the principles of reproductive justice, I certainly, I would put that up alongside more, obviously, or explicitly reproductive rights related concerns that have unfolded with, with COVID.

AK: So I only have a couple of more questions for you. One is kind of a big one. If somebody listened to this interview tomorrow, what is one thing you would want them to know? And if they are listening to this interview 50 years from now, what is something you want that person to know?

SM: What a wonderful question. [50:00] I think if someone was listening to this tomorrow I would want to say two things. I would want to say that however you feel right now is how you're supposed to feel and that it's okay. And you should, like if you can, you should comfort whatever that feeling is because it's legitimate.

And then I would also say that, that I have been inspired by the coverage of the pandemic and the political analysis of the pandemic that is demanding far [51:00] more than a return to normal. And so if that idea hasn't, isn't familiar to this person that I would encourage them to, like, think about some of the things I said earlier about, you know, every, every political effort and social movement was fighting for a thing that seemed impossible until it wasn't. And that it can be really hard to have that mindset when things feel so dire, but that I actually think this is an opening to hold on to that reality and that sort of historical truth and I think comforting story, at least for me, because it is so dire. And so I would, I would want to pass that message of, I don't know, of like [52:00] political solidarity and convictions along to this person.

If this was 50 years from now, I mean, I hope you, when, I hope that things returned, I hope you're living in a way, way better normal. I hope that what I just described, you are reaping the benefits of and that this is like, that COVID was a moment that, that forced fundamental reprioritizing [53:00] of what we really value as a society. And that you all like look back at us and are horrified at what we almost did, and the things that we did for so long and that you know, there is a different value system in place for you where the wellbeing of people comes before the, wellbeing of people and the planet that we are dependent on, before profit and endless, capitalism's quest for endless growth and expansion. And I hope that it's really nice.

AK: So finally, is there anything that you were hoping to get in the historical record today that I did not ask you about? I would like to leave this final moment open for you to use however you'd like. [54:00]

SM: I think that I would say, because I've been a little heavy on the political analysis, that this really, there's a lot to criticize about this moment, and I certainly have done my fair share, but there's also a way that this has prompted immense displays of care and solidarity on behalf of people who I think probably were never politically active. And even if they didn't do it through a political framework, just people paying more attention to their neighbors and the, the

circumstances of even people that they don't know. That there really has been an outpouring of that sentiment. I think partially because of the crisis [55:00] and partially because of the intense isolation that every, that many of us are experiencing, I think, has motivated a kind of desire for connection and a reminder of like, that the best thing about being alive is what, is the human connections that we can create and sustain, however intimate and prolonged or fleeting they might be. And so, while I don't know if I've painted a dire picture and had a lot of political ranting to do, like it has really been a moment of feeling really touched and moved by the displays of connection and care that I've seen happening all over the place and both in my local community, but also just like reading about it online and hearing about it from friends who are [56:00] elsewhere. So that gives me hope and I think is a, if there's like a silver lining of this, which I don't know if it classifies as that, but it has been a reminder of what, what I think most people find to be most important.

AK: Well thank you so much for your time today and sharing all of these really amazing thoughts and moments in your life. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

SM: Thank you for doing the project.

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