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Amanda: Today is Thursday, March 24th, 2022. My name is Amanda Rigenbach and I am the manager for the Tumultuous 2020 Oral History Project at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. I'm currently at the ALPLM's recording studio with Lisa Badger, community organizer, community leader, as well as Springfield's third COVID-19 patient. We're going to be talking about her pandemic experience for the Tumultuous 2020 oral history project.

[0:00:32] Lisa, thank you so much for being here.

Lisa: My pleasure.

Amanda: We always start with the basics. When and where were you born?

Lisa: I was born right here, born and raised Springfield, Illinois.

Amanda: And what were your parents' occupations or are your parents' occupations?

Lisa: My mom was a state worker now retired.

Amanda: Was that kind of mindset of that public service instilled in you at a young age from your mom?

[0:01:00] Or was that something that you came up with throughout your own experiences?

Lisa: I think that the seed was planted early. Just being involved in the community, not necessarily in public service, but in community events. And then maybe some sparks were a little bit more reignited a little bit later on in my life.

Amanda: And did you go to Springfield High School?

[0:01:31]

Lisa: I went to Springfield Southeast High School.

Amanda: Okay. It's always funny, because when I interview long-time Springfield residents, it's either Springfield High School or Sacred Heart.

Lisa: Yeah, it's a lot.

Amanda: Yeah. And what about social justice? I know that that's always been a passion of yours as well. Can you talk me through that?

Lisa: Yeah, I mean, there have been some tumultuous times that we have gone through in the past few years.

[0:02:04] That has been, I guess, a reflection of the past several decades of our nation. And so I went back to school a little bit later in life, in my 30s, and I became a nurse. And I had every intention of pursuing an advanced practice nursing degree. And then the upheaval in Ferguson, Missouri came about in about, I think that was 2015.

[0:02:38] So I made some decisions and I went and obtained a bachelor's degree in legal studies, thinking maybe I would go on doing something in civil rights, maybe go to law school. And then I decided to go ahead and just obtain my master's degree in conflict resolution.

[0:03:00] So with my studies and my involvement in the community, social justice is just a really important passion of mine on several soap boxes that I can speak on.

Amanda: And Springfield is an interesting town to have that passion.

Lisa: It is.

[0:03:23] Being the capital of the state, with our history with Abraham Lincoln and the work that he did here and in Washington, DC as president, the 1908 race riots here, the development of the NAACP here, Springfield really has its stamp on a lot of big things throughout our history in the country.

Amanda: Absolutely. Have you found that sort of history has made it easier to make inroads in social justice movements or harder?

[0:03:58]

Lisa: That's a good question because it's definitely not an easy fight. It's still a fight. It's still a struggle. It's still a battle. And it may seem like it's small individual battles that we have to go through in the larger fight, but Springfield really is tied to its history. Some of that is good and some of that is bad. But I think we have to recognize the evil parts and the bad parts to understand and prevent things from happening currently or in the future.

[0:04:33]

Amanda: Absolutely. And so you were a nurse. I guess kind of walk me through that your career path a little bit.

Lisa: Okay, so I was a nurse and when I decided to go back to school I was working as a nurse in a clinic for Dr. Nicole Florence and we were doing internal medicine pediatrics.

[0:05:00] And I worked while I was obtaining my bachelor's degree but then when it came time to really crack down on my master's degree, I took a leave of

absence and I was teaching part-time in high school and working as a corrections nurse part-time too while I was obtaining my master's degree. And then I was able to secure employment with the Illinois State Treasurer's Office as a community affairs specialist.

[0:05:27] So I have not practiced as a nurse since, gosh, 2016 now.

Amanda: Wow. And so you were with the state treasurer as we kind of move towards the pandemic discussion in 2020?

Lisa: Correct.

Amanda: Then like I said, moving into that pandemic discussion, what was the beginning of 2020 like for you?

[0:05:54] You know, did you have any big goals for the year?

Lisa: It was very, very, very busy, but it was my normal life. It was traveling the state on behalf of the Illinois State Treasurer's Office, doing community outreach. So meeting with educational leaders, religious leaders, business leaders, community groups, every ordinary day citizens.

[0:06:23] And so it was busy. One of my duties in that role was planning the Treasurer's Black History Month celebration at the Capitol Building. And so that was one of my kind of favorite aspects of my job there. And so all throughout February, that's what I was really, really working on.

[0:06:50] And so it was just really busy. And then, you know, the other groups I'm involved in and involvement in the community, it was moving very fast.

Amanda: Yeah, so February and then shortly after was when COVID really became prevalent. How was the Black History Month celebration?

Lisa: It was great. It was wonderful. I mean, it, we honor people from all over the state.

[0:07:23] So people travel from all over the state, political figures, politicians, educational leaders. That particular year, we honored a current NFL player from here in Springfield, Illinois, Malik Turner. So it was a great celebration. I believe that was on February 27th. So wrapping up the end of February, I was looking forward to maybe things slowing down a little bit.

[0:07:55]

Amanda: And what does slowing down look like for you? I mean, what would that kind of downtime be like, you know, in a normal year?

Lisa: Yeah, having days off. You know, when you're working a lot of the time, six or seven days a week and then doing a lot of involvement in the community and going to events and things like that, it would just be having some downtime to just kind of rest and not be literally running all over town or all over the state.

[0:08:31]

Amanda: And, you know, with that job, I think we had discussed in our pre-interview that you were able to kind of be privy to information that wasn't always available to the general public?

Lisa: Yes, there's sometimes some confidential nature of the role, and then also being a locally elected official and kind of being involved in those circles with other elected officials, whether locally or statewide, sometimes you do have a little bit of extra knowledge about current events and things that are going on.

[0:09:22]

Amanda: And so I was going to ask if you had heard much about the virus in those early months.

Lisa: Not from anyone in Illinois, really. I had a good friend, she works for a statewide elected official, and we were watching it and discussing it. My daughter, who was a senior in high school at the time, we were kind of watching it and discussing it and seeing, you know, what is this going on?

[0:09:55] This strange, mysterious virus is starting to hit the West Coast, cruise ships, you know, what's going to happen? And so we were keeping an eye on it throughout the beginning of March, but we did not have any idea the magnitude and the up front nature would hit where it did and when it did.

Amanda: Absolutely. And not to go back too much, but I know that I saw one of the things that you were doing in the end of February or was it in March, was, you went to the Women's March?

[0:10:42]

Lisa: I did. I went to the Women's March here in Springfield. It's not unusual to go to different community events, rallies. That one was outside. I had been at the governor's mansion approximately two times in the week or two before for different events for Black History Month and Women's History Month, which is March. So yeah, just that's normal to go to different events all the time.

Amanda: And January 30th was the day that the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a public health emergency, but I mean, I think it wasn't until much later that COVID first came to the United States.

[0:11:27] And then Illinois didn't really start to feel the effects until March and that was really kind of when you've started feeling those effects as well, right?

Lisa: Correct.

Amanda: And so can you tell me a bit about what it was like that Thursday you told me about when you started, you had dinner with that friend?

Lisa: So it was on a Friday. I had dinner with the friend that I had just recently mentioned.

[0:11:54] And we discussed COVID. You know, do we think it's a big deal? Is it really going to be widespread? They're locking people in their homes in China and leaving cruise ships out in the ocean. And so it was starting to be like, what is this thing and is it gonna reach every corner of the world? And so we went to dinner that night, we talked about it, we shared a meal.

[0:12:23] And then we went home and we talked on the phone about it for even longer. You know, just chatting with a friend. Then a day later, the Sunday, was the Women's March. Went to that. The day before that, on Saturday, went to the mall and dinner with my daughter and one of her friends. Just normal, living your life activities.

[0:12:51] Monday and Tuesday, I was feeling kind of run down and maybe even had a very, very slight temperature of 100.5. But being a nurse, any time I think that I'm becoming too run down or that I would maybe even have a cold or something that could spread to somebody. I would take precautions and stay home.

[0:13:19] I'm very conscientious about that, you know, hand washing, things like that. And so Wednesday morning I woke up totally fine. I thought, okay, I just needed some rest. I've been going to all these events. I've been working a lot. I was just run down and needed some rest. So Wednesday I went to a career fair for high school students at Lincoln Land Community College on behalf of my employer.

[0:13:47] And I didn't have a lot of interaction with a lot of students, but I did have some close interactions with some students I know. And then I left work. I went and got my nails done. I think I ran in the grocery store. I went to the park board meeting. The entire day I had hand sanitizer with me. Used it frequently as I usually do.

- [0:14:22] And then I went home after the park board meeting. There was another event being held downtown that I could have gone to, and I decided no, I'm just gonna go on, go home. I had felt kind of run down earlier in the week. I didn't want to push myself. So I went home. A couple hours later, I was sitting there watching TV. This was about 9 something at night.
- [0:14:48] My face started feeling very, very hot. And I thought, well that's strange. It's just getting hot all of a sudden. So I got up and I got the thermometer and took my temperature, and it was over 101, inching up to close to 102. And so I took a picture of the thermometer and I sent it to my mom and I said, hey I must be coming down with something.
- [0:15:15] And I took some ibuprofen and went to bed. And I had no idea when I went to bed that night how my life would change and what I would be facing in the weeks ahead.
- Amanda: And how did you feel when you woke up?
- Lisa: So when I woke up, I had a raging headache. My blood pressure was very high. I had a fever in the 101s, I think.
- [0:15:48] And I had this strange sore throat. I had never felt my sore throat the way that my throat was feeling at that time. And I said, there's something not right. I've had the flu before, I'm educated on illness. And so I thought, I better call my doctor. So my doctor's office happened at the time to be Dr. Nicole Florence, who I used to work for. And so I called the nurses who I was friendly with and said, hey, something's not right, this doesn't feel like the flu.
- [0:16:22] Do you think I should get tested for COVID? Thinking I have done hundreds of swabs for strep throat and flu and RSV and all of these other illnesses. I'm thinking it's that easy. All I got to do is run in the doctor's office to get this test. So they at the clinic knew very, very little and had very little direction about COVID protocols.
- [0:16:55] They're essentially at that time – and that was on March 11th, I believe – there were no COVID protocols in place. So they were following the very little only instruction they had from the Illinois Department of Public Health, which was to make sure that you test for strep and influenza first. So that's what I did. Drove over to an Express Care, which was a normal Express Care quick clinic at the time.
- [0:17:35] Walked into the very, very, very packed waiting room. I checked in, I asked the receptionist for a mask and she said I couldn't have one because I wasn't coughing. And I said, Ma'am, I'm being tested for these things and possibly

COVID, could you please give me a mask? I don't want to spread this, whatever it is.

- [0:17:59] And she said, well, you're not going to get tested for COVID here. And I said, ma'am, very firmly, please just give me a mask. Nobody had masks on that worked there. Nobody, none of the patients that were in the waiting room. So I stayed away from people as much as I could and I just stood up with a mask on. And the lab technician came back and got me, no mask, no gloves, swabbed my throat, went back home, about an hour later, negative strep, negative influenza.
- [0:18:36] So the nurses at the clinic and myself were following what we were told to do and we just kept on calling IDPH over and over and over. It was busy, it was ringing forever, nobody was answering this particular number they told us to call. So when I finally got an answer, the woman on the other line laughed and she said, I actually work at the Illinois Poison Control Hotline, they just put us on these phone lines because they're just so jam-packed.
- [0:19:10] So that is when the nursing staff and I started getting the sense that it was going to be difficult to get a COVID test. But we were following what we were supposed to do. Throughout this day, my temperature is going up and up and up. And I'm in the 102s and I'm feeling sicker and sicker. So we all submitted the information to IDPH as we were instructed to and they said, wait for a call back. So that afternoon I did receive a call back from someone at the Illinois Department of Public Health.
- [0:19:47] She was honestly quite rude and she gave me a code to be COVID tested. So through Dr. Florence and the nurses trying to arrange who was going to test me, where I was going to be tested, it was decided that I would drive behind that same express care clinic and be tested in my car. And so I told them I'm on my way, pulled up.
- [0:20:20] A nurse and a clinic manager came out, dressed head to toe, full PPE, and swabbed my nose and my throat while I was sitting in my car. Went home, isolated, keep on feeling sicker and sicker, get a call the next morning. They want you to retest. So this is Friday morning at this point, I think. No, this is Thursday. This is Thursday morning.
- [0:20:56] So I go back, go through the whole thing in my car, swab the nose and throat, go home and wait. By this time, I've told a few people, hey, I've been tested for COVID. One of them is one of the friends that I had had dinner with recently that I had talked about COVID with. The agency she works for, the elected official she works for, they sent her home throughout this.
- [0:21:27] I told my daughter and her friend to isolate themselves, so she was isolating at her dad's. Her friend was isolating at home. Nobody that I had been in

contact with was having any symptoms, but we just knew so little about COVID-19 at all. When I was tested, they handed me a sheet saying if I had ever traveled to China. No, I have not. I've been out of the country once and it was not to China and it was many years ago.

[0:21:59] And so there just was so much unknown about policy process. All of these things. And so then it was fear. It was my mom crying, my daughter crying, the unknown, what's going on, until Saturday when I got the results.

[0:22:30] So I had heard there was going to be a press conference with local health officials, the local medical community, so I was prepared to watch that. That was in the evening of Saturday, I believe the 14th. I got the call from the local health department that I had tested positive, right as that press conference was beginning.

[0:23:05] And they did say in the press conference that it was just found out that a local Springfield woman aged 40 tested positive. That was me. So you know I'm telling my close contacts, my family, everybody's worried sick, everybody's crying. Then I start getting texts and calls from people because the local health department shared my name when they were calling my close contacts.

[0:23:40] So nearly immediately my name was out there. So the entire park board knew, several local politicians that had been at the Women's March knew. They had contacted my estranged boyfriend at the time and told him. So he showed up at my house. And it was just it was scary and it was devastating news but right from the beginning it was an onslaught of communication from people.

[0:24:15]

Amanda: Just a couple of follow-up questions before we continue that. Getting tested the first time for COVID, with a nursing background, was seeing that full PPE daunting? Because you would know what it means.

Lisa: Yeah, it was. We were outside. We weren't in an isolation room where we knew that you had to take those precautions. We were starting to kind of see on the news that it was hitting certain areas and that maybe there was going to be shortages of PPE.

[0:24:55] And so me seeing that, yes, it did seem a little ominous.

Amanda: And you mentioned that you were working to calm down your mom and daughter.

Lisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: Would you say, were they a bit more scared than you, or were you not really able to be scared because of trying to be the person calming them down?

Lisa: I was scared of the unknown. And I was sick, and I just literally by the hour was getting sicker throughout the days.

[0:25:27] But trying to calm them down was more important of a priority to me than trying to calm myself down. Sometimes you have to put your own feelings aside to try to do for others, and that was one of those moments, definitely.

Amanda: And that press conference and hearing all these people calling you, what was that like knowing that your name had been released?

[0:26:07]

Lisa: I was disappointed, I was shocked, I was furious because as a nurse I never dreamed that my confidentiality would be broken. That is something that is very well instilled in you in nursing school or any type of medical training, and so I just assumed that when they were notifying people they would say you've come into contact with a person they wouldn't say who.

[0:26:46] And so I just was shocked that they had released that information knowing that it could potentially be harmful to me.

Amanda: And I read on an article from that time, there was discussion that the then director of the Health Department defended it, saying that during public health crises there's an exception in the HIPAA laws.

[0:27:30] How did you feel about that?

Lisa: I was not shocked that that was their stance to try to walk back their mistake. But I knew that that wasn't true. I knew that wasn't the law. I knew what they had done was wrong. And whether they did it intentionally or not intentionally didn't necessarily matter to me.

[0:28:04] But it was harmful to me as a person. Knowing my involvement in the community, I couldn't help but wonder if that's why they let my name out. And then I was also trying to reason that I can handle it. If it were some little elderly woman that lived alone and she was having to face those things, maybe she wouldn't be strong enough to deal with the backlash. So I was trying to tell myself I can handle it more than other people can.

[0:28:56] So I'm a pretty tough cookie. I've got thick skin. That's what I was telling myself at the beginning. But it became so incessant that it just went completely off the charts at that point. And by now we're at Sunday, March 15th.

[0:29:26]

Amanda: And by that point, March 9th is when the state of Illinois went into – or Governor Pritzker announced the disaster proclamation, and March 11th is when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. So things are really becoming more real with these declarations. When did the onslaught of people messaging you turn negative?

[0:29:56] Was it initially people being concerned, or when they initially messaged you after your information was released? What were people saying to you?

Lisa: The people closest to me were concerned. I have a general rule that I do not read news comments. I know when to turn off media. I know which media outlets are more fair and which ones are more salacious.

[0:30:31] I decided, and I told my family, do not read the media, do not read social media. At the time, and it's still in existence, there is a social media website that is a Springfield Gossip type of website. And they immediately put a post up on me, and so people were screenshotting it and sending it to me, screenshotting the comments and sending them to me.

[0:31:01] These were not just people that I'm close with or I'm friends with. These are people I haven't talked to in years that have my number and are sending me things. So that Saturday night is really when things started coming in and it just didn't stop all day Sunday. It was still my mom crying, my daughter crying, they're upset.

[0:31:33] People are starting to threaten my daughter because she's my daughter and she had to go into isolation. So when she was at school, did she infect people? It was such a rapid escalation of events that you couldn't even – I don't mean to use a pun here, but catch your breath.

[0:32:03] And I'm sick. And so Sunday night I told everyone I have to turn my phone off. I cannot listen to this and see this anymore. So I laid down, I was sick. I turned on my favorite television program on my computer and I was planning on just trying to block it all out.

[0:32:28] And I was getting notifications on my computer because it was every form of communication possible. It was text messages, phone calls, screenshots, email. I have several email addresses, Facebook messages across several different Facebook pages, LinkedIn messages. It just wouldn't stop.

[0:32:59] So I had to put out – I contacted a journalist that I respect and I had to put out a statement. And I was hoping that that would calm it down. It didn't, unfortunately.

Amanda: And we have your statement with us. Would you mind reading it?

[0:33:30]

Lisa: Sure. "Since learning over the weekend I'm one of the first confirmed cases of coronavirus in Sangamon County, my life has been turned upside down. I join everyone who's feeling fearful and uncertain about what is happening and what is to come. But I would please ask for time alone at home to recover with my family as our local, state, and federal officials work to stop the spread of this disease that has brought everything to a halt.

[0:33:58] I had no symptoms when I was in contact with the public from March 5th on. When I developed a slight fever and other symptoms that initially were un concerning last week, I stayed home from work and contacted my health care team. I have not been out of the country, had any known contact with anyone who has traveled abroad, nor have I had direct contact with anyone who has yet tested positive for coronavirus. I assume I contracted this virus through community spread.

[0:34:27] Please understand I used to work as a nurse and I'm very proactive about my health and underlying conditions. I'm in direct and constant contact with my doctors and recovering, although it is a slow process and I'm concerned about getting worse instead of better. I am a public official and proud of being open and accessible to my constituents and anyone who needs help. In addition to being a Springfield Park Board trustee, I work in a very visible position as a community affairs specialist in the state treasurer's office, and I am a union steward for Teamsters Local 916, a Democratic Precinct Committee person, and I'm involved in many other ways in Springfield.

[0:35:12] I take pride in being easy to reach. My family and I have been bombarded with negativity since my case went public. Hundreds of texts, voicemails, Facebook messages, and more. People are threatening to sue me. They've been terrible to my daughter. I understand everyone is scared. I'm scared too, but I've done nothing wrong. I have taken every precaution possible and I caught this from someone else.

[0:35:39] Now I need time to rest and recover without the overwhelming stress of so many personal attacks and accusations. Please stop reaching out to me and my family. Call the Sangama County Public Health Department and urge them to do more to help find out how I contracted the virus and do everything they can to test people with symptoms and ensure immediate treatment.

[0:36:05] If you're concerned about exposure at the Youth Career Fair I attended on behalf of the treasurer, please contact the treasurer's office. I love this community and I only wish to be well again and for all of us to be well. I will provide further updates as warranted. Thank you to everyone for respecting

our privacy and for banding together during this difficult time to stop this pandemic as soon as possible.”

[0:36:32]

Amanda: And that was March 15th?

Lisa: Yes.

Amanda: What was the general response to that?

Lisa: I have no idea. I wouldn't look. A lot of the messages that I received, I didn't open up for over a year because it was absolutely overwhelming. I was essentially begging. I was bawling.

[0:37:05] So it was just very difficult, and I can't emphasize enough, I'm getting sicker every day and having to deal with this on a good day would be difficult. I only kept in close contact with a few family members and a few close friends. I heard from some of those friends that they were nearly exhausted from defending me online and trying to get the truth out there.

[0:37:38] So it was very, very difficult for me but it was difficult for the people closest to me as well.

Amanda: And was your daughter isolating in your home or was she isolating elsewhere?

Lisa: She was at her father's house, so I was alone.

[0:37:58]

Amanda: And you also mentioned that you have a son who was sheltered from this.

Lisa: Yeah, he was only about 10 years old at the time and I did not want to scare him. So when everything shut down, he was with his dad. I was alone. I knew I was sick and I had to be alone. And so when we would talk or FaceTime or anything, he had no idea I had COVID. We didn't tell him until, goodness, over a year later.

[0:38:35]

Amanda: What was his response?

Lisa: He was upset that I didn't tell him, but he understood once I explained that I was trying to protect him and didn't want to worry him. So he was okay with it when it came down to it.

Amanda: And you mentioned that your daughter was being attacked by the parents of her high school?

[0:39:03]

Lisa: Yeah. You know, I would expect it more from youth, but to see her classmates' and schoolmates' parents saying some of the things that they were saying and hearing about it, where her school had to put out a statement to remind that bullying is not acceptable in any form, that was very, very disappointing.

[0:39:32] I wish I could say I was overly shocked, but just the vitriol and hate that was being spread by people I knew, people I didn't know, not just in Springfield but surrounding communities and surrounding counties, it was vicious.

Amanda: And you know you've talked about that social impact but physically you mentioned getting worse and worse. Can you walk me through your symptoms?

[0:40:10]

Lisa: Mm-hmm. So the first several days it was sore throat, headache, fever. From the beginning, under doctor's orders, I was taking fever reducers and pain relievers around the clock on schedule. Even while doing that I ended up having a fever for 23 days straight upwards in the 105s. It felt like my bones were breaking.

[0:40:50] Sometimes it would be my feet that felt like they were being crushed. Sometimes it was my hips or my elbows that it felt like I was in a vice. I never had a cough is one of the kind of the funnier things. I never once had a cough. I had a lot of chest pain and pressure and heaviness and it was very very tight like a rubber band was around it but I never coughed.

[0:41:24] It was very painful. I believe in the second week you know the doctors and nurses did check on me every day. We were in constant communication. As a nurse I knew the warning signs of if I'm in trouble and need immediate medical care. I sent in my address to the fire department to let them know in case I did call 911 that I was COVID positive.

[0:41:59] So the physical symptoms just kept on getting worse. So in about the second week I was getting no relief and I couldn't sleep all one night because my back hurt so bad I couldn't even sit. The fever just wouldn't break. And so the next morning the doctors and nurses made me go over to the express care that I referenced but at that point it had been turned into a respiratory emergency COVID center of sorts.

[0:42:42] And they were only seeing respiratory patients or COVID or COVID exposure. But they had a field tent in the parking lot, something like you would see in a military installation or something held down with sandbags.

And that's where I was seen was outside in that tent with nobody else around.

[0:43:10] Obviously, I had a mask on. And the two doctors and I believe two nurses that were out there – and I knew the two doctors, I had worked with them before – they treated me. And I believe I got a portable chest x-ray at that point, and they learned that I was also developing pneumonia and there were spots on my lungs.

[0:43:41] So they called ahead and they instructed me to drive to the hospital. I cried the whole way, I was terrified. I was alone, I'd been alone for over a week at that point. I called my best friend on the way and I was just bawling. And I pulled up, they had a triage center out in the ambulance bay. Walked up, I said, the medical team has called ahead, I am COVID positive.

[0:44:13] So they took me in the ER in a negative pressure room, an isolation room, that they had re-outfitted the entire ER. And they had full PPE. It was an interesting experience because still at the time, there were no treatments.

[0:44:45] There were no proven treatments, no medications. In talking with the doctor and the nurse, they couldn't give me a chest CT to see how bad my chest was developing because I would have then infected the equipment in the room. So I couldn't get the chest CT. So it was literally a guessing game to see how bad I was going to get.

[0:45:14] They offered to admit me, but I said no thank you because if there was no known treatments and I don't need to be on a ventilator yet, I would rather be at home where I'm more comfortable. And I don't want to expose anyone else. I don't want any doctors or nurses to come into contact with me if we can avoid it. With my medical training and with my medical team that was taking care of me I was confident that I would know if I needed emergent help.

[0:45:54] So I had some IV fluids administered, some pain medicine administered. I couldn't take anything too much because I was driving. And I went home. So from there, I was getting worse. I wasn't getting better. But total, like I said, the fever was 23 days. I was exhausted. My body had just been fighting so hard.

[0:46:29] I just was sleeping so much and I could barely keep my head up. Twice I was delirious and heard things from the fever getting so high. And so it was very, very, very scary.

Amanda: And I imagine when you were having those delirium episodes, being completely alone was probably very scary.

[0:47:00]

Lisa: Yeah. And I knew that I was delirious because I one of the things I heard was my son and he wasn't there. And I knew I was home alone and it was the middle of the night. And funnily, the other thing, it was like a mariachi band in my front yard. So I can't explain that, but I mean, it was definitely just from being so sick and the fevers being so high.

[0:47:28]

Amanda: That delirium, it only was episodes, you mentioned?

Lisa: Yeah, it was just brief in the middle of the night when I was awake. I knew how sick I was, I knew I was very sick, I knew what I was hearing in the distance wasn't there.

[0:47:54]

So I guess it rattled me a little bit but I knew I was very, very ill.

Amanda:

Did the people in your life know that you were that sick?

Lisa:

No, I don't think so. You know, I would tell a few people that I was close with about some of the symptoms that, you know, the pain, the fatigue, the fevers. One of my long time from childhood best friends is an RN and she would, you know, text me and check.

[0:48:30]

I was more honest with probably her and then my medical team but family and friends, I was really just trying to kind of ease their concerns and put on a brave face and I didn't want them to know how sick I was.

Amanda:

And was your medical team concerned about the severity of your symptoms? I

[0:48:59]

I mean, with the immense amount of pain that you were in?

Lisa:

I think they were just shocked as I was. No one knew anything then. Nobody knew if this was going to be so absolutely widespread that everybody I had come into contact with for two weeks prior was going to go down. You know, they were building emergency COVID centers and treatment centers and testing and, you know, all of these different things.

[0:49:34]

There was a shortage of tests, I didn't know. And it wasn't just the swabs, it was the reactor to it. There was a shortage of PPE. You know, you never think that in our society we're not going to have what we need to take care of people. So I think everybody was just kind of doing the best they can. Everything was shut down.

[0:50:04]

You know, people who were not ill and everything shut down statewide, people were out of work. People weren't going to school. There were

shortages on so many different types of supplies. It just, it shifted society so quickly that everybody was just pivoting as best as they could, I think.

[0:50:36]

Amanda: And, you know, not to go back, but that did just remind me about, I mean, I know you had mentioned how difficult it was to get your COVID test. In our pre-interview, did you mention that it was partly because a friend was able to contact the governor?

[0:50:54]

Lisa: Someone from the governor's staff did order the test, unbeknownst to me, at the time, because I didn't know that there was a shortage. And so someone from the governor's office did order IDPH to test me, because I had been around so many people, not just elected officials on every level, but also, you know, students and the community.

[0:51:32] And they were fearful that I potentially would be part of a mass spread or be involved in it somehow, even if it weren't me that spread it, if somebody had spread it to me, due to my work in the Capitol and the governor's mansion and the events and things like that.

[0:52:01]

Amanda: That makes sense. And then how were you able to get groceries and other materials during this isolation period?

Lisa: My friends, my doctor. My doctor made deliveries, my nurse practitioner made deliveries, Melanie Reynolds. You know, there was a time that I didn't eat for a couple days because I was so ill.

[0:52:32] And so I texted my best friend and I said, can you please make me a grilled cheese sandwich and bring it over? And so he would drop it off on the porch swing. A friend of mine, one of my best friends, owns a small family grocery store, so she could get me pretty much anything that I needed and she was great about bringing supplies. My other best friend, Lindy Lucas, the RN that I referenced, she went and picked up medicine for me.

[0:53:05] Even with a lot of the negativity, I saw just how great my friends are and my medical team. I didn't go without a thing at all. Except for heat. My heat went out during my isolation and I didn't have heat, but I did have space heaters that somebody dropped off. So I was able to jump over that hurdle as well.

[0:53:34]

Amanda: I don't know what the weather was like in Springfield in March. Did it get relatively cold?

Lisa: Yeah, it was cold. But I had a fever, so I was really, really hot. And, you know, you just bundle up and then with the space heaters – and I wasn't moving, I was pretty much couch bound. So I made do. I couldn't have anybody in my house and potentially expose them to look at my heat.

[0:54:07] So when you can't do anything about it, you just make do.

Amanda: During this time, I mean, I know in the beginning you said that there was fear. When you were in the midst of being so sick, were you scared? Or did you not really have the time to be scared?

Lisa: I was scared. I have thick skin and I have a fairly tough exterior.

[0:54:37] So you just brave through things. When you don't have a choice, you know, what are the options? You just do the best you can with the cards you've dealt. At one point, there was a nicer day in the second or third week that I had it because I was in isolation for a total of 26 days. I had propped open my front screen door to just get some fresh air at the house, because I had been cooped up for a couple of weeks at least by then.

[0:55:11] And police dispatch called me and said somebody had called it in to the police and they wanted to make sure I was okay because they knew I had been receiving threats. And so that was shocking on a couple of levels. First of all, that somebody would call the police on me for opening my front door to get fresh air.

[0:55:34] And secondly, that the police, everybody knew who I was in town as the COVID person who had been being harassed and receiving threats, that the police were watching out for me. So it was just bizarre.

Amanda: Do you know that the reason that the neighbor called was to report you? Or could it maybe have been that they were calling because they were concerned?

[0:56:05]

Lisa: I got the feeling from the police dispatch that somebody was reporting me.

Amanda: And to feel so watched must have been a very bad feeling.

Lisa: Yes, very much so. It was like being in a zoo because you're trapped and you feel like you're being watched.

Amanda: And listeners of the tumultuous 2020 project will know that Nicole Thornsworth was previously interviewed and she mentioned that you were

concerned about you know her being seen dropping off groceries for you because of you know what people might say.

[0:56:49]

Lisa: Yeah people were so angry with me that I didn't want any people close to me to be looked at as guilty by association or any other convoluted thoughts of, if she's dropping off groceries, is she walking around infected? There was so much mistrust and fear and rumors and speculation going around that I didn't want people to be mad at her because she's needed.

[0:57:24]

She's a great doctor. She does great work. And so yeah, I mean that was one of my many concerns throughout the ordeal.

Amanda: And when did you finally start to feel better? I mean, you said you had a fever for 21 days or 23?

Lisa: 23. And so it broke on the 23rd day. Protocol at the time was you had to remain in isolation for three days after your fever broke.

[0:57:52]

So those three days were long because I was so afraid it was going to pop back up. But on day 26, I contacted Dr. Florence and I said, it's been gone for 72 hours, three days. Am I free? And she said yes. So I went for a drive through Washington Park.

Amanda: And in spring I'm sure it was beautiful.

Lisa: It was so beautiful just to feel air on my face.

[0:58:30]

Because I had only left the house once when I went to the respiratory clinic and the ER. So in 26 days that was the only fresh air I had had at all. So it was a good day.

Amanda: What else did you do leaving the house for the first time that first day?

Lisa: I got fast food, which I'm not normally a fast food eater, but I think it was just the freedom and liberty of being able to do so, to go through a drive-thru with a mask on, of course.

[0:59:07]

And, you know, I just drove through and then, you know, from then on being released, I slowly started integrating myself back into work, working from home, because I had been in contact with my employer throughout the ordeal.

Amanda: I was just about to ask, were you able to be off the whole time?

Lisa: Yes. Yes, they were really good to me.

[0:59:38] And integrating myself, you know, throughout my illness, the world kind of pivoted and shifted to online format everything. So people were figuring out Zoom meetings and, you know, things like that. And so I was able to start integrating myself back into the Springfield Jaycees meetings and the park board meetings and things like that from home.

[1:00:09] It took me a few months to feel comfortable going outside in public at all. But it was very helpful with the masks. And you put a mask and a hat on and you're not as noticeable or noticed. So it helped me gain a little bit of my anonymity. But it took me a while to really feel comfortable being outside or being around people or going anywhere or anything like that.

[1:00:42]

Amanda: And a couple of follow-up questions about what you just mentioned. What types of groups are you involved in? So I know you're a Park Board trustee. What else?

Lisa: I'm a Springfield Jaycee. I'm a Democratic precinct committee person. I was formerly a union steward for the Teamsters. I am now a business agent employed full-time with Teamsters Local 916.

[1:01:19] EastPAC, different, you know, community organizations, neighborhood groups, things like that.

Amanda: And the Jaycees, that's like a national...

Lisa: That's an international.

Amanda: And what is it exactly?

Lisa: It's a service organization for young people. They let me stay on even though I've aged out. And they volunteer.

[1:01:53] They do so much in the community. They host the annual Holiday Lights Parade. They host the 4th of July fireworks. Lots of different service projects and volunteer opportunities with them throughout the community. So they're a really great group of people.

Amanda: And EastPAC?

Lisa: That is a, like a political action committee focused on the east side of town.

[1:02:22]

Amanda: Which seems to be the getting the brunt of disinvestment in the city, is that right?

Lisa: Absolutely, yeah.

Amanda: And what was that like rejoining these organizations? Not necessarily that you weren't joined, but you know coming back after being gone, were the people supportive of you? Was there, was it taboo to talk about it? You know, what was that like for you?

[1:02:51]

Lisa: No, it wasn't taboo. I mean, for the first few months, probably the most common question was, what was it like? Is it as bad as they say it is? You know, because people were passing away worldwide by then. And so being one of the first, you know, maybe 50 people in Illinois to contract it is – I mean, it was so early.

[1:03:21]

And so not everybody at the time knew somebody that had had it except for me. Luckily, nobody that I had come into contact with, to my knowledge, got it. So, you know, all the people very close to me all tested negative. Nobody had symptoms. Everyone isolated that I had come into contact with, to my knowledge. And so, it just, you know, people were curious.

[1:03:51]

To the friendly people, I had no problem answering my friends' questions. I still didn't tell everyone about the severity of it, but I told everyone, you don't want to get this, you know? Follow the protocol, like socially distance, wear a mask. And throughout that whole summer the world was still shut down. My daughter was a senior in high school.

[1:04:22]

They closed down her senior year. No graduation, no more yearbook, no prom. They canceled the end of the school years. You know, everyone nearly was working from home. So many businesses closed for quite a while. And as we learned more and we had information, we started being less restricted. Like, we could go out and do things outside. You know, some businesses were able to open back up under certain circumstances.

[1:04:55]

It's just the world literally changed and everybody was trying to roll with it. But slowly they were learning more about the virus and they were learning about some possible treatments and trying to get tests available. So during that summer, I heard that the Sangamon County public health testing site was going to be closed. And I thought, well, that can't happen.

[1:05:27]

Where's everybody going to go? There's nowhere to test children besides there. So I called some elected members of the legislature. I called everyone I knew. I called people on the school board. I called people on the city council. I called people in other counties. And I just said, hey, I don't want anybody to know I'm doing this, but we got to get a movement going to keep this testing center open because this isn't over.

[1:06:00] This is going to be going on for quite a while and people need to know. We need to do everything that we can do to stop the spread of this virus so people don't have to go through this stuff.

Amanda: Why didn't you want your name associated with it?

Lisa: I didn't want there to be any negative connotation to the movement of trying to keep it open, first of all.

[1:06:23] I didn't quite know if the fallout had ended. And then also, it wasn't important for me to have the recognition of it, it was important for me to have it done. So I called everyone I know and it stayed open, but I didn't need my name attached to it.

Amanda: And did you say that was the summer of 21?

Lisa: That was the summer of 20.

[1:07:03]

Amanda: Wow. And we'll get to talk more in depth about some of those aspects of the summer, but another follow-up question about the organizations that you're part of and just in general, were people cruel to your face? Because one thing that people have noticed is that people tend to hide behind the keyboard when they're being overtly awful.

[1:07:31] Did you experience any of that directly?

Lisa: I wouldn't say that I did because there wasn't the opportunity to. I still remained pretty isolated through most of 20. One of the things I failed to mention when I recovered from the illness acutely was that I was still a medical guinea pig in a way.

[1:08:08] So I was being sent to numerous specialists, not only because of the damage that had been done to my body, but because they wanted to know more. What did it do to my body? You know, what are the potential repercussions of this?

[1:08:29] I also donated plasma a couple of times, convalescent plasma, to try to help out somebody else that would maybe need help recovering. And through testing at the immunologist and the donating of the plasma, they discovered that I hadn't developed the antibodies to protect me from getting COVID again. So I knew I could get COVID.

[1:08:54] At the time, people were saying, oh, well, maybe we should just get it and get it over with because once you get it, you're going to be immune to it. So I'm trying to educate people and tell people, no, you can get it again. I've been

told by numerous people I don't have the antibodies. And if people are recovering and not getting their antibodies tested, they shouldn't assume that they're protected and they can't get it again, because if I get it again, I'm afraid it's going to kill me next time. So I was really isolated. I, you know, was really careful.

[1:09:25] My mom isn't in great health, so she was in the house isolated for over a year. You know, anything we did was porch drop off, even Christmas. I stayed away from people a lot. When I dropped my daughter off at college in August of 20, they wouldn't let anybody in the dorms to drop your kids off at college for the first time in Chicago.

[1:09:54] I had to drop her off on the curb with all of her things. So still throughout 20, there was not much opportunity for face-to-face contact. And if I did have to go in public, I almost always wore a hat with my mask, and you couldn't really recognize me.

Amanda: And were there long-term social impacts from your isolation? I mean, did you develop anxiety being around people and whatnot?

[1:10:32]

Lisa: Yeah. You know, before I got sick and before the pandemic, I never really watched much television, and I got used to just sitting at home by myself and just streaming every show possible to watch. I limited who I am comfortable around and who I trust, which is very few people.

[1:11:05] I try to preserve my energy, not only physically, but mentally. But I was still sick for months. I mean, even though the fever broke, and even though I didn't have the acute symptoms, you know, throughout 20, I couldn't carry a laundry basket up and down the stairs without being out of breath, or try to plant some flowers, you know, just light gardening.

[1:11:32] I was still very, very easily fatigued. So it took me close to a year to start really feeling better. And it wasn't until after I received my first vaccine that I started feeling any better at all.

Amanda: So you experienced what people call long COVID?

[1:12:00]

Lisa: Yes.

Amanda: What was that like when you got your first vaccine dose?

Lisa: I was so happy. I was eligible fairly early when vaccines started becoming available because I have my nursing license. But I refused to get it until my

mom got hers. I wanted her to be able to be protected. I felt like I was taking it away from her.

[1:12:27] So the first person in my family to be vaccinated was my uncle in Chicago. He is a pipe fitter, but they were working on a hospital, so the hospital vaccinated all of them. So he was vaccinated in January of 21. So he was the first one in the family. And when he texted me that he got the vaccine, I nearly cried. I was so happy that we were finally going to start seeing the other end of this terrible, terrible thing that has ripped apart our society, made so many people ill, so many people have passed on.

[1:13:06] So I could have gotten it around that time. And I talked to a doctor that I used to work with, Dr. David Sandercock. He was one of them that took care of me when I had COVID. I used to work with him, great doctor. I'd run into him and he said, have you been vaccinated yet? And I told him I was waiting until my mom could be vaccinated first. And he remarked something along the lines of, after everything you've been through, that's really, it says a lot about you that you would do that.

[1:13:42] But I said, well, I'll just keep on following the protocols. So then my mom got it. And so then I was really happy. And then when I got mine, it's just this sense of relief that there's a treatment, there's something preventative to stop so much suffering that's gone on in the world. So it was a pretty monumental occasion.

Amanda: And what month was that in?

[1:14:28]

Lisa: I believe I got mine in March of 21.

Amanda: So you waited quite a while.

Lisa: Yeah.

Amanda: Was part of the reason that your mom got it then, was it because she had some reservations?

[1:14:42]

Lisa: It wasn't available, totally. As it was rolling out, it wasn't as widely available and it was hard to get appointments. And so I was staying up until midnight every night on the drugstore websites trying to get in to get her in for an appointment. And then just as it was becoming more available, we were finally able to get her in.

Amanda: Wow.

[1:15:09] And not to go back, but I'm curious to talk a bit more about those long-term impacts that you experienced with COVID. You had mentioned that you went to an immunologist and not developing an immunity, but you also mentioned going to a specialist for your heart.

Lisa: Yeah, so when I got COVID, like I've said, there was no treatment, no treatment plans, no ideas.

[1:15:39] My medical team and I talked through the pros and cons of everything, what we should do. And we decided I should maybe start taking a daily aspirin to prevent strokes because we were seeing studies coming out from Asia and Europe that there was an extra association of risk factor for a stroke.

[1:16:00] So it wasn't gonna hurt me, so started taking an aspirin, but my blood pressure was just so out of control. I mean, it was in the 230s over 150s. I mean, we're talking stroke levels. Just constantly. And so it's almost like it was a little mini hurricane that went through my body and just did damage and just left it behind.

[1:16:27] And we had to figure out a way to repair that damage. And so trying different treatments, different medications. And then like I said, after I received my first vaccine, I started feeling a little bit better as well.

Amanda: You don't have to answer if you don't feel comfortable, but I hope now you have a good, clean bill of health for the most part?

Lisa: I mean, I feel like COVID aged me, but I think that that's mentally and physically.

[1:17:01] I think that it's been a really couple hard years, a couple of really hard years that we've all gotten through to different levels. Some people have lost loved ones. Some people haven't been too adversely affected. I mean, it's just so different. Everybody has a different story with it. So I'm a lot better than I was for a long time, but it definitely it aged me.

[1:17:38]

Amanda: And I know you mentioned it took a while for you to start to feel comfortable and just to start feeling better mentally from the trauma and the cruelty.

Lisa: Absolutely. And it's still very frustrating that over two years later, just over two years later, that people still bring it up to me constantly. A week doesn't go by without somebody referencing that I was one of the first people to have COVID in Illinois or that I was harassed or that, you know, just bring up some element of it.

[1:18:17] So I feel like I am still walking around with a scarlet letter on my chest, but the scarlet letter is a C for COVID or coronavirus and that's not what I want to be remembered for. But I think it's important to be honest with how society was. You know, there, there are a lot of amazing things and stories that have come out of the pandemic, but that it wasn't all like that.

[1:18:54] You know, everybody had a really different, unique perspective and it's definitely changed our society and a lot of relationships within the society over the past two years.

Amanda: Oh man, the thought that I had just went out the window. Um, and then, I mean, wow. Just your story. Oh, I was going to ask, you know, when people bring it up to you, I mean, do they do it in a way that's just meant to be casual and just flippant?

[1:19:34]

Lisa: I think so. Some try to, you know, make a joke of it, or I think some people don't understand that what they say does maybe hit a certain place. You know? I brush it off, or I'll make a joke or something, depending on who it is. But it's just something that I'm still associated with, and I don't know how long it's going to take for that to go away.

[1:20:14]

Amanda: Would you have come out publicly with the third COVID case in Sangamon County if the health department hadn't released your information to certain people?

Lisa: I don't know because I wasn't given the opportunity. I wanted people to be informed about it. I definitely wanted people I had been in contact with to know that they needed to isolate.

[1:20:42] But they took that opportunity away from me when they released my name. So that's hard to say.

Amanda: And I know you mentioned that you had even spoken to an attorney and you had mentioned that you had a publicist help you draft that statement. What was that like working in the middle of a pandemic and feeling so wronged?

[1:21:15]

Lisa: I was devastated. I mean, I was bawling to an attorney and a publicist that I didn't even know, I was meeting on the phone for the first time regarding this. But I knew what they had done and the privacy that they had violated and what they were putting me through, I knew it wasn't right. And so I wanted the wrong to be righted.

- [1:21:39] And I didn't want it to happen to anybody else because who knew who the next person that tested positive was and if they would be able to be as resilient as I can be. If it were somebody else who couldn't take that much criticism or was harmed because of this, I just didn't want the practice to continue.
- [1:22:03] I wanted them to be called out for it. I was literally begging people to leave my family and I alone was the intent of going and putting out that statement. But I also felt like a lot of people weren't taking it seriously yet, and so I also wanted people to know that anybody can get this. It is indiscriminate. I was just living my life.
- [1:22:37] You know, I wasn't working in a hospital with sick people. I hadn't traveled to China or any of the, you know, risk factors that were being named at the time. So I did want it to be also about a public service announcement kind of to just educate people and inform them.
- [1:22:57] So I just was trying to make the best decisions I could at the time with some bad cards dealt to me.
- Amanda: And then moving into the summer of 2020, I know was it around then that you did an interview with Dr. Florence?
- Lisa: That was over a year later, a little over a year later. So Dr. Florence puts on a web series of interviews with local people and she contacted me and she said, you know, I haven't done this for a year because we've been isolated for a year with COVID.
- [1:23:39] Nobody's been meeting up or going anywhere. And she said I think it would be important for people to hear your story if you're willing to and restart her series with with me being such an early COVID case and her series having to be shut down because of COVID. So I thought about it and I agreed to it because throughout from day one I had been fairly onslaught with media requests from different media outlets, television, print.
- [1:24:22] And I wasn't cooperative. I wouldn't talk to any reporters except for the one that I chose to and I didn't like how I was being sensationalized. And I wasn't watching any of it or reading any of it on the media. So I chose not to talk to the media at all, but I'm comfortable with Dr. Florence. She's my friend. I know her style. And we were in her backyard where we've hung out and had dinner and drinks before.
- [1:25:06] So I said yeah I'll go and we can talk about it a little bit, so that's what we did. That was in March or April of 21.
- Amanda: And that actually got a little bit of media attention itself, didn't it?

Lisa: It did. Reporters reached out to me because they saw it. And I didn't respond, you know, declined. And then they were reaching out to her to try to get her to talk, and she, on my behalf, declined out of, you know, respect for me.

Amanda: Well, I certainly do appreciate you being willing to interview for this Moral History Project.

[1:25:51]

Lisa: I think that it's important. History's important. We can't fix things if we don't know about them. So, if, God forbid, there's some other pandemic or emergency or anything like that in our society, in our lifetime, I hope we can look back at this and we can do better than we did this time. Because, like I said, while there were some great things to come out of it, there were some really, really terrible things to come out of it too.

[1:26:20] And so, when we know better, we do better. And I think that from a historical perseverance aspect, I think that it's important to tell. But I just want it done in a way that's not sensationalized or any kind of clickbait.

Amanda: Absolutely. Yeah, that's not what we do here.

Lisa: Yeah.

Amanda: And then, kind of going through this last part, through that summer and then the rest of the pandemic years – the project is called Tumultuous 2020, but clearly the pandemic has spanned much farther.

[1:27:03] I know that you were able to resume some of the community service. And we discussed this bit before we started recording, your role in renaming the Stephen Douglas Park. Is that what it's called? Stephen Douglas Park?

Lisa: That's what it was. So yeah, I mean, even though the world kind of stopped, there's still work to be done.

[1:27:31] There were still things going on in the world. There was a lot of tension over the murder of George Floyd. And so, you know, after we had been cooped up for so many months in 2020, people started having rallies and things again. And because I didn't want to be in close proximity with people and I didn't want to be recognized as much, I would, for the most part, stay on the outskirts of those.

[1:27:59] One time there were some young people that were holding protests down at the Capitol and a doctor I used to work with reached out to me and she said, I want to help those young people. What can I do? And I said, they need to be fed, so she ordered 20 pizzas and I went and picked them up and took them

to them. So I would still have roles and things, but maybe not quite in the front seat as much as I used to.

[1:28:29] But a group in the community reached out to me and asked if I would bring it to the park board to change Stephen Douglas Park to Frederick Douglas Park due to Stephen Douglas's association with slavery. And I said, yes, I'll be your ally. And so that did pick up some negative press, some negativity in people in the community. But, it's never the wrong time to do what's right.

[1:29:09] And so, no matter what I've been through in my life, that's not going to stop me from doing what's right. Just because other people behave badly or poorly or are ignorant or uneducated about things, that doesn't mean that I have to follow suit. So we did get the park name changed, and it was actually changed to Otis B. Duncan Park, who is a local here from Springfield, war hero, among other accolades.

[1:29:47] So, the park was successful in being renamed during a lot of the racial strife and things going on in 2020. So, it was a rocky year.

Amanda: Was the group that approached you disappointed that it wasn't named after Frederick Douglass?

Lisa: They just wanted it changed from Stephen Douglass. They preferred Frederick Douglass, and I actually became friendly with one of his great, great grandsons, Kenneth Morris, who lives in Rochester, New York, and who's also a descendant of Booker T. Washington.

[1:30:29] He's a great man and does great work all over the world. And so, while it was disappointing to us that it wasn't changed to Frederick Douglass, at least it wasn't honoring a man who was associated with slavery any longer, and that was the greater goal.

Amanda: And was it difficult to not be as involved in the protests as you might have been? Or was it okay for you to be able to take that step back?

[1:31:09]

Lisa: It was okay for me to be able to take that step back. I've been organizing things since high school. And I don't always need to be the one to take credit or to have my name in the news or anything like that. That's not my style. And so for, I believe it was around Juneteenth maybe, Sunshine Clemons from Black Lives Matter and some other community activists, Alderman Sean Gregory and some other people, they organized a car parade.

[1:31:54] So we could socially distance still and not be around each other, but we could still do things that we were used to doing and honor things that we were used to honoring. So you just had to be creative sometimes.

- Amanda: And then getting to the fall of 2020, I know that you are a very politically aware person. What was that election season like while also being in the pandemic?
- Lisa: It was very different. Like I just said, you had to be creative. So as a precinct committee person and an elected official and somebody who's just very involved in political organizing and things like that, we're used to knocking doors. Can't do that anymore. Nobody's going to answer.
- [1:32:45] You don't want to disrespect anybody or be rude or come into contact with something yourself. So door knocking was out. So we had to maybe do some literature drops on doorsteps a little bit more. And getting petitions signed for people to run for office. We basically just had to reach out to people and drive all over town and get them one at a time.
- [1:33:16] But the presidential election, it felt so pivotal. They always say this is the most important election of our lifetime, but it really felt like it. Getting through the pandemic after being lied to so many times by people in charge of the federal response was so disappointing. It literally killed hundreds of thousands of people.
- [1:33:44] The racial strife and the racial divisions and the hate coming out from some people's mouths, it's almost like the former president gave people permission or a pass to behave badly towards people. And so that is why people reacted to me being sick the way that they did.
- [1:34:11] Because it's almost like for the past few years they've been given a pass to make fun of people and be mean to people and to be hateful and to not respect people's differences. So it was the most important election of my lifetime so far. And so we just did what we could to get out the vote and did drive-through petition signings.
- [1:34:41] And on Election Day, I'm out there bright and early at my precinct with my judges. You know, I drop them off breakfast, and then I went to the drive-through at the local operator engineers to do whatever we can to still try to canvas and get people to vote and to get people to the polls and to educate people. And then we saw we weren't going to get results that night.
- [1:35:11] And so it was an exhausting day. And then waiting and waiting and waiting and seeing the mass chaos of getting that election certified. You know, we heard that Biden won, and I was so relieved. And I've met President Biden, and he's a lovely, very, very nice man.
- [1:35:41] And it was the first election my daughter voted in, so I drove her ballot to Chicago to make sure that she could vote. And when we heard we were together. You have a sense of joy and a sense of relief when you find out.

[1:36:06] And then I literally, I threw up because it was like this whole year of 2020 was so chaotic and exhausting. And it's almost like I had to purge myself of the year. So I wasn't expecting to react that way. I never thought I would react that way, but that's how my body reacted.

[1:36:38]

Amanda: And it was also in the fall that you had a little bit of a job change.

Lisa: Yep, so I was offered a job full-time with the Teamsters as a business agent. I'd been a Teamster for a few years. I was union steward. My Teamsters family has been great to me, especially when I was sick. I've been a delegate on Central Illinois Trades and Labor for a few years, so I've been in the labor movement for a while.

[1:37:12] But being a female business agent is more unusual than not. And so that's really a progressive step. I'm the only female business agent in this area and only a one of a handful in the state.

Amanda: And so do you enjoy being a business agent?

[1:37:37]

Lisa: I love it. I mean, I think with any profession, there's good days and there's bad days and there's tough days and there's easier days. But I really enjoy doing whatever I can to help people. And in this role, I can. I can help fight for people to be treated fairly, do whatever we can to make sure that they are making a living wage, they have safeties and protections in the workplace.

[1:38:06] So I think it's a really good fit. And I just really hope to be able to continue to make a difference.

Amanda: And again, moving in that chronological order that we were, that we are, we've talked about vaccines and so kind of getting into that 2021, there was a lot of hope. Was that particularly meaningful for you, given your experience?

[1:38:35]

Lisa: I think so. And so it was disappointing that vaccines became a political issue and that any of the pandemic and vaccines and masks and all of it were politicized in any way. I find that ridiculous. Viruses don't discriminate. They don't know what, who you vote for. You know, they can harm you no matter what.

[1:39:04] So vaccines, I just guess I was naive again and just thought, oh, here's something that'll help us. Everybody's going to want it. Everybody's going to go get it. And then that became politicized too. So that was disappointing. So there was a hopeful yet disappointing aspect to vaccinations.

Amanda: And that was going to be one of my questions was, summer of 2021, Illinois moves into phase five. It's almost complete reopening.

[1:39:38] Did you think that that was an appropriate timing?

Lisa: I think that the elected officials who had to make these decisions as new information was constantly rolling out did their absolute best. I think that they were listening to the science. As they had more information, they were able to make more informed decisions.

[1:40:10] At the beginning when nobody knew anything, we could have been like China where they were soldering people's doors shut. In Spain, children weren't allowed out to play in the yard for months. They weren't even allowed to go outside. And so we definitely had a lot more freedom than a lot of other places in the world, but I think that we had to do the best we can to make decisions in predicaments that we never thought that we would be in.

[1:40:44] Whether that's on the local level of closing parks and playgrounds and facilities, or on the statewide level, which is closing businesses and different things like that. I trust the current state administration as they've made these decisions because it is very, very, very likely they have more information than the general public and they have experts that we have to listen to.

[1:41:19] So opening slowly, I think that's the right move. Better than doing nothing the whole time and we would have lost more lives. But it's not an easy decision for anybody in office. And I would rather be informed when making decisions and informed about what's going on than the truth being ignored or being lied to.

[1:41:54]

Amanda: Most definitely. And then kind of with that, Illinois went back to the mask mandate in that August of 21 because of the rise of Delta and then in fall and winter came Omicron and with that came your second round of COVID.

Lisa: Yes. So, you know, families hadn't gotten together for years and so there were 11 of us on Christmas. All of us had been vaccinated. Some of us were masked.

[1:42:32] We were only together for about two hours and somebody in the family that had tested negative on December 24th became symptomatic on December

26th. He worked in the hospitality industry. He likely caught it at work. He was trying to be proactive and test ahead of time before he was around anyone, but it slipped through.

[1:43:03] And so five of the 11 of us came down with COVID and it was my second round. And so I wasn't mad at the person. I was just disappointed that for so long I had been so careful. And then one time you were careless, you contract it again. So even though I was double vaccinated and boosted, Omicron got me.

[1:43:34] And so I had COVID for the second time. Had a fever for 11 days. It never went over 102. It stayed in the 100s and 101s. But I spent New Year's Eve. Didn't make it to midnight. And so that was kind of my ringing the new year was with COVID round two.

Amanda: I do have to say that your holiday gathering being only 11 people and everyone being vaccinated, that doesn't seem irresponsible. It seems like you guys did everything that you could.

[1:44:12]

Lisa: We tried. I mean, we've all as a family been very responsible about this the entire time. We've stayed apart. We haven't gotten together for graduations or birthdays or holidays or anything. And so we did what we could.

Amanda: And it also sounds like that your experience with COVID the second time was a lot worse than many people who've had COVID once before.

[1:44:43]

Amanda: I mean, from what I'm hearing, also at the time, 40% of my office had it randomly from other sources. So we were constantly checking on each other and comparing to see, how are you feeling? What are your symptoms? And I definitely had it worse than everybody else, but it was so much better after being vaccinated after the first time that in comparison, it was uncomfortable, but the fever wasn't nearly as bad.

[1:45:19] The pain wasn't nearly as bad. It was just fever, headache, cough this time, and fatigue. So I just slept a lot.

Amanda: And well, I mean, now we're in 2022 and as of March 1st, the mask mandate has lifted, and I'm seeing you without one.

Lisa: Yeah.

Amanda: Do you feel that things are kind of coming to a close?

[1:45:48]

Lisa: I feel that way, yes. People are returning to work. Not nearly as many people are wearing masks. Some still are and that's fine. Some people may always and that's fine too. There will be instances where I will always wear a mask, I think like when I fly. But I feel like it's wrapping up. I mean, we're hearing about another sub variant that's kind of going around and so we'll see if it starts ticking up numbers around here.

[1:46:21] And if that is the case then I will be more vigilant on protecting myself and others. But I do feel like hopefully this pandemic is hopefully ramping down and we're getting on the other side of it.

Amanda: And coming to these closing questions, I'm always curious to ask people, do you think that your hometown, Springfield, and background and experiences affected the way that you responded to the pandemic?

[1:46:58]

Lisa: I don't know because I feel like my particular situation with the pandemic is so unique because I was so sick so early. So how it played out for the rest of everybody else for the most part is very, very different. I did see some good community things. There were food giveaways and mask giveaways.

[1:47:33] And I was in part of the food giveaways after I got better. That is Springfield, you know, people coming together. This hateful aspect of it, the negative aspect of it, I don't feel as though that is who we are overall as a people. I feel like most people are inherently good.

[1:47:59] But I do feel as though the internet and social media, people hiding behind keyboards, and like I said, the previous federal administration giving people permission to be mean to other people. And hopefully we get away from that at some point. I mean, yeah, fingers crossed because our kids, I don't want my kids to experience those things as they get older.

[1:48:33] And I am a fan of young people. I mentor college-aged people sometimes, and you know, talking to my own kids, I think that these younger generations, I think they have the capabilities to make the world a much, much kinder and gentler and just better place to be in.

[1:49:02]

Amanda: So do you have hope for the future?

Lisa: I do. I can be cautiously optimistic sometimes. Those who know me know that I can be fairly cynical sometimes. But I am hopeful. I'm hopeful we're going to get past the pandemic. I'm hoping a lot of people will change for the better. I'm hoping that some of the rifts in our society will finally end.

[1:49:33] I know that it is never going to be a fast process. It never has been a fast process, but it's a process that I'm committed to still working towards.

Amanda: And is there anything that you look back on over these pandemic years and wish that you had done differently?

Lisa: I thought that my house would be more in order by now, but I was sick for a year.

[1:50:08] No, I think we made the best of it. I think we did everything we could. When the fair was closed, we made fair food at home. When we couldn't go to the movies, we went to the drive-in. When we couldn't go on a vacation, we went and drove around Amish country. You do the best you can.

[1:50:37] My 12-year-old son said to me recently, he said, I don't care if you're the dumbest person or the smartest person or if you're athletic or if you're not athletic. What matters to me is if you try. And I found it profound that a young person at the age of 12 has that mindset that as long as you're trying to make things better or you're trying, then that should be good enough.

[1:51:10]

Amanda: Definitely. And I kind of want to close the interview talking about your philosophy behind public service and how that has been impacted by the pandemic and by your experiences with the pandemic. It's a big question.

Lisa: It is. I mean, here are certain aspects to public service and politics that I do not care for.

[1:51:45] There is a superficiality that I am not on board with. There is, to some people, an attention-seeking factor that I am not on board with. I do it for the work. I do it for other people. I'm not paid for any of this. I spend a lot of my own time doing for other people, people I don't even know, just because it's the community that I grew up in and I want it to be a better place.

[1:52:20] I can be cynical at times, but I don't think that the pandemic or my experience has affected my desire and my ability to serve the public in any way. If not, it has shown me where there are greater areas of need, and so we need to work on that.

[1:52:49] So I will work with whoever I need to work with to make those things happen, because to me public service is not about the limelight or name recognition. It's about taking care of needs of the community and other people, and so I am hopeful. And even if I am not in an elected role, I suspect I will always be involved in community service in some way until it's time to pass on the torches to the other people and the younger people.

[1:53:26] And so I think we can do better and I think we should and I think we will.

Amanda: And one of my favorite questions to close with is if you could say anything to yourself pre-pandemic, what would it be?

Lisa: Immediately prior to the pandemic and contracting COVID, I wish we would have known.

[1:54:07] So I guess I would have told myself to trust my gut and start taking precautions earlier. Because I was watching it, but I was listening to certain public officials that were saying that it was no big deal and that we were going to be fine. And so I wish I would have trusted my gut and been wearing a mask, been staying away from people, preparing my mom and other things like that prior to.

[1:54:50]

Amanda: And is there anything that you know of all the things that we've covered and I think that you would like to add? ‘

Lisa: Not that I can think of right now. I think we've covered a lot. It's hard to put two years into a nutshell when you're dealing with things that are of such epic proportions. But I think we've covered a lot.

[1:55:22] Really all I want anybody to get out of this is learn from our past mistakes. And so people who have made mistakes throughout all of this, I hope you've learned from them, and I hope that you don't make the same mistakes again.

[1:55:39] And I hope that people who are unkind learn to be kind.

Amanda: And I guess I said it was going to be the last question, but last question for real, what would you want your legacy to be as a public leader and servant?

Lisa: One of equity, one of dedication, perseverance.

[1:56:16] And that I may not always do things the way others would do them but I get the job done. And I hope that my legacy is in a positive light for my kids and someday their kids.

Amanda: Well, this concludes my questions for you at this time.

[1:56:51] And truly, Lisa, thank you so much for sharing your insights and your experiences.

Lisa: Thank you for having me.