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Amanda: Today is Thursday, December 16th, 2021. My name is Amanda Riggenbach and I am the manager for the Tumultuous 2020 oral history project at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. I'm currently in Springfield, Illinois with Katie Brethorst at her home. Katie is a graduate student at the University of Illinois Springfield where she is studying public history. We're going to be talking about her experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic for Tumultuous 2020.

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Thank you for being here Katie.

Katie: Yeah, thank you.

Amanda: So usually the way we start these is always with the when and where you were born.

Katie: Okay, I was born in Breese, Illinois, but my hometown that I will consider it is Carlisle, Illinois, which is very close to Breese. I did move around a little bit in my childhood, but ended up ultimately going back to Carlisle when I was in the fourth grade.

Amanda: So you graduated from Carlisle High School?

Katie: I did. I did graduate from Carlisle High School in 2016.

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Amanda: And I know that you did your undergraduate degree at the University of Illinois Springfield. What made you choose there?

Katie: I chose UIS because it was really close to my mom and my grandpa. And so I had family in the area. It had this really great honors program that paid for a good chunk of school. And, you know, if I kept up decent grades, it would increase the scholarship a little bit. And it seemed really small. I had visited other college campuses when I was in my high school years,

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just going to different competitions and stuff. And I never really loved the big feel. And UIS is very small. It's only got about 5,000 students, or it did when I was in it. I think it's gone down a little bit now. But it was very small. The geography of it was very small as well. So everything was about a 10-minute walk. So it was really nice. I feel like it was, immediately when I went, I started meeting people and talking to people. It was very friendly.

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And so it wasn't a really hard decision. It was the only school I formally applied to. Luckily, I got in. It didn't seem that difficult, but I did get in. And so I got into the honors program. And, yeah, that's why I chose it.

Amanda: And what did you study? Initially, I went in with an English major and a teaching minor. However, I spent a summer volunteering at the Dana-Thomas House.

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And then I had a really bad single class period in an English class that scared me out of the English major. So I ran and changed it to history, beginning of my sophomore year. So I was history from sophomore year on. And I had an English minor, and then I ended up tacking on a women and gender studies minor at the end.

Amanda: Do you want to share what that one incident was?

Katie: I could, yeah. It's kind of strange.

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So I went into this class. It was a British literature class, which I had taken one in high school, so I thought I liked it. And the lady walked in, and she didn't say anything. She just started playing this Old English version of Beowulf. And it was in the Celtic accent, or the Gaelic accent, or wherever it's originally from. And so it was Old English plus the accent on this really old audio book. And she said, we will be listening to this every day for the next three weeks, and we're going to have a major test on it.

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And I was like, oh no, I don't like this at all. And so I was like, I mean, I'm sure there's other English classes, but I'd been kind of toying with the idea of history. So as soon as that 1:15 rang, I bolted to the counselor's office. And I was like, are there any history classes available, please? I got into my first history class that thankfully had not started. It started the next day, so I didn't even miss anything. But, yeah, I ran from the English major.

Amanda: Having read Beowulf, I understand.

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Katie: Yeah, I don't think I would have liked it in print, let alone audio book. So very glad I diverted my choice.

Amanda: And so tell me a bit more about the Dana-Thomas House. Yeah, so I actually went there on a trip for one of my honors courses, and it was a weird honors course. It was a, the honors program really emphasized intersectionality between different majors and fields.

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So it was an archaeology and a theater class, which didn't go as well as I think it could have. It was still somewhat interesting, but I really liked the theater parts and then the archaeology parts. I was like, oh my gosh, I don't like this at all, but I ended up getting, we went on this field trip to the Dana-Thomas House, and I just was in awe. I don't know why we went there, because it fit neither archaeology, nor did it fit theater. But we went, and I loved it, and I was so excited by it that I took my mom back, and I took her and some friends.

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And when we went, I, at the end of the tour, I was like, do you guys ever need volunteers or anything? And they're like, oh, we always take volunteers, and they gave me a card. And I ended up calling and registering that summer to work as many hours as I could, really. I was working three jobs, technically. I had two jobs, and I was volunteering three days a week for the full time, which is unheard of as a volunteer. Usually you do half shifts, but I ended up banking like 200 hours of volunteer time by the end of that summer.

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And by then, I was, enraptured with her and the house. And then I ended up the next summer getting to work there. I had applied. I didn't make it because they had opened and closed the application process. And then mine had gotten deleted in the interim, and I was so disappointed. I thought I had it. And then I told the lady who does volunteering, I was like, you know, I think I need a break. I'm really sad by this. And as much as I love the house, I can't do what I did last year, so I'm just going to take a hold on it.

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And she's like, oh yeah, I totally understand. You know, it's fine. And then I went into volunteer one day. It was like my first day back. It was like July 1st. It was very early in July. And I was just like, yeah, I'll give it to her. You know, I miss it. And I went in, and someone had quit that day. That person who had gotten that job had quit that day. And they were like, you want the job? I was like, I absolutely want the job. So I quit AMC Theaters, and I immediately started at the Dana-Thomas House.

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Amanda: What was your position there?

Katie: I was a tour guide. I mean, I was just a seasonal contract worker, so I worked until October. So I didn't get the full, you know, five months. But I still got to go and work there every day, and so that was really exciting. And what year was that? The year I worked there was between my sophomore and junior year. I volunteered between freshman and sophomore.

Amanda: So that would have been maybe 2017, 2018?

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: Okay.

Katie: Yes.

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Amanda: I feel like we could do a whole oral history on the Dana-Thomas House.

Katie: Oh my gosh, I would love to someday, but yeah.

Amanda: We have to put that in the books.

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: And was it an adjustment moving to Springfield? I know you have history here.

Katie: Yeah, I mean, I've always had people in the area. I know the area fairly well, which was definitely to my advantage. I think the only thing that was really an adjustment was college life, because I thought I knew what I was doing in high school,

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and then real-world experiences kept hitting me, and I wasn't, you know, everyone didn't just love me on sight. And so that was weird. And then I had to adjust to my new way of thinking, because college definitely changed a lot of my opinions. Coming from a small town, I feel like I didn't really listen to outside voices. And then as soon as I got to college, it just was eye-opening. So I completely, like, it was less of an adjustment for me getting to know who I was, or it was more getting to know who I was

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rather than getting acclimated to the city. Yeah.

Amanda: That seems to be a good thing for people who go to college.

Katie: Yes. I highly recommend it.

Amanda: And, you know, actually my next question was going to be, what was your biggest adjustment in the beginning of your college experience?

Katie: Yeah, I mean, adjustment-wise, I think I fell into it pretty quick. I didn't do as well in the honors classes. It was just a different style, and I don't think it was necessarily for me. So I was getting more Bs than I was As, and that was upsetting.

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But I mean, yeah, the biggest adjustment was learning I was not Republican.

Amanda: And what would be your most cherished memory from that first part of your college experience?

Katie: From between sophomore and...

Amanda: From like I guess freshman to junior year, because we'll be talking about your senior year.

Katie: Well, I had a lot of great things happen in that time frame. I ended up with my then boyfriend, now fiancé, Bob, during that time.

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I learned how much I loved history. I got my dog. He worked as an ESA on campus for me. But yeah, I mean I had so many good ones. I made so many friends those first few years. Really, once I fell into the history program, I think that's when I was really happy again, I think. I felt like I was secure in my relationship. I was secure with who I was. I knew what I wanted. And that's when everything kind of clicked.

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Amanda: What year did you and Bob start dating?

Katie: My freshman year, October 2016.

Amanda: And how did that happen? Weirdly. It all started with this, we had encountered each other a couple times, we had an honors class together, we lived on the same floor, we ran into each other a couple times at like the lunch room and like they had volleyball for people who wanted to play and so we'd encountered

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each other a couple times, but the day that I think I became interested was when I had just gotten back from a movie with my friend Kelsey, and Kelsey and I were stopped by this man named Jacob. Jacob was a guy who we all knew was a little, um, he was very fascinated with this one girl on our floor and in like a naive, innocent way

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but also a little bordered on some infatuation and so he came up to us and he was like, guys I have some poetry I'd like to read you and we were like, why? And he said, it's for Kea. I was like, oh boy, sure. I actually didn't say sure, Kelsey was closer friends with him and I was dragged along but the vibe was sure, I guess this night will continue this way. And we walk into his room and he's Bob's roommate and he starts reading us poetry for this girl

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and it's all patriotically themed so it's her eyes are as blue as the flag and her mind is as sharp as the constitution and like I'm holding it together as well as like it was like tape and bubble gum like that was it and like I look at Bob who's sitting in his chair who's stopped playing video games to listen to this like train wreck and we make eye contact and we are just

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like holding it together and we just start having this silent conversation because this is not just one poem it's like he has a bag of crumpled up poems that he just keeps pulling them out and reading these poems trying to decide the best poem for her and like I'm like almost crying like I had to lay down so that they could stream down my face so that I didn't like insult this boy but like me and Bob just like we were communicating that whole time but with no words and so we ended

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up talking after the poetry reading was done and like I don't know he got a little emotional at some point he just broken up with his girlfriend, I related I'd just broken up with my boyfriend and, you know, I think I left and I told Kelsey I said I want to get to know him, and then everyone started warning me away which is hilarious if you know Bob, they said he's dangerous he's a he's a lady killer and I was like that guy are you sure I'm not positive you've got that right and so,

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but anyway, we had a class together I offered to be his partner for the biggest project we were going to have that semester and we ended up

working on that project and we hung out day and night for two weeks, I believe, and then we were texting a lot which he doesn't text so that was big for him and I, you know, I was just crushing hardcore on him and he I had no idea if he liked me or not and but we spent all hours of the day together so I should have known but I was like this I like

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this guy and then on a Monday after two weeks of doing this he asks me "So are we going to date or not?" and I'm reading a book for this class we've totally blown off because we were up till 5 a.m. talking and I'm skimming and I didn't really hear him and I said "I don't know whatever you want to do," and then I looked up and I was like that was bad do it again and he said "Would you like to be my girlfriend?" and I said "Yes" and then we had to go to class and then we didn't get to

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see each other till later that night and then we actually talked about what had happened, uh, but yeah, that's how I became Bob's girlfriend in a silly goofy way.

Amanda: That tracks.

Katie: Yes absolutely, it does.

Amanda: And, um, we talked in our pre-interview that it was really by your senior year that you started finding your stride.

Katie: Yeah, yeah, no um, I don't know how far back you want me to go, but I was finishing up my history courses I tacked on a minor in women

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and gender studies because I'd taken so many women history courses that I almost had the full degree anyway, um, I had this great job working for the Sangamon Experience, um, I was I had this really good core group of friends, um, I was top of my class, I was doing really great. I felt like all my projects were on point, I felt like I was doing well, I knew I was going to go to grad school, um, which is not something I went into college thinking I would do I thought I'd get my you

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Know teaching degree and leave by, you know, year five because it takes that long for teachers, um, but I was very confident in myself, I was, you know, I knew everyone teacher-wise that I felt I needed to. I had a great community

connections uh and I was I really felt like I was on top of the world. It was a strong year for me

Amanda: Yeah, tell me a bit more about the Sangamon Experience.

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Katie: Yeah, so the Sangamon Experience was a museum that is open on UIS campus, it's a small thing, it had a private donor who funded it but it was essentially, we wanted everything to be this history of the region that didn't have as much to do with Lincoln, like it could occasionally like overlap with Lincoln since he had his uh hands in so many pies but, um, it was supposed to focus on more local history and, you know, with my background with the Dana-Thomas House.

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I really love that sort of thing. I was very interested in uh in it and like one of the bigger aspects of this was doing a lot of community outreach and going to... Do you want to pause?

Amanda: We're back after a momentary pause, um, but Kat and I were just talking about the purpose of the Sangamon Experience

Katie: Yeah, uh so they're uh one of the biggest things I did with it was doing a lot of community outreach, um, so a lot of it was supposed to be partnering different historic

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sites with one another so that, you know, not only would we be the inner connection but they could make their own connections with each other and, um, so like we had a couple of events where they would meet up together and they could talk about what they were doing with their sites and that sort of thing and what fundraising they were doing and what programs they were doing and it was really cool and so I got to go out to a lot of different places. We got to go out to a lot of different places and just

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I got to talk to them, I got to see what they were doing, I would write little reports essentially that would go on our website about who these people were, what's a little bit of their history, why should people care and want to go see them now. And so I got to work with a lot of these historic sites that I hadn't even heard of working in the area. It's like the marbled farmstead, like nobody knows what that is. It's not huge in terms of like it doesn't have a huge historical event that happened with it or the person who lived there is

super famous but it was this large agricultural site that had, you know, a ton of sheep and pork that like Illinois was one of the largest sheep producers in the world

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and that's not something we do anymore. And so it's just like it's this great little site, they're lovely people and they were just, they were absolutely amazing and so I got to go to all these places and meet all these wonderful people and I was just so inspired by it. And then the biggest goal of the Sangamon Experience was creating this museum space and then, you know, telling these stories that I was going out and finding and getting to know a little bit about the time and like what this area meant and so the first thing we did was we built, there were four panels for different sections of years.

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So there was like before Illinois was settled to 1860 was the first part and that's what I worked on and then, you know, 1861 to 1900 that sort of thing. So we worked on the first section. It was also a class for some people, for me I was getting paid, this was my job.

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But I was doing a lot of research. They were supposed to do research and or, you know, design portions of it that sort of thing, and I ended up having to pick up another guy's portion because he didn't do it and then, you know, we had to edit another girl's because she didn't do enough research and thought, you know, what she had done was enough and so it was, it ended up being okay.

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Like we did get to use a lot of her stuff and we didn't, that guy didn't turn into anything. But, you know, I ended up having to do like double time to make sure I got all of this information and then we also did these like little bios for a bunch of famous residents and we made a picture wall and it was just really, it was a lot of hard work.

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But we did it and I got to essentially like research this pretty great little exhibit that was going on. And that opened January 30th or 31st, I think it was 30th of 2020, and that was a big day for me. Also just because, you know, they'd barely gotten the [cling] on the wall that had our beautiful mural done by a friend of mine, Gabby.

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And then, but then I go in, I went in two hours early, like everyone told me I didn't need to do that but I went in two hours early to make sure everything was going right and nothing was on the wall. None of our panels were on the wall, none of the information, and I was like how did this happen? We open at 3, it's 1 pm, and I was just panicking and I was like I need to do something and they, these guys were taking a lot of time, they weren't taking it seriously and then at one point they all wanted to go take a break at 2.30 and a quarter of the wall wasn't done and I said if you don't do it I'm doing it.

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And they're like you can't do it, we're part of the union, and I said I hope you take your lunch break later then because I need this done in the next 30 minutes. And, you know, my, Dr. Hunter was the lead of this project and I, he was busy working on some of the technical problems, because we were having a ton of technical problems like getting ready for this and so I'm just like, I turn into like a sort of like a dictator at this point just yelling at these poor construction crew.

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But I was like how is this not done? We've had all this time, how did you not do this? And I wasn't mean about it but I was like we got to do it, we got to do it. And they put the last thing on 10 till, I helped sweep up the last of their dirt and tape and we were ready to open. So that was hectic, but that was January. That was the end of January. That was my big win for January.

Amanda: January 30th, you said? I think so, yeah. That's funny because that's the same day that the World Health Organization declared COVID

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a public health emergency.

Katie: Yeah, I was not thinking about that that day. Yeah, it was in the back of my mind, but I was, it hadn't touched me yet, so I didn't know.

Amanda: And then I remember in our pre-interview, we also discussed that you had auditioned and actually got a part in the school play.

Katie: I did. So UIS has this great program for theater. There's a show in the fall and the spring, and I hadn't been able to do the fall one,

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but I had a little bit of a lighter load in the spring, and I had convinced my best friend to do it. I'd convinced a new friend who was a community member to do it. One of my, the first scene partner I had at UIS, his name was Mike. He's an older gentleman. By that I mean, he's 40. He's not that old. But I had convinced him. Me and Claire had done our first shows with him. We wanted to do our last shows with him.

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And he was ecstatic. They both got huge parts. My community friend got the lead in Twelfth Night. She was Viola, and Mike was Orsino, and Claire was Olivia. So the three bigs were my closest people. And I was so ecstatic. I was the servant, which was just fine for me. I was happy to have three lines, but I also got to be super sassy, which is definitely my thing. So it worked out, and I was so excited. I was so scared I wasn't going to get a role.

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I was sick for three days because I was convinced I didn't get it. And I got in, just under the wire in that servant role. But yeah, I'd been participating in that. And we'd been practicing for two months at that point, I think. We were just about to hit the stage ready after spring break was when we were supposed to go into the actual stage that was getting built and start rehearsing in there. But that never happened.

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So, spring break was weird because me and Bob always travel during spring break. It was the first year we couldn't in our four years at that point together. And I stayed home. I started looking for apartments for May. Had no idea I'd need one sooner, but I started looking for apartments for May. Everyone kept telling me I was looking too early. I was looking in March. And that's what I dedicated my spring break to, was looking at these apartments. And I ended up finding one that was willing to put a hold on it for two weeks.

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And then I was just going to pay double rent for April, and we'd just move in slowly for that. So I put my down payment on, down payment my hold money on for the apartment, I believe five days before UIS said that we had to leave.

Amanda: We will get there.

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: But there's a couple more things I wanted to talk about. And one of them was that, you talked about that you applied for your master's program.

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Katie: I did.

Amanda: That was probably in the fall of 2019?

Katie: Yes.

Amanda: And what made you decide to do that?

Katie: First, didn't know where I was going to get a job. I was just a bachelor's. I'd been hearing a lot that you needed a master's to do what I wanted to do, which was to run and curate exhibits and/or a museum or a historic house. So I wanted to get my master's. So I would be sure to do that. I also wanted to write. So I thought this would be a great opportunity to.

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The process itself really wasn't that difficult. I have some really great professors who mentored me through the whole thing, and it went pretty easy, wouldn't even necessarily call it a huge stressor because they all were so confident in me getting in. So it was just a, just another application really.

Amanda: What made you decide to go to UIS?

Katie: It would be fully paid if I got a GPSI position, which they were pretty sure I would get. Might've been a little misplaced in the GPSI program just because of how competitive

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it is. But I did end up getting one, but it would have been fully paid if I'd gotten that. But if I didn't get that, I probably would not be in my master's right now.

Amanda: And GPSI stands for?

Katie: Graduate program, public service. I can't tell you. I just call it GPSI. I think it's graduate public service internship or something like that.

Amanda: That makes sense.

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Very cool. And so starting with that early part of 2020 before we fully get into the pandemic is, other than these amazing accomplishments you

described, did you have any other resolutions or goals for 2020? For 2020, I gave a pretty big presentation. I got to speak at the UIS Lunch and Learn program, which was huge.

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I mean, I was a keynote speaker, and I wanted to do more like that. I wanted to see about working in the Dana-Thomas House again. I kind of wanted to get engaged that year, but wasn't sure that was going to happen. But that was a want. And I mean, I really wanted that GPSI position. So I was putting a lot of focus into my application for that. And I was putting a lot of focus on really just trying

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to make sure that I looked really good as a potential applicant. So, you know, I was really working hard on my papers and my assignments. Ended up really doing well that year. That semester, rather, I got a 4.0. But I was really putting in the work.

Amanda: Congratulations.

Katie: Thank you.

Amanda: And in the early months of 2020, did you know much about the virus?

Katie: No.

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I knew it was in China. I knew, you know, people were concerned about it. I remember seeing a lot of Daily Mail articles about it. And I thought we were untouchable. I really did. I remember one time I was sitting in Bob's apartment talking to his roommates. And I was like, there's no way it's going to get here. There's not a chance. It won't make it here. I quickly ate my words. But I didn't think it was going to turn into anything. I thought it was going to be like Ebola or something

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that a couple people might have got it. And we had to be wary of it. But I never would have thought it would have turned into what it did.

Amanda: And you wouldn't be alone in that.

Katie: No. I don't think I would be. Even now, I think people still don't take it very seriously, even though I do now. But yes, I was blindsided, really.

Amanda: And when was that turning point when you

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started to become more aware?

Katie: Spring break, for sure. I was sitting at home a lot in my apartment at school. And I'm seeing these reports every day. I start hearing that it's traveling. It's getting into New York. It's getting into San Francisco. And I'm just looking for apartments. But I'm just like, wow. If it takes a little bit longer, I'll be glad to have this. But I was, even then, I think it still felt really far away.

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There were a couple reports during that time. Someone traveled with it on a train through Springfield. So then we had six cases. And then it was 36 the next day. And just how fast it was spreading, I think that's when I was like, oh, my God, it's here. It's in Springfield. I can't get away from it. I'm here. And luckily, I mean, UIS is isolated. But it was spring break. Everyone was traveling. And they were all going to come back. And that's when I was like, oh man, this isn't good.

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And we were also getting daily updates from the school of like we're taking this seriously. If you have a place, we're going to move remote. And then it was we're moving completely remote. And then it's, if you have a place to stay that's not at school, stay there. Don't come back, especially if you've traveled. And if you do, you can stay. But just be careful and don't go anywhere. We'll figure something out. And so I mean, it felt slow.

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But it wasn't. It was very quick. It was within like four or five days. And then there was finally, the last day was an email from the chancellor saying no one can stay. Everyone needs to move. And here's your time slots. Mine was 35 hours from when I opened the email.

Amanda: What do you think of that response? That COVID response?

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Katie: It wasn't empathetic. There were these, they basically gave like extensions for people who they thought qualified to not be able to go home except they weren't being, I didn't think they were doing a good job with that system. I had a friend who, he himself was autoimmune compromised, his entire family was autoimmune compromised and they didn't give him the

extension even though he applied for it and he got COVID within a week of moving back home and it really took a toll on him.

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And I mean they, I don't think any school did well with this. Everyone kind of had a similar like we don't, we're panicking, we don't know what to do, everything's canceled, just go home. But no, it felt like we can't be bothered to even help you guys. It was, and that was also something that bothered me is like we'd been getting these emails, you know, this whole week of you can stay, you can stay, you can stay, and then one day we wake up and there's these giant dumpsters they rent for the

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end of semesters and they were outside and we got the email that day that was everyone move out. Like they'd been planning it. Like they had been, it wasn't like hey we're going to give you some time to start getting stuff together before things get bad. No, it was get out, you have 36 hours, go. Which was horrible, and again they had these like time slots to limit contact but everyone's panicking, running around campus trying to get stuff and throw stuff away and like you want to

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say bye to your friends and so you don't know what you're doing and so it was just so hectic and it was so dumb. It was so dumb and people had to come from their like spring breaks or their families and they'd been like hours away and they had only a certain amount of hours to get everything packed up and it was just, it was bad. I mean I can talk a little bit more about the move out if you want. Yeah, okay. So Bob's sister had actually come down for her spring break which lined up with ours. Her name's

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Shirley, and, you know, Shirley had been doing a little bit of some homework here and there and but I mean we'd been taking the days easy. You know, I'd been out apartment hunting and she'd stayed and played with the dog and, you know, we had our gaming system set up so she was having a great time and we got that email and we walked downstairs and we said well Shirley we're putting you to work. We have to leave now, and I, Bob immediately was like I'm getting a U-Haul

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because I have a ton of furniture and, you know, we had a lot of stuff, so he, we run, we get the U-Haul. I then decide, you know, I got to get the keys to

this new apartment, so we have nowhere, so we have somewhere to go. So I call my new landlord and I'm like "Hey, can I move in early?" and she's like "Oh yeah, whole place is open for you guys." We're like awesome, thank you, thank you so much. So we, you know, it took two days. We only kept the U-Haul for one day to get the major stuff but I literally,

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it felt like calling in the cavalry because my mom, my stepdad showed up, my friend Chelsea showed up, Shirley was there. You know, my roommates were helping me get stuff out if it was too heavy or, you know, that sort of thing. They didn't have as much stuff, so they were, you know, helping me out, and so like we had this like whole team to get all the big stuff out and, you know, I was trying to pack up all my prints and all of my, that took forever and my,

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my kitchen took a long time and, you know, we were also panicking because we don't want to leave anything behind because you can get fined for that. We didn't know that UIS was going to wipe the fines because, you know, everyone was so frantic and then they had this whole time to clean everything out, but, yeah, we were like really panicking trying to get everything together and, you know, Rhett, my dog, is having a hard time so I kept feeling really bad because he hates move-out dates but usually it would be slow like I'd get boxes and I'd slowly pack up the whole week and

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get stuff together so he could kind of see it coming but like we just started hauling everything out. We hauled out his favorite couch. When I left I grabbed a cushion because he was so sad and I laid it by the window so he could stay on it and he was the most depressed I'd seen him. He was really struggling, and so like that I kept seeing him every time I'd bring another load of stuff downstairs and being upset all over again and then as we're loading things out things are canceling. We're getting emails "The play is canceled!" We get an email "Graduation's canceled!"

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We like, anything and everything that was happening canceled, done, over, and so I'm still packing but I'm getting more and more emotional, I'm like, but I'm closing it off too, because I'm like I'm in go mode got to get out and so we come over to the new apartment start loading things in just throwing it into the living room just stacks of stuff it looked horrible and I was like oh, my God, this is not how I want my new home to look, and I don't know

where everything is and I'm like I don't know how much left we have to do and so we're running back and forth we'd make like three or four trips

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that day like thankfully only one in the u-haul but of like little stuff and then, you know, we're not even done and so we spend the first night in our new apartment and I'm just devastated. I call, you know, a few more people to help us the next day and what was so crazy was so that first day when we get the email, right, it's, it's a really nice March day, it's like 65, it's sunny, it's really nice out, and so like it wasn't horrible moving out and then the next day

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downpour all day long. Anyone who hesitated or didn't have the like because all the u-hauls like sold out like within a couple hours, so there were no u-hauls anymore, and anyone who didn't immediately have family come help you and they had to wait a day, now all their stuff's getting ruined, some people didn't have places to go, like I had a friend who didn't want to move back in with her family but didn't want to move in, her boyfriend didn't necessarily want her to move

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in yet because they'd only been together a little bit um, and so this like, you know, we have nowhere to go, we don't know where to go, like we lucked out. I know that so much and I can't believe that I was like I want to start looking for apartments in February, like I was really ahead of the game and it was only because of that that we had anywhere to go where Bob and I could stay together and, you know, have a place to shelter and so like it was really insane and so there's this like

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Mixed emotion of I'm moving into my first apartment with my with my boyfriend and like we're living together now, um, which is something I've been waiting for and had been so excited for and but I'm doing it under these circumstances that are horrible and so I, you know, I'm having these weird emotional moments and the next day we go in, I feel like the cleaning took longer than the packing, like that took forever uh, we were vacuuming right up until five o'clock when you're supposed to leave

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and then we had this horrible roommate who like we didn't like to begin with, she drove out two of my roommates and I was just stuck there but she

smoked a ton of pot like was inconsiderate for my athlete roommate who that could really affect her career if she tested positive for anything so she had to start staying with her boyfriend, our other roommate just moved out because it was too much for her and then, you know, but she was horrible and, you know, she wasn't moving out at all, and we're like how did she get a pass to stay. We had no idea, she never really talked to us, she and like we'd

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bring up our concerns and she'd brush them off and uh, but one of the craziest moments was, you know, we're deep cleaning the kitchen, right, we're getting the fridge cleaned out, we're getting the cabinets cleaned out, and we open the oven to clean out the oven and there's an entire uncooked pizza. The oven's not on, just half eaten or it was cooked but it was like cold, a half-eaten pizza and we were like oh, my God, she's just storing it in here and we were like and like my roommate

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Hannah just loses it like we've had a bad two days and she just starts she's taking pictures because we don't know that she's not leaving yet, right, so she's taking pictures, she's like very loudly telling, you know, this other person how horrible she is. She's not around but like the walls are thin so she heard uh and Hannah's just on a tangent. I'm like "Hannah, it's not worth the energy" just "we got to go, we got to go, this isn't us, we're taking pictures it's not us, if they

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have questions about it, we have proof," and she's like "Fine." She was so mad. I think what happened was, the trash can was mine and I had packed that to bring here because we started deep cleaning the apartment, so we could get ready to move in and, um, she probably just didn't want to walk out in the rain to the dumpster with this almost full pizza, so, you know, she left the pizza in there, but then, um, but yeah, so then that day or the next day one of the very close together between us moving in

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Pritzker orders the stay at home, um, by Friday. I don't remember what day that was but it would have been in effect Friday at like 5 p.m. and, you know, that was terrifying, and my first thought was my friend Chelsea who had come to help us move in and or move out rather and, you know, we're close and so we, uh, we, I called her because she was living alone with her two cats and she, you know, had already

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been having a pretty bad, you know, state of mind with, you know, I'm lonely I don't have a partner, um, and I don't know the thought of her staying in that alone like scared me so I couldn't imagine what she was going through. so I called her and I said "You just want to move in, we can move in together?" and she said "Yes," and so her lease wasn't up until August and it was March but we just had her bring her essentials that first weekend like her bed and the cat stuff and, you know, some changes

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of clothes and we'd go back to her apartment when we had the chance but we didn't do that for weeks, we did not know when it was safe to go so but she just moved in and, you know, it was after that whole weekend I just felt kind of like dead. I was tired, we had to move in start understanding Zoom, I had to set up internet here because we didn't have a router, we, no one was doing anything for that, all my classes are now on Zoom and so luckily my mom had an extra,

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so we were able to set up our own internet and it ended up working out but I was just fried by the end of it.

Amanda: It sounds exhausting.

Katie: It was.

Amanda: And absolutely insane. So your spring break was mid-March, I assume.

Katie: Yes, and they actually extended it a week following us getting the, it was before we moved out, but mid of the week is when we ended up having to move out.

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Amanda: And I looked online and it was March 11th, well, one, that the World Health Organization declared COVID a pandemic, but also that was the day that the Illinois public universities extended their spring break and implemented online learning.

Katie: Yeah, I think March 17th was the big day of, I think I was out completely. I remember March 17th very, I don't remember why, but that's the day that I remember. So that must have been when I moved in.

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Amanda: That would make sense, especially with, I think, it was before St. Patrick's Day that there was closing of the bars and a lot of those measures taken to avoid it, and then after St. Patrick's Day, it was the stay-at-home order.

Katie: Right.

Amanda: And so, what was the rest of the semester like for you?

Katie: Well, I had some pretty great professors, thankfully. One professor did not handle Zoom well. She kind of, she didn't know how to figure it out.

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She's an older lady. She was lovely, but she just, you know, wasn't really, we weren't adept for this yet, you know. We didn't adapt very quickly. And so she, basically, we just had online discussions. A lot of it hinged on, you know, how's everyone doing? Are we okay? And trying to offer our support and that sort of thing. And then my Sangamon Experience job became, you know, my,

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the thing I loved, which was going between places and talking to people, just became null and void. And so, like, I got assigned random projects. So my boss was Dr. Hunter, and he told me to go out to all the places downtown that were closed and take pictures of the signs. And try to get pictures of the places with these closed signs. And that was weird.

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I went to the Dana-Thomas House, and seeing, like, closed for the foreseeable future, like, broke my heart. And then there was, like, Felicia Olin is a local artist, and she made a bunch of paintings that were, like, everything's going to be okay. And, you know, thank you to the nurses. And, you know, I took pictures of those. I didn't know it was her yet, but, you know, I was going to all these places. And some have these really nice, hopeful messages of, like, we can't wait to see you soon, but for now be safe. And, like, then others were, it was just a printed out piece of paper, like, we don't know when we'll be back.

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So, a lot of places closed for good with that, including one of my favorite restaurants, which was upsetting. Augie's. But, yeah, so that was a very sad project to undertake. And the whole of Springfield was dead. And, like, I was living downtown, near downtown, and I would go walk downtown to take these pictures, and no one's out. There's no cars.

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It felt like I was in a zombie movie. Like, I'd occasionally see someone, but very rarely. And it was cold, so I'm walking around, like, freezing, and it's dead silent. And, like, this is the time when everyone starts, you know, giving those good news updates of, oh, the dolphins are back in Italy. And, like, China's smog is down by a ton. And I'm like, I understand why, because it was silent.

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And, like, I didn't understand how much downtown noise I would be, you know, living near until, you know, I'd been here for six or seven months. And things started to come back, and I had no idea. I lived next to a school. I never heard children for the first year. It's insane.

Amanda: So what about the professor, going back a little bit.

Katie: Sure, sure. Some of the

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professors you mentioned that were good. What made them, what made their style, you know, that was particularly helpful?

Katie: Yeah, one of the best was Dr. Bertaina. Dr. David Bertaina, I already thought was one of the best, but he immediately figured out Zoom, gave us pointers, he did those stupid backgrounds to make us laugh. Our project was very heavily research-based anyway, so I mean he just did a lot of

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updates and he was like, talk about your project, what do you have, what don't you have, is there anything I can do to try to get you sources because our libraries are closed and this is heavily research-based and you don't have books anymore and the whole project is a historiography, which is basically going through different historical sources and watching how the opinions change over time or, you know, shift or, you know, that sort of thing and, you know, luckily I had been on top of it and I had all my books. I'd hoped to get more, but, you know, I could only work with what I had at that point and but I mean he was also

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Just, you know, he wasn't depressed about it and like he probably was personally but like he never let it show and, you know, we would have our hard days and we'd just stop and we'd talk about what's going on as opposed

to like we're not continuing with the lesson. He knew we were in this horrible situation and we as students didn't know how to function and he's a professor, he didn't know how to work in this new setting as well, but he was still a professor and knew how to

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get to us and how to make sure we were okay and that meant a lot. I love him for it. He's my favorite professor of all time. So I was thrilled and I was thrilled in the fact that something felt normal. I was still in the class with people I respected. I was the only woman, too, which was weird, but I had all these like great guys that, you know, I got really heated about my project and they knew that and so they'd, you know, encourage me. They'd be like, oh did you

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find anything new? I mean, you know, you're going to beat up Thomas Jefferson today and I'm like "Oh, you know it." So it was a good core group, too. It wasn't just the professor like that. That specific class was like first of all all history. All I, everything I wanted to do. So I enjoyed it and I had this group that made everything a little bit better. I haven't kept in contact with any of them. I didn't really know any of them before COVID and I didn't really keep in contact either because I never, you know, usually you'd get their numbers at like

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the end of the semester and talk to them and, you know, keep in contact but I didn't get the chance. It felt weird to ask over Zoom. It didn't by the time I was in my master's but at first it was strange and so I mean I hope them all the best because they were lovely guys. But yeah, no they were, they kept things normal, too, and, you know, we already knew all of our own projects. We pitched it several times. We gave updates so, you know, we were still invested in what they

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were doing. Everyone was invested in everyone else's project and so that was nice. And then, I mean, yeah, it was, I don't really even remember many of my other classes. I remember those two. The one that kind of fizzled out because of COVID and the one that I feel like at least the, you know, something tried to remain the same.

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Amanda: And how did being going through this pandemic and the Zoom classes with the really responsive teachers and the teachers who weren't quite as prepared – as if anyone could be prepared – how did that affect your motivation?

Katie: Um, school's kind of the only thing I had going for me. So it didn't, I was still dedicated. I still wanted that GPSI job, I still wanted, I wanted it all, but I wasn't getting a graduation, or a commencement rather, I was graduating, but I wasn't getting a good commencement.

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So I don't know, I felt like I was sad a lot. But I also was, I mean, I, my respect for my professors hadn't changed. If anything, it only grew. So I do a lot of my work based on how much I want to impress that professor, is definitely a major motivator for me. So because I loved my professors, I was, I was still working hard. I was, it didn't really go away, thankfully.

Amanda: What about your mental health?

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That declined. Very rapidly. I was in this, you know, in this very, I don't even want to say dark, just grey, just grey place. Everything was the same. Bob and Chelsea got to go to work every day and I did not. I was here every day, all day. Stuck in these walls. And I love them, don't get me wrong. It's a fun apartment. But they weren't decorated at all first, and that's something that I love to do. And, so, you know, everything was white, and very bland. And so I was doing the same thing every day. I was sad, I didn't get to do my job very much. I, I just started, you know, I was just stuck. And I think I was emotionally pretty dull for a little while, I didn't quite know what was happening. I was just numb a lot.

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And then it was like, Bob and Chelsea got along really well, which was great. And they're both introverts, I'm extroverted. And so, you know, they kind of liked not having to go out and do stuff. And Bob, especially was really like happy. And he loved coming home every day from his full time job. And, you know, he got to just play games and no one was coming over.

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And because I was, you know, always dragging us to see people and go places. And, you know, I'm just like, I just felt like I was sitting there, no one was seeing me. And then one day he like, I said something about how sad I was. And he was, we were laying in bed. And he just, he was like, "What do

you mean, everything's not going well for us? It's going great." And I just started screaming. I was like, I'm, I lost it all. Everything I wanted. I'd worked so hard for graduation. I had worked hard on that play. I had three lines, but I worked hard on the play. It was my last, it was supposed to be my last play with everyone.

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And it was gone. And so when I started screaming, that was the first time I felt anything. In like months. But um, that was also when I felt like I came back. I was finally feeling it again. And I was pissed, and I was mad, but I felt like I'd come back. And that was when I felt like I could do stuff again.

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Because I'd been doing it, and I'd been doing the same thing I'd been doing for months, and I was doing homework, but I felt like I could be a person again. But that was, that was a big one. And then I think he finally figured out that I was so sad. I don't think he'd realized because he was happy and, I mean, I wasn't reacting like I was upset all the time like I was but I was it was more just,

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we call it the gray days which is just when you're depression is so much that you, you don't feel things as much. And it's harder to recognize I think gray days as opposed to like the dark days when you're crying all the time and you're not able to get out of bed and like I was still getting out of bed, I was still doing stuff but I was here, I was all alone. And he wasn't and so he wasn't seeing a lot of like when I was sad, I would I could put on a good face when he and Chelsea were home because I could talk to people again but it was the

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middle of the days when it's just me and my dog and two cats who don't like me. So it got better but it took like me breaking, like breaking down, I wasn't broken but it took til then.

Amanda: Thank you for sharing all of that. And I also remember we discussed that you were awarded

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Marshal for the History Department, which I hadn't known that terminology, so I was a little like, so what exactly is the Marshal?

Katie: Sure. The Marshal is the highest honor you can get out of your department, rather. I'm sure you could get higher honors like cum laude or whatever. It means that everyone in your department chooses you to represent the department at graduation,

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at the commencement, which if you remember, I did not have. But they still assigned it, which basically meant everyone came together and agreed that I was the face of the history department. And that also hurt a little bit. I remember I closed my computer screen after telling, I didn't actually find out officially yet. I found out through Dr. Bertaina, who is a snitch, and I love him for it. He said, and this is our last class, everyone,

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but I wanted you guys to congratulate Katie on becoming the history marshal. And it was as we were getting ready to leave for class or leave the class. And so I said, thank you. I closed my laptop and I went and cried in the bedroom with Bob. And I was just like, I made history marshal. And he was like, congrats. And I was like, I don't know if it's a congrats because I don't get to do the thing that's like the prestigious honor is getting to walk in the front of all of the department with like a special thing.

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So it was hard, but I was like, I did it. I did the thing I wanted to. I didn't get the, you know, the public response to it. Not that I think there's going to be an applause for me, but, you know, I was something I was really looking forward to in general. My grandpa always does this thing at graduations, depending on which grandchild is graduating, but he would yell, that's my granddaughter, very loudly

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when I would walk across the stage and I didn't get that. And that was one of the things that was, I think the hardest to reckon with because I'd gotten it at like my high school graduation, but not getting it for my bachelor's degree was very difficult. I was very upset about it. I don't know why I brought that story up. But well, graduation was just something I had looked forward to really a lot and I didn't get it.

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And then I think part of why it was so bitter this year is because I had a really great system that like I think they should do from now on for all graduations, which is you have like time slots of like six students, you have

their families in the auditorium and they're socially distanced and then they can go and then you get the next slot. So like it's intimate, it's personal, you get the applause that you deserve. I don't know, I'm not a huge fan of big commencements.

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It would have been cool as history marshal, but for everything else, I think they had a great idea and it just, I just didn't understand why it took them so long to come up with it. Like I could have come up with that and I kind of did. I was like, why aren't we just doing like individual small things like it doesn't even have to be, because usually they do it at the, what's it called? The big center downtown.

Amanda: The Hoogland?

Katie: No, it's-

Amanda: Oh, the Bank of Springfield Center?

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Katie: Yes, the Bank of Springfield. I knew it was a bank, I just kept thinking it was US Bank. But yeah, the Bank of Springfield Center is usually where they have the graduations, and this time they did it, this year they did it at the Sangamon Auditorium on UI's campus. And I was like, that is, why couldn't you have done this in 2020? We had the capabilities, we were getting tested. We were getting, like we had all of these things we could have done and we didn't. I mean, we didn't, our testing wasn't as good. It definitely got better once, you know, my master started,

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but I was so pissed off. I was like, oh, we had, this is such a great idea. Why couldn't it just have been sooner? You know, I feel like we were in that like chunk of time where everyone was scared, everyone didn't know what was happening. Nobody knew what was going on and I'm not blaming UIS for all of this. The whole world was in chaos, so. But it made me really upset that I got nothing. And then it felt like, and then it felt like I got more nothing from UIS

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when the actual commencement day happened because they kept saying, you know, for our 2020 graduates, we're going to do something really special. We're making a thing for you guys to honor you guys. And well, you know, my, we had a family party and it was just like my mom, my dad, and

my step parents, and all my siblings and like Chelsea and Bob, of course. But we had this party at my mom's house and

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Amanda: We're back after a quick cat nap, cat moment, cat interruption. And you were talking about the party at your mom's house.

Katie: Yes. So we just had a brief party. My dad doesn't stay long anywhere, so I knew I had limited time. But he surprised me. I definitely knew he was coming. To go to this party. And so, you know, we'd been hearing this hype from UIS about this event that was going to

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happen on their website. And we had a timer and a countdown and it was like big. It was going to be huge. And, you know, I was like, oh, boy, I hope they, you know, they kept teasing like they were filming stuff. I had a friend who worked with Sangamon Auditorium, so he'd sent us snaps of them filming stuff and it looked like a legitimate like they had like their full cap and gown stuff on as professors. And, you know, so I was like, oh, I'm excited to see what it is. And then the countdown ends.

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First of all, they didn't set it up to immediately transition into this video. You had to refresh it. And by then it's already playing. And so, so we refresh it after like 30, 40 seconds because we were like, what happened? And so Bob refreshes it and it's in the middle of this essentially UIS commercial where it's these really nice shots of campus that I've seen in our promotional videos. And then there's like a quick scene where they're walking down the stage and there's

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a person on every side that has a different major. And that's it. It was maybe four minutes long of like you've endured so much this year and it's been really hard for all of us and here's your graduation present, it's us making this film, and I was so mad. They didn't list the names, they didn't list who was part of what department and

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it felt so fake like it was slapped together last minute and I know it wasn't because I'd been getting updates of them filming. So like they had the lists, they knew who was graduating. And I was just so mad and I, I thought that was absolute garbage, and I and like everyone laughed at it and, you know,

them laughing at the video felt like they were laughing at me. This was my accomplishment. This is what I get. This is like my

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reward or award for this and so that hurt a lot and I was so upset. I'd gotten my honors cords which was very nice of them and honestly the honors people did better. It was a separate ceremony quote unquote but it was just a little Zoom thing they put together where they listed all the CAP honors who were graduating and that was nice. That at least, you know, we individually got some recognition. You could submit, I forget what we could submit, like a little story, a little quote, something,

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something small that they could play on the screen and that was nice. Honestly, that was the nicest thing of the day and I did not get to do that with my family because CAP Honors does essentially a breakfast before graduation and this was kind of what this was supposed to replace. It was before the video. But that was nice. I don't think CAP Honors really loved me as a student. I feel like I did a lot better doing my actual major and

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stuff I liked, but that was something I was really grateful for that little video. It meant a lot after seeing what our big thing was from the university. So again, it's like, you know, departments care. Departments always care more than administration. So, that was nice, I guess. A small bright spot.

Amanda: It sounds like a very, sounds like a lot. Yeah. A lot all at once, but CAP honors,

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Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: What does CAP stand for?

Katie: CAP is Capital Honors, so we're in the capital city. So, CAP honors. Just C-A-P.

Amanda: That makes sense. Yeah. So then post-graduation, did you, when did you find out that you got the GPSI internship? Or when did you get interviewed and what was that like?

Katie: Yeah, so I think I got

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interviewed at the end of May. I was interviewed. I am, and it's, I got one interview out of the hundreds of jobs. I got one interview for research intern at the ALPLM in the, in that department. And I did the interview. I felt like it went awesome. It was a lot of, you know, they were like, can you tell us how you've, if you've done any kind of like deeper research?

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And I had a lot of these stories from working at Sangamon Experience of where I was able to track down like the house that Grant stayed at when he came here at the beginning of the civil war. And he, and my now boss, Christian, was like, you found it? And I was like, Oh yeah, no, I know where it is. And he was like, really? We get that question all the time. And I was like, Oh yeah, totally. I found it. It's like right here on Walnut. It doesn't look like it's in great shape, but I was able to kind of go through the process and I felt like they were impressed. I know they weren't supposed to show that they were impressed, but I was like, I got

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it. I felt so confident. But then I was also, I didn't know how many people applied. I didn't know how many people got this interview. And, you know, I only had this one, so I put everything into it. I brought out all my experience. And at one point he was like, well, it's something else you did besides just some like making the exhibit at Sangamon Experience. Like I was like, I'm losing them and I got it back. But, um, but yeah, I found out June 1st was the day and I ran into my bedroom.

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Bob was still asleep and I was so excited. And I was like, I did it. And then I got a bunch of texts from people being like, I didn't get the research department, uh, internship. And it was like everyone who was going into grad school with me. And I was like, Oh, my God, I feel so bad telling them, but I was so excited. It's like, I did it. I got the one. But then, that didn't start till August 16th. So from June 1st to August 16th, I was unemployed,

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which was really hard. I had always worked since starting college, so having nothing to do and nothing being open, it wasn't even like I could, you know, I didn't want to get a job. ... He bought that. ... So I'm unemployed. I start playing a lot of Animal Crossing. That was a big escapism for me. I had never once played Animal Crossing before,

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but I spent days setting up my island, and I was always very excited to do it. You know, that was something small. That was something I could control. I probably got a little too invested in it. Like I should have done other things, but I was really into it for a little bit. But yeah.

Amanda: And you mentioned that you had always previously been employed for the summers.

Katie: Yes.

Amanda: And throughout college.

Katie: Yeah, like I said, I mean, I worked AMC and family video

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the summer before college, the summer in between freshman, sophomore year. I worked at a tobacco store in AMC and then volunteered at the Dana-Thomas House. And then my, junior year, no, in between sophomore and junior year I worked at the Dana-Thomas House. I worked at AMC at the beginning, then it was just the Dana-Thomas House. And then between junior and senior I worked at the 1908 Race Riot dig site as an archaeologist tech. Worked there for a little bit and then I did not work my senior year.

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And I, you know, a lot of people are like, just take it as a break. But there's almost, there's only so much break you can do when the world is shut down and you just want to go out and do something. And I wanted to go out and do something so bad. Luckily, I don't know if it's on your list, but we went on a vacation in July and that was a big relief for me to do something.

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Literally anything.

Amanda: Yeah, I have down. That's actually my next question.

Katie: Oh, okay.

Amanda: You're good mind reader.

Katie: Perfect.

Amanda: Yeah, you guys went to Mackinac Island.

Katie: We did.

Amanda: Which is in Michigan.

Katie: Yes. so towards the beginning or middle of April, you know, we've been in lockdown for a little bit and I have a lot of my friends left. They went back home to their various places and

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I had two friends in town, David and Rebecca, who were married. And, you know, they texted me and they were like, are you guys good? And we were like, yeah. And they were like, oh, we're going on a bike ride. Where do you live? We can stop by if you're not too far away. And we're like, oh yeah, we live here. And it's only like a 20 minute bike ride from the house. So they stopped by. It was my first friend interaction besides Chelsea in months. Oh, a little over a month.

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I was ecstatic to see them. You know, I was so excited. I knew their political. We had some slight political differences, but I was just like, oh, a human interaction. Thank God. And, you know, they were talking and we were chatting. Chelsea had never met them before. But, you know, I knew them. We were all talking. And then at some point, David brings up, oh, you know, I'd love to go camping and we love Mackinac Island. That's where they went on their honeymoon. And they try to go back every year. And so I was like, oh, I've never been. And I know how much you love it.

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I'm like, why don't we go? It's like, well, it's a pandemic, guys. They were like, well, what if we can't? And so we did. I've never been tent camping before. Don't think I'll do it often. I did not love that part. But Mackinac Island itself is just beautiful. It's a small island in the Great Lakes. And we went, I think the first day we went up was July 3rd, was the day we drove up.

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And things are starting to open up a little bit, a little bit. And, you know, we set up camp, there's people, but it's a good distance between us. We got this really great campground, and then at near Mackinac Island on the mainland. And next day was July 4th, was our first day on the island, which was very busy, very busy day on the island. Everyone came to Mackinac Island for 4th of July.

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Amanda: Even in the pandemic?

Katie: Oh, it was busy. It was insanely busy. And there's a different vibe in the UP, or the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, that's a little bit more conservative. So like, you know, we're outside. There's no cars allowed on Mackinac Island. So there's only bikes and horses. So, you know, we get there, everyone's outside. We decide, you know, it's super busy today, let's go see the like island nature stuff today.

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So we biked around a lot of the island. We saw the fun big sugar rock. I think it's like the sugar loaf rock. I don't remember. It was a fun rock. There's a lot of trails where we didn't hardly encounter anybody. And then at one point we were super warm. It was very hot out. And so we went swimming and, let me tell you, if you're dying of heatstroke and you get in the Great Lakes, it's so cold and nice. We swam for like an hour and it was beautiful. The water was so pretty.

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I brought this like inflatable bird that we just had the best time playing on. And like called it like, you know, the bird. And just we'd all try to get on it and like float as far as we could. And it was just fun. I don't know, after being stuck inside, you know, getting to swim in the lakes and then, you know, I mean, there was no real beach, it was all rocks, but like, you know, being at the beach essentially and then biking around and we didn't go really inside any of the shops that day just

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because it was so busy. But the next day we went, it was dead. There's like no one there. It was mostly just cleanup from the day before, so like we got to go in and pop into a couple shops and everyone was very nicely masked up and we got to buy a few things. You know, we biked around a little bit that day. Again, we wanted to go swimming because that was fun. But that was super chill and then I think that was the day we went to the fort

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because there was no one there. We got to see some of the historic sites, which was very fun and cool. And then the next day we did a little bit more of the like naturey stuff again because people are starting to come back, cause, you know, they've gotten done being hungover from the 4th of July and so we went out and we did, we saw [an art?] truck, we went and found there's these two cars

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1920s cars from a long, long time ago and someone tried to protest the fact that there were no cars on the island, so they brought these two cars over and they were going to try to get a bill passed so that cars could come over and it didn't. The locals were so mad. So they dumped them in the woods. And so you have to get to this remote trail of what used to be their garbage dump. And so we hiked out there and found these 1920s cars that were in pretty decent condition.

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That was super cool. That was a lot of fun. We did it and only me and Rebecca wanted to like traipse through the woods. We were the only ones who brought shoes for it. And I was like, guys, when else are you going to see a 1920s car rusting in the woods? This is the coolest thing ever. And so it was just me and Rebecca and we went out and that was fun. We had a great time. But and then, so we only spent three days on the island. We spent a fourth day near the island. We did there like there was this beautiful like tree windy road,

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path that's kind of like the Dragon's Tail but in Michigan. Less, you know, I'm going to fall off a cliff and die, but still very pretty. So we did that and then we went to Fort Michilimackinac which is this, you know, I think it was like 1812 and a Revolutionary War fort. And they had this great archaeology site and so Chelsea was in heaven as an archaeologist. I thought it was super cool. So we had like a good nice day there. And then the next day we started our trip up the UP.

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We stopped at two shipwreck museums, which was crazy. The first one was when we went to Fort Michilimackinac, and that was smaller. But the streets near Mackinac Island, because it's so small, a lot of ships don't necessarily know where the land is. So there's like, I think there's this like rock that says, you know, if you took all the water out from this point, you can see 86 shipwrecks. Like just an insane amount of shipwrecks, right? So that was the first one we went to.

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And then the second one we went to was Whitefish Point, which there's a real famous shipwreck called the Edmund Fitzgerald. I think 70 people died, something like that. Back in the 70s, it was like the largest ship to go down in the Great Lakes. But that was near, Whitefish Point was where it was supposed to be going, because it was in this horrible, essentially hurricane,

and it did everything right. It had a ship like tagging along to make sure it was okay, and like it just vanished. But then at that point as well is like super dense in shipwrecks.

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And so what's so crazy about that is that they have these buoys out along in the water where all the shipwrecks are, and you could like just standing from where you're at, you can see like, you know, five, six shipwrecks. And then we even found like pieces of china in the rocks, like that was still washing up after hundreds of years. Consistent, like you could still find stuff constantly. So that was beautiful and that was Lake Superior. That was the prettiest water, so clear.

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And then, let me see, then we went to some other places. We went to Marquette. We went to this, we went, I forget the town, there's like one of the oldest pubs or bars in Michigan. So that was cool. And there was also the site of like this horrible tragedy. Where like a bunch of children died on Christmas Eve, like because someone yelled fire and then a stampede happened.

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So like we saw these like random sites, just went around the UP though, it was beautiful. Camped the whole time, so again we're, you know, we're doing small things. And we're also supporting these local businesses that aren't really getting the tourists that they normally would. So like we went to a couple theaters that let us go backstage. But it's only us in this building. And so, you know, it felt like the safest trip we could have ever possibly taken.

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We were camping, we weren't dealing with a lot of people, we weren't making pretty, you know, active choices of where to go, where not to go. And then we came back down and we were supposed to go to House on the Rock in Wisconsin on our last day, but we realized we weren't going to make it in time. So we went and waved off a ship instead. I think it was the Badger. Which is like the last coal or steam powered ship on the Great Lakes or something crazy like that.

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And so we waved it off with our masks. Which was a little goofy but fun. Like we waited an hour to watch the ship leave. And there's this comedian, John

Mulaney, where he makes fun of like, Oh, you know, you got to have a bunch of time on your hands to want to go dress up in your best clothes and wave off a ship. And I felt like we had nothing but time. So we waited to wave off this ship before we went home.

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Amanda: Is that not the most COVID time period story ever?

Katie: It was really funny. Like, it was just such a diversion to our plan. We were supposed to keep going and make it to this museum. And then we were like, guess not. And what's our alternative? Also, David's obsessed with boats and lighthouses. So, like, it was perfect. Also, Mackinac Island has two lighthouses on its own. The place we saw the shipwrecks at Whitefish Point had a lighthouse.

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So, like, it was all lighthouse and shipwreck themed. So, waving off a ship was really the, you know, closing thing we had to do to make this trip complete. But it was so funny. I had so much fun doing that. It was so dumb, but it was so fun.

Amanda: I am curious about the theaters that you guys got to go to and see the backstage. Were they like actual plays or were they like old movie theaters?

Katie: No, they were, they were like play, playhouses.

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And so I think Calumet was the one we went to. And that one was super cool. It's like a, it's called a hemp theater. Cause they, you still use like hemp rope in their like riggings and stuff, which David's a stage hand. So like he was fascinated by that. Um. But yeah, no, it was really cool. It was, it's a really old theater and I don't think they've really done a bunch of updates in it in a long time. And they had this whole like upstairs history room telling you about the history of the theater and who these famous people

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who came and performed there at like one time. And it was really cool. It's just this beautiful little historic theater and like a town I probably would have never found on my own. So it was really fun. But um, David and Rebecca are obsessed with Michigan. Uh, so we had kind of the best tour guides to do this trip with.

Amanda: And it was David, Rebecca, Bob, Chelsea, and you?

Katie: Just the five of us.

Amanda: So another thing that we talked about that happened over the summer was when your grandfather moved out of the city.

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Kind of this place that was kind of like a safe haven for you, his longtime house.

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: Is that, do I recall correctly?

Katie: You do. So my grandpa, my grandma died in 2014. My grandpa has remarried with a woman named Becky, who's lovely. But, you know, my grandparents lived in the house for my entire life. And we all kind of knew

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this day was probably coming because they became snowbirds, which is, you know, you go back and forth between your home state and Florida. So, you know, you're in Florida for the winter and you're back here in the summers. But my grandpa was just staying longer and longer in Florida. And, you know, it always gave me a lot of anxiety thinking about it, cause that was the last place my grandma was. She died in that house. And I mean, it had always just been, it was a safe haven,

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it was a giant playground, it was everything, every memory that was distinctly tied to my grandma was there. So yeah, he told us May or June that he wanted to move out. They weren't taking much, so they had to do a lot of sales. And that was really hard to watch. They gave us first pick of course of anything we wanted.

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So I got some of my grandma's furniture and stuff that meant a lot, I made sure we got it. So, I mean, it's not like they were giving away treasured heirlooms or something like that. They were very generous and gave us a lot of stuff. But yeah, just the everyday things that weren't enough to take with, but were something you would interact with every day. That was tough to see them go. And I mean, that house itself, if I could have bought that house,

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I would have bought it. I would have bought it like that. It was huge, just this giant farmhouse in the middle of town, but it had like seven bedrooms and it only sold for like \$115,000. And it wasn't a bad price, but, I mean, it wasn't technically up to code. There was nothing wrong with it actively, but to redo all that to make it, that level would have been very expensive. And so if I'd have been a little bit older, I probably would have tried to get it,

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would have tried to buy it from them, but just was not in the right place to. So it sold to some people I wasn't thrilled with, but I spent the summer going back and forth to my grandpa's. I got to see him quite a bit, which I was thankful for. I probably wouldn't have gotten to without COVID. I mean, I was still trying to be really careful about him. I didn't want to bring anything with. But yeah, so I, gosh, sorry, I'm yawning.

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But I spent several days packing stuff up, working the yard sales, helping him clean up stuff. But yeah, no, it was really sad to see that house go and they just remodeled it too, so it was beautiful. And I just felt like I kept seeing my grandma around every corner and she'd been gone for a while. She's been gone for six years at that point, but still hard to see it go. Just you see, I didn't realize how many memories I had to walk through the rooms

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and I'd be like, remember when we did this or remember when I did that? And that was tough. I cried a lot on the way home for that. I had a screaming session in my car just like, and I knew it was coming and I knew it was happening, but saying bye to the house was painful, very, very painful.

Amanda: Well, thank you for sharing that.

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And I also know that in June of 2020, which is I guess you were in Mackinac in July. Not to backtrack too much, but do you normally have like a big birthday party in a non-COVID year?

Katie: Yes. I love my birthday parties. I have a lot of friends who are very nice enough to come to my place and we have like a couple day celebration essentially where I spend the weekend doing whatever. And I still had friends come, which was so great.

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I was very lucky that people were being safe enough that I felt comfortable for them to come. And I'd had this whole plan. We were going to see Gone with the Wind, which is my favorite movie. I will admit there are many problems with Gone with the Wind, but it's a movie I've loved since childhood. And so this drive-in theater decided because of COVID, they weren't making a lot of money, but they're going to show classics to pick up some revenue as well as just get people

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out. And Gone with the Wind was supposed to play on my birthday. It was a sign, right? I was going to see Gone with the Wind on my birthday. But in early June, George Floyd dies and Gone with the Wind is immediately pulled from HBO. It's pulled from this showing. It's pulled from Walmart. You can see there's these stacks of movies that are like there's holes in their classic section.

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I totally understood and I will engage this conversation to death about the problems with Gone with the Wind. And I'd love to talk about it because as a sign of Civil War memory, it's so important to understand how we remember things. But there's some strength in Scarlet that you're not normally going to see in women of that time. And she was a role model to me as a kid because she didn't take shit from anyone. And she was strong.

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She could tell, you knew what she wanted and she's not afraid to say so. And that's something I loved as a kid and something I couldn't do. I was very enraptured by the idea of Scarlet. So my plan is now ruined for my birthday. I was like, ah, we're going to do this drive-in. And again, I was like, oh, I totally support this decision. They're talking about like HBO is going to do this like mini documentary on like the problems of it. I'm like, amazing. Love that. And then, but I was like, well, you know, what are we going to do now?

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And I was like, well, I have the movie. We can just watch it at my mom's house. And so my stepdad made a bunch of food. I got the couple friends that were going to come. So it was David, Rebecca, Chelsea, Bob and I. And then my friends, Hannah and Kelsey came down. Hannah being my former roommate and Kelsey being the one who was with me when I met Bob. And we've been friends throughout. But they decided they were going to come to my birthday and kind of glad we didn't go to the drive-in because we needed to pause it a lot just for breaks, snack breaks.

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Didn't want anyone to miss any part of the movie. So that was kind of nice. They didn't have to. And so but yeah, it took, you know, the full four hours plus to get through it with our breaks. And that was good. I still had a good time, you know, still got to do the thing I wanted just in a new setting. And but, you know, a couple people hadn't seen it. So that was exciting. But yeah, I got to have a little mini celebration.

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Hannah and Kelsey had come the day before, we got an ice cream and played a game at home. So it was small in comparison to what I've done in the past. But it's still, I was still glad I had people who were willing to come and celebrate with me.

Amanda: Would there normally be more people or would it?

Katie: Yeah, I would have a lot more people. I think the year before, I had nine or 10 people staying with me

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in this apartment I rented by myself. Well, I had a roommate, but this apartment I rented in Verdon. And, yeah, it was, it's huge. You know, we go, we went putt golfing. We went, we had, we had like a movie night. We had games that we played. And what else did we do? We did a bunch of stuff. We went to like an arcade, bowling like we did. We went out. We were out on the town doing stuff. And then like before we done like a ghost hunt at a house like a haunted house that

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we rented for the night and like probably 10 or 15 of us there and just big things, like I have this knack for getting people to come and visit me and they all seem very happy to. So I had a ton of people who could, who would come and, you know, we'd do whatever I wanted for a day or two. And that was very nice. I did not get big parties as a kid. So this was my like, yes, I'm an adult. I have adult friends. We can go do stuff.

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So I loved my big birthday parties and I got to have one pretty big this year. So it's back. It's back and better than ever. But yeah, no, 2020 was a little bit of a, it still was not bad by any stretch of the imagination. It was just small.

Amanda: And so then in fall, so we'll get to your birthday of 2021, but fall of 2020, that's when things changed and you started your master's classes in August.

Katie: Yes.

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And then you started your internship. Tell me about all of that.

Katie: Yeah. So, um, I started my internship the week before classes started. Um, I start working at the ALPLM. I get immediately, I get a project from my new boss, Christian McWhirter, who is the Lincoln historian. And he basically, he's going to do an interview for this documentary that's happening on, um, oh goodness. I can't remember the name of the, of the people.

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It was the people who owned the Bears before they were the Bears and they worked in Decatur. They were a really wealthy family. Anyway, I knew a lot about them already from my multiple jobs. Um, as both a, uh, archeology tech and a, um, saying I'm an experienced person. And so I, um, like I basically put together this PowerPoint for him, um, of different stuff I learned about them. Cause the whole point was we were trying to track down who owned this land and

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if Lincoln had ever been on it, um, and if he'd ever stayed on it. And so I did all this work. I figured it out. Um, I had a pretty solid conclusion. Um, and I'm so scared. You know, I'd had this boss before who, you know, criticized a lot of my work and like, he made me not feel comfortable going a little bit of the extra mile to make sure that I, you know, was getting the point across and doing it in a cohesive way. He just wanted the answer and like no extra work or time dedicated to this. And, you know, I, I went up to our lovely secretary Shanta and I was like,

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will he be mad if I make a PowerPoint? And she's like, why would he be mad if you made a PowerPoint? That would be great. And so I went and I made this PowerPoint and I presented it to him and he was like, well, that's fantastic. Thank you. Can I have that? Can I have a copy of that? And I was like, like, I almost started sobbing, you know, like I immediately, I was like, oh, this is an entirely different boss. This is like someone who encourages my work and is very happy to have me. And so I was like, wow, this is a new world. You know, I loved this job,

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still love this job. And, um, you know, I get to do that every day. Um, track down fun things, look into different people's stories. And so, you know, I, I go in with this, like, oh, I'm going into a big institution and I'm going to be lost in the crowd and no one's going to care about me. And no, it's the exact opposite. I have someone, I have two amazing bosses. Christian's my number one boss, but Jake Friefeld is also a boss of mine. And immediately, they're, you know, like asking me good questions and like challenging my ideas.

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And like, I'm learning a lot about the collection and what we have. And so I, I felt like I was really engaging in this material very quickly. And, um, you know, I just fall in love with the job in like the first week. And I love them and I love the place. And then I started school. Um, the day I started my master's program was weird. Um, so I start, I go to work, come home. I'm doing some readings before my first class of my master's degree. Right.

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Super excited. And I'm in my library, I'm reading and I hear like clacking, like it sounds like someone's typing. And I'm home alone. Right. And I'm like, hmm, I don't like that. And so I get up and I'm like, I hear someone typing. And then my dog looks. And I'm like, all right, I'm not crazy. Um, and I walk into the other room, look around the office. No one's there. Um, like I'm haunted. Great. This is so good. I love that for me. Um, but I'm not haunted. Um, in fact,

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I looked to the right and there was water pouring out of my closet, uh, in the office and Bob's computer isn't there. And so I like panic. So I'm like, oh, my God. And like, it's like, this is also our storage room because we don't have a lot of closets and it's a very, it's a very beautiful 1890s apartment is this apartment we're in. And so I just started throwing things out of the closet, out of the way. The ceiling is like all, but like it's cracked. There's water coming, pouring out. It's 20 minutes to go time of my first Zoom class.

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And so I, I'm throwing stuff and I hear Chelsea come in and I'm like, get in here. And she's like, oh, okay. Hold on. My stuff down. I'm like, no, get in here now. And she's like, what's wrong? And I like throw a thing out. And there's water pouring off of it. Oh, my God, and runs in and we get everything out.

And I'm like, oh, my God, what do we do? And I call Bob and I'm like, get home, get home right now. And I call our maintenance man. I'm like, hey, uh,

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water is coming out of our, our closet in the office. We don't know what happened. He's like, okay, I'll be right there. Like, great. Um, so I go, um, we were like, well, maybe something happened with our upstairs neighbors, you know, maybe like a pipe burst or something. And so we, I run to the front door and I knock on their door and they answer. And I was like, hey, does anything happen upstairs because like there's water pouring out of our ceiling. And they're like, oh, we don't know anything that happened. I was like, you know, it could have been a pipe. Like it could be between floors or something crazy, you know, like that. And I was like, okay, like just keep an eye on it on either side.

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Okay. Uh, so I go to class covered in gross water. It's brown. It's disgusting. Uh, so I'm like, wow, amazing. This is loving this start. So, uh, at one point I see Bob opened my bedroom door and I, he looks in and he's like, are you, is your mic on? I said, no, I turned my camera off. And he's like, you don't know what happened. I'm like, yeah, please tell me. He's like, well, Marcus, the maintenance man went upstairs. And, um, apparently the upstairs neighbors tried to move a fish tank,

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but forgot how heavy it was and dropped it. And so I was covered in fish water, which, uh, inside I'm terrified of fish. So I'm like now panicking. And I was like, oh, my God, I am so grossed out. Cause now all I can smell is fish, but it's my first class. So I don't want to leave. And I like filled them in a little bit. I'd been like, yeah, it's crazy thing happened. Like water was coming out. And then I like log back on at my camera and I was like, oh, I'm, I hate this.

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I hate this so much. But, um, yeah, I think they lied. I think they got in a domestic dispute and threw something and broke it. Because that's, you know, something that happened a lot with them. But anyway, yeah, I spent my first night covered in fish water. And then, classes were great though. Really liked my classes. I knew a few people. Had gotten close with a few people. And it ended up going okay.

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First week was fine. I really enjoyed my classes. I got some fun new ones. Started making new friends. And I started reaching out to people over Zoom to talk about them. Talk about them. And, um, so yeah, I really started to fit in with my master's program. I really loved all of my courses. I was like, I felt like I was back in the zone. I knew what I was doing. They figured out the like kinks of Zoom University is what we kept calling it.

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And, uh, you know, it felt kind of normal. Not great, but it was normal-ish. And, you know, we all fought almost to get heard. And so, like, I feel like my cohort is really tight. And we're really invested in our master's program. Because we had to fight every day to get, like, you know, make sure our Wi-Fi was working. Make sure, you know, everyone was mentally okay. And so, like, we all kind of started looking out for each other and making sure we were good. And, um, you know, we're really, really dedicated to making sure we get our master's.

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And that also that we're all people and going through this together. So I'm very grateful. I feel like the year after us is not as, um, intense in the vein of, like, they're there. You know, they're participating some. But it's still, like, we finally went back to in-person. And, like, just the divide between us of you can tell who was a 2020 master's, like,

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entry-level person. Because we're all still so animated. We're so excited to be in-person. We're like, yes! It's, we're in-person. We're, like, we can tell jokes. We can engage with each other. We don't have to turn the mic on to do stuff. So, like, we were very vibrant, I felt like. And so that was really cool. And we were still vibrant in the Zoom part in 2020. That's entirely different. Entirely different. And I'm glad we're done.

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I did like getting up until, you know, 6 p.m. to finish all my homework. But there's nothing like being in a classroom.

Amanda: Wow, erm, I feel like that's just like a lot to digest. What a time.

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: Going from working at the ALPLM to your ceiling collapsing, to this closeness with your cohorts. So do you think that you wouldn't be as close to them

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if you hadn't gone through this pandemic?

Katie: Yeah, I'm not sure. I'm not sure if we would. I think a lot of the conversation starters come from, you know, people not getting to explore Springfield. And like as someone who thankfully was here before, I was able to help people point them in the right direction, tell them where some collections were if they were doing research. You know, a lot of our conversations stemmed from, and like I'm sure that could have happened, you know, if we were still in person, they still would be new.

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But yeah, like I feel like it really helped that we were all trying to do different things, but we also all didn't have a lot of resources because some places were still closed. Or it just, I think because we were all like, God, it sucks to be doing a big program like this and you don't even get to engage with your people. I think we definitely got a little tighter than the average. Like there was like the group ahead of us,

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the class ahead of us had like a group chat that they were all in and like that was fine and dandy or whatever. But I felt like our, and I felt like there's, they were a little bit like, you know, they still had that energy of like, you know, the professor's not doing something that we love and so they're going to like gripe a little bit. Not bad, just like, you know, they're negative. Whereas we were trying so hard to be positive because we felt like there was so much bad already. We wanted the positives.

[1:38:19]

So I wouldn't necessarily say we're closer than other cohorts, but we definitely boost each other up, I think a lot more than normal.

Amanda: That makes a lot of sense. And then the second half of October, you had some health issues.

Katie: I did. So there's a little bit of a backstory to this. A friend of ours, trigger warning, committed suicide in late September.

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It was a very close family friend. And my mom started going down to help his wife out a lot. They had to sell the house because they didn't have his income. And there's just a lot happening. So my mom was really close with

her, too, so we were able to go a lot. And so my mom asked me to drive her down because my mom doesn't have a license. And I was like, okay, you know, I'll do that. I don't have class that day. Sure.

[1:39:17]

And that whole day I'd been doing an install at the exhibit, or at the museum actually, and I've been installing the Stevenson room in the library. And I've been working hard. And all day I kept saying I felt funny. Like it wasn't like pain, but like I just knew something was a little off. And then I drove. And again, it wasn't bad. It was just like I kept shifting a lot in my seat. And I was just like, huh. And I didn't tell my mom even. I think I was just like, I feel a little weird today, but that's it.

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And I kind of laughed at that. And then I dropped my mom off. And then I went, I got to the edge of the town, I dropped her off. And I like just burst into tears because it started hurting so bad. It was this pain in my stomach. And like it just got so, like I called Bob, I'm bawling. I'm like, I don't know how I'm doing this. I'm driving. I'm crying the whole time. I start like praying to my grandma because I'm like, I think I'm going to die.

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And like I just needed to stop. I just needed to stop. And like I like considered stopping in a hospital. I'm not in Springfield, but then I kept remembering like all these horror stories of people who go to the Southern Illinois hospitals and die of like a routine procedure. I'm like, I don't want to die. So I drive all the way to Springfield. And like the whole time Bob's like, just stop. I'll come get you. I'm like, no, it'll take twice as long then. And I'm like, I'm just driving.

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So I was like, you know, crying this whole time. I get home, I lay down, it still hurts. I thought I just needed to lay down. I was like, I'm having a weird cramp. And I didn't want to go because I'd had like, I have had health issues in the past of the gynecological nature. And so last time I went, I got a U, I got like a ultrasound. And the person like hurt me like with their ultrasound wand and it really hurt.

[1:41:14]

And like they weren't gentle. And they kept saying stuff about like, you know, it shouldn't hurt. I've had them before because I've been having this problem for a long time. And they're like, it's fine. It's fine. And like, so like I

would like, I was really scared of getting that done again because it hurt me worse than the actual problem I was having. And so I, I call or they, Bob takes me to the emergency room. And of course, with COVID, every room is like filled.

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And so I'm in the nurse's, or I'm in the, not the nursing home. I'm in the waiting room for two hours and just like moaning. I feel so bad for anyone who was in the room with, I was that annoying person in the waiting room, I was moaning. I was standing up, I was trying to stretch, anytime I do that I'd like break and like fall back into this wheelchair. They had to get me, I was just like I was in horrible pain and like I just it was just getting worse and like time was frozen. It felt like, I was like, how is this? How have I not gotten a room yet? It's COVID. COVID was the reason I didn't have room because there was a, we were in the middle of a spike and,

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you know, I there was this lady who came in with her daughter who was like she went over to a friend's house and got exposed and like was really rude about it. I was like your daughter might have COVID. Can you just like calm down? But again, I'm thinking this is I'm like in horrible pain. I was like this lady is so rude, you know, and then I'm also like, yeah, maybe I'll make her feel bad if I just keep moaning louder. Just kidding. Okay, no, I was in bad pain, though. But anyway, they were like Katie you get a room and I think as soon as we passed that threshold

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and I was no longer in the waiting room, I blacked out and I, I apparently was still awake because I was screaming and crying and telling Bob that please make it stop, Honey, Make it stop and he was like crying, too, because I don't remember hardly any of this and I remember waking up, this doctor walking in to be like you're in a little bit of discomfort, huh? And I was like on the internal like, yeah asshole, not doing this for a show.

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But no, I was like, mm-hmm. Yep. I am in pain and he was like, okay, yeah, yeah, we'll do some tests and he's like we need to do an ultrasound and I burst into tears again And Bob was like trying to explain why I'm scared and I was like, okay, it's fine. No, it's okay, it's fine and like crying and they're like why are you crying? And I was like and he told them what happened and, you know, I'm like in this like delirium again, like not looking forward to this

ultrasound. This woman comes in and she's like "Hey, you put it in, if it hurts we're done.

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You're done like that. We'll work with what we got." And, and I was like, okay, I put it in I passed out again. Fell asleep. Didn't hurt at all. She was lovely. Don't know who she was. Would love to thank her someday because that was a very nice experience as opposed to before. And they learned from this that I had a stone in my appendix that was slowly working its way out of my appendix. And if it had gotten through, I had the potential to go septic. So it hadn't gotten through yet, but it was there and spiky and working its way.

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So they're like, all right, you're going to have to go, the guy, the first doctor didn't want to take me to surgery. He said I should just take some antibiotics to break it down but there's always the potential that it could come back. A nurse in the middle of the night came in and like a secret agent was like "I'm going to go around this man's back. I think you should get this taken out. We're going to wait for the morning shift doctor." I was like, okay, give me more morphine. I did not like morphine, actually, it was weird,

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I didn't love it, but needed it, needed it badly, and I had to get it a lot because I was in a lot of pain and so I went and there they, they got the next guy's approval and then a guy who I must have like projected that it was Bertaina in my like delirium My Dr. Bertaina, because he reminded me so much of him and he like woke me up at 4 a.m. He's like, "Hey, we're going to try to get you into surgery soon. Is that okay?" I'm like, yeah, please. And he was like, oh great and like was super nice. Love that guy, don't know who he is.

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Didn't see him again. It was Bertaina but in doctor form and he, you know, I got approval to go into surgery and it was supposed to be at like 2 that day And so it's like 7 a.m. when that next stop that the Bertaina doctor comes in or the third doctor comes in rather and he, you know, he's like, "All right, we're going to move you to a different room." I get moved to this room. There's a lady in there. It's a double room and,

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you know, she's quiet and it was fine and, you know, and then like 8 a.m. rolls around she leaves, 9 a.m. rolls around, this woman comes in who's had a stroke and this woman is being told she has to go into surgery. There's like

a 70% chance she's not going to make it, and so I am listening to her make her will and testament and like calling all of her relatives

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to say she might not make it through the day and, you know, I'm just, I've got pain meds. I'm very quiet, I don't want to disturb this woman and I, you know, Bob occasionally is waking up and texting people for me and calling people and, you know, I get up a couple times go to the bathroom. She never sees me once or something and like 1:00 or so? No, it had to be like noon, noon comes in, this nurse comes in to tell me that I'm getting ready to get transferred to

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the surgical ward and she comes in and ladies, like no, I don't need anything, you can just come in. She's like "I'm here for your neighbor," and the lady's like "I have a neighbor?" and I was like, well at least I was quiet enough to not bother this woman and but that was a little traumatic as I'm also waiting for surgery and so I, I get moved to my own room at like 12:30ish and so nice. There's no bright lights. It was like a relief.

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I felt like I was finally able to breathe a little bit and I'm like, I'll take a nap before surgery. It's at 2:00 and then 2:00 rolls around and I'm not in surgery. And this whole time, mind you, because I'm supposed to go into surgery, I have not eaten or drank since I was in the car, I'm going to my mom or going to drop off my mom, and I, you know, I'm like I can't wait to eat, I'm so excited and, you know, 2:00 rolls around nothing, 3:00 they come in

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they're like, "Hey, we had to move surgery. Someone got shot." I'm like, understandable. Thank you. They go, they're like, "I'll be back, surgery by 5:00." Cool. Sounds good. No, no surgery by 5:00. Thankfully AOC the congresswoman was playing Among Us on a stream that day and that entertained me for a lot of it because I was dying and I was just, you know, they had to keep coming in and give me meds and

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thankfully I had Bob who has a little bit of medical background and they let him actually stay most likely because he, they weren't really letting people stay because of COVID. But, I mean, I didn't have to call my nurse hardly at all to help me to the bathroom. Like Bob was helping me through all of it and like professionally not just, you know, I'm a doting boyfriend, like he knew

what to do. And so I think they were like, yeah, we have less to do now. Thank you for that. But anyway, I don't get surgery until 1 a.m. The next day.

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So I've been in the hospital since 10 p.m. I think it was a Thursday, Wednesday. Yeah, it was a Wednesday and I go in for surgery 1 a.m. Friday morning, and I, I get in to do the surgery, you know, they finally they're like, "Hey, we didn't think we're ever going to get to you." And I'm like, "Yeah, I mean, me neither. Really glad you're here." And so they like they're prepping me. They're like, "Are you nervous?" And I'm like no. They're like, "At all?" "No. Get it out." Like alright, glad to hear that.

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And then I was also I was like, you know, I'm scared of hurting any customer service people's feelings, so I, you know, they're getting ready. They're like, "Hey, can you move your arm?" "Oh, yeah. Sorry." They're like, "Can you move this?" I'm like, "Yeah, of course," and like moving stuff like this is the like politest patient we've had nothing. Oh, thank you and I get like brightened my, you know, day that they were all like, oh my gosh, thank you so much. And then like, you know, I don't think I even got to do the countdown before I fell asleep with their gas. I was also just exhausted

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so I felt like nothing. I woke up and I looked at my nurse. I'm like "Is it done?" and they're like, yeah. I was like can I water? It's like of course and have like ice chips waiting for me. Oh, and that was the other thing is I had this really special mask. I had bought that was from a youtuber I like and it was the only mask I had when I went in and, you know, when I was getting ready for surgery I kept saying I'm like, "Don't lose this mask. This is my mask." And like I kept trying to put it on my wrist like I normally do and I'm just doing stuff.

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I'm like, no, no, no can't go there. I'm like, okay, but we can't lose this mask and I woke up and my mask was on my stomach. So they took care of it for me. So I like grab my mask and like I got ice chips, went back up to surgery or the room where I'd been and Bob woke up and he teared up a little bit and I was like, I'm okay, and he was like, I know, but it was just, it was scary and I'm like, I know. Let's go now and I thought I was going to go home that day and I didn't, they wanted to keep me for observation because I had higher oxygen

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level, levels than I was supposed to. But I finally got to go home on Saturday. And what I did not realize was the day of my surgery was the anniversary of my grandma's death. And so I felt to some extent that she sort of watched over me, especially because I prayed so hard to her and it took two days for me to get into surgery essentially. So that was bizarre and I didn't realize that till, you know,

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well after and I, because I always dread the day. I always have a hard day and, you know, I was just relieved, like a day I just like got to sleep and like watch the shows on the television and so that was nice, but so I felt like I was heard to some extent and but yeah, so then I recovered, slowly, I actually ended up tearing something because my maintenance man got jumped outside of our apartment and I sprinted out to help him

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because there were four guys on him and luckily other, my other neighbors were also out there helping and I hadn't seen them and but when I sprinted out I tore something and so that made my recovery time a little bit longer than it should have but I ended up being okay, and I have some cool little scars now from my weekend in the hospital.

[1:52:20]

Amanda: So, what a story that is, and I'm very glad that you're okay.

Katie: Thank you.

Amanda: Your recovery, you were out of work for two weeks, weren't you?

Katie: I was, I was out of work for two weeks. Finally got to come back in. I was on bedrest for a while. I got to come back in though I think I made cookies for everyone and that was the day that no one was in the office. My boss Christian was out sick, well, I think Jake was on vacation and Shanta was on vacation and I didn't know that because I'd been out and

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save my cookies by myself. And then very shortly after that COVID made us all go home again. So I didn't get to see them for very long at all.

Amanda: And as the extrovert that you are that must have been very difficult.

Katie: It was. I am NOT productive at home That is something I learned. I love that, you know, people are getting the option to work from home now, but I am very much an in-person present type of person. But yeah, so I think we went home like November 16th or 17th

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was when the next spike happened.

Amanda: And then, yeah, so the ALPLM, I think in our, yeah, you mentioned, did you say November just now?

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: Yeah, that's, I think what you said in our pre-interview. So how long were you guys at home?

Katie: We were at home until, hmm, it was the week after the inauguration. So I believe January 26th might have been it?

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I was allowed a couple times to, like, if I needed something from the office, I could come in by myself and grab it. And I remember, I can come circle back to this, but prepping for inauguration, the building was about to be, they surrounded the building with National Guardsmen. And so we had to come get our stuff before they showed up because then no one would be allowed in.

Amanda: Yeah, we will talk about that. We're close though, because now we're in the winter of 2020.

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And that's when your sweet dog was diagnosed with cancer.

Katie: My sweet boy, Rhett, who was, I mean, it wasn't necessarily a surprise in December. We had taken him to the vets, like, either early November or late October because he had a giant, we found out later, it was a tumor on his foot. And it was just swollen. He was biting it a lot.

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And so I, you know, I thought maybe he'd gotten something stuck in it or something, and he was just chewing on it. And so we took him to the vet. They couldn't find anything. They decided, you know, we'll remove it, just to be safe, and then we'll test it. And then December was when we found out that it was actually cancerous. Or we did the surgery in mid-December, and

we found out, I believe January 5th was when it was diagnosed as cancer. But that was really difficult. They

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basically said he has weeks to live. He, I mean, no one told him he had cancer so it was really hard to, you know, like to see this and like see him and then, you know, think, oh you're going to, you're not going to be here soon and then like because of COVID I was, I was terrified we were going to have to take him to the vet to put him down and that's something I've never wanted. I want him to go at home, whatever or wherever that may be, and so I, uh, was, you know, really struggling with that.

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I was struggling with the idea of him leaving. We, there was so much, you know, we were way too busy waiting for, for after college to get to do with him. We always wanted to take him on vacations and so, um, we decided to take him on a vacation, um, we got some pictures taken with him professionally so that we had something and it was so cold that day, it was, [Rhett?] did not look happy in those pictures. He looked so upset, it was so cold, um, but, you

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know, they were beautiful photos, um, by a local photographer, uh, so we got these great pictures. We decided we're going to take him to New Orleans, um, because we wanted to take him to the ocean because Rhett loves to swim, loves the water. He is a water dog and, um, you know, which is weird for a pit bull but he, uh, he, um, we got him started on some treatments and then we took him to New Orleans and the first day we went we did a bunch of stuff downtown

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so that he could, you know, we got him a beignet, we took him to Jackson Square, which you're technically not supposed to do with a dog, but we did it anyway and, you know, we have to see these sites. I love New Orleans. I've been once before, um, and but, you know, we got, we spent the whole day with him, whole day wherever he wanted to go down a street unless it was a little sketchy we let him go, we let him take us through, um, he had a great time, he was exhausted by the end, we had this beautiful Airbnb, too, like it was

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an old seminary, stunning, it was so pretty, uh, they allowed dogs and he was psyched to be there, uh, had a giant bed, which I'm sure he loved because he's a bed hog, um, so they had like a king-size bed and, you know, we made him steaks, we bought steaks in like the French Quarter and carried him back which was like way too long to walk but we were like, well you don't want to drive and park downtown. Bless you.

Amanda: Uh, sorry.

Katie: It's okay and so...

[1:58:02]

... we, we got food, we made him these steaks like we each had one and so he was, you know, living it up in New Orleans and so then the next day we were like let's go walk around the Garden District because our Airbnb is like really close to the Garden District. I was like the perfect place and so we. we, uh, we start walking around looking all these houses again we're letting Rhett just kind of lead us where he wants to go, we take him to this diner that loves dogs, it's not really diner, it's like an outside like you walk up

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order and there's tables outside, so he's just like, he's also like passing out because of the day before, because we walked like seven miles, like we were hoofing it and so he's like, there's this, I took this picture of him like his face on the table, like he's not even putting in the effort to beg for the food, he's just so tired and I'm like "Oh no, Buddy, it's we're doing it again today," and so we walked all around the Garden District and then I think we were waiting to go to the ocean until it was like 3:00 so it was warmest

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because it's, you know, January, very cold, um, and so we walked, we take him, we drive like an hour to this beach, it's so cold, but it was, um, it was warmer than I thought it was going to be, thankfully in the Gulf and so we get to this beach and Rhett's just going crazy and he loves the water, he's kind of freaked out by the waves not like scared but like oh, my God, I got to fight the waves and so he's like jumping, it, it's not super deep so, you know, like I'm in like jeans and a coat and I just say, you know, what screw it and I just start sprinting

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out and like it's like up to my knees in water, Rhett's chasing me and like we just have this like fun little couple hours and of course we're both so cold, so cold by the end of this. But we had so much fun, he was being a little weird

about the water and just like, like if I was in the water he was trying to bite the water but then was getting a little too close to me but like he was just having so much fun chasing everything and, um,

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so, yeah, we drove back to New Orleans. We had another night of like really good food that we, I don't know if we ordered from somewhere or if we made food again, but anyway, we just had this nice little, you know, day and then we came back. So it was just, you know, a little four day trip with two days of driving. Oh, we stopped, did we stop anywhere. We stopped to see my friend Layla on the way back because she wanted to see Rhett and that was in Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

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And so she we had dinner with her on our last night and then made the rest of the trip back to Springfield. Um, so that was big. I was very happy. That, that and like the whole time, you know, I was worried. I'd be sad the whole time, but it was honestly nice, you know, we were in a new place. He was having a great time, so it was hard to think about being sad because, you know, he's thrilled. He's having a great time. So I think that was a good choice. It seemed a little crazy. A lot of people were like,

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"You're taking a vacation for your dog?" and I'm like, "Yes, I am. We're taking him to the big water," which is what we kept calling the ocean. So Rhett got to play in the big water for the first time because we did get to do another trip later on.

Amanda: And so he's outlived the doctor's prognosis.

Katie: Yeah. No one ever told Rhett he had cancer. He was on chemo. He turned white for a little bit. He's a pretty red, red-haired doggo like his mom. And his mom being me, of course, I have red hair. And so,

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yeah, he was given basically two months. It is now December of 2021, and he is just fine. He is still on some meds, but there is no tumor. He's not really in remission. There's always a little bit of something. But as far as we know, it has not spread. Yeah, he's been doing pretty great.

Amanda: And if the listener hears some heavy breathing, it's not Katie or me. It is indeed Rhett.

Katie: Sighing very dramatically, like he is abused.

[2:02:05]

But he is not. He is on a very comfortable couch.

Amanda: He's been on two different comfortable couches.

Katie: He is a very spoiled dog. He gained weight on chemo, which is unheard of. He has gotten a lot of people food since his diagnosis, but he's doing great.

Amanda: We are back. I almost said brack. We are back after a little bit of a pause.

[2:02:34]

And we were just getting through talking about Sweet Rhett and his, well, he's doing better. Which is always very good to hear. And, you know, one thing that happened in December that we kind of didn't talk about was that the first vaccines became available to health care workers. Personally, I didn't know too much about it at that point. Were you aware of the vaccine going on at that time?

Katie: Oh yeah. No, first of all, I was ecstatic. I was keeping up with that very closely.

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And Bob works at SAU Med, so immediately he was, he's not a first responder or, you know, a health care provider. He's a researcher, but he was able to get his in January. And I was like sad, because I wanted one. I wanted to go out and do things, so I didn't get mine until like March. But, you know, him, and Chelsea, because Chelsea's technically a, what's the word?

Amanda: Essential frontline worker.

[2:03:37]

Yeah, frontline worker as an archaeologist, because you had to keep doing construction and infrastructure things. And so she technically was able to apply, too. So she got hers in like late January, early February and I was just like, oh the last one. I want my vaccine, please. But I'm a state worker so I got mine in March. So I was still earlier than a lot of people but I was just the last in my household.

Amanda: And at that point it's just like, ah.

[2:04:08]

Katie: Yeah, I was like, oh where's mine? I want to go out and do things. I want to go to a restaurant.

Amanda: And then to finish out 2020, I have two more questions, which is, was Christmas of 2020 different than normal? I mean, for a lot of people it started feeling normal, whether even though the death count was, you know, higher than it was in March.

Katie: Yeah, um, I mean, it was fairly normal. It was, I mean, I didn't, like,

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we hadn't had a normal "Christmas" that I would think of as like our family Christmas since my grandma died. So, I mean, we just did really small get-togethers anyway and had been for several years. So, you know, we went up to Bob's family and stayed for like a week and I was working remotely. So that wasn't a problem. And I mean, they all are recluses and didn't go anywhere. So we weren't really concerned with that. We ended up having a small party at the Edwards Place,

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which is a historic house here in Springfield. I became very good friends with this woman named Sarah over the pandemic, and she is the curator of the Edwards Place, and Chelsea convinced all of us to read this series of books that she loved called A Court of Thorns and Roses. And so we decided we were going to have our own Starfall, which was an event that happened in the books. In which, you know, they have, they, you know, get to have a whole bunch of food, they drink, they give out presents.

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We actually got the date wrong, but it still felt fun. And so it was on the solstice, so December 21st, and that was my Christmas with my friends, was, you know, in this historic house and we all dressed up in like ball gowns and got dressed up and it was just a good time. And so, you know, we all looked amazing and we all got each other gifts and this was like our first Christmas, you know, with this core group of friends. Who, you know, like I feel like I'd die for each and every one of them.

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And so, you know, this was our first big Christmas. And like, I don't know, you could feel how much we all cared about one another. Like, not to put too much emphasis on presents, but, you know, they were all so thoughtful. And we really were trying to, you know, give each other a fun Christmas. And, you know, this is our core group, so, you know, we all knew we were safe.

We all work in very small closed areas. Me, probably working, I work at the largest institution, but, you know, we only really go places in our own area and I'd been working from home, so.

[2:06:43]

Yeah, it was super small. Saw my family for like a day each. Yeah, it was, it didn't feel quite normal, but it was also not so different that it didn't feel like Christmas.

Amanda: And then did you have any particular hopes or goals for the new year? Or any perhaps projections for what you hoped would be normal again?

[2:07:11]

You know, anything like that?

Katie: Well, I was real confident that everyone was going to get the vaccine. After this whole year, we were all, everyone wanted to go out again. So I was pretty confident everyone would sign up for those vaccines super fast. And boy was I incorrect on that. But also, I did want to work out a little bit. I'd been seeing a personal trainer for most of 2020. I wanted to, you know, make sure I kept doing that. I did not. Spoilers.

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Well, I did, but with my health problems and the COVID spikes, I wasn't able to get into a good, you know, rhythm of things. So that was disappointing. But, I mean, other than that, I was just focusing on my master's, working on that as much as I could. I was feeling good about the classes I was taking and I was getting great grades. So, you know, it was tough, but it wasn't unbearable like it had been before. Like, I feel like once

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school and work started in 2020, I, you know, I felt like a person again. I felt like I was back to normal in my own brain. And it was during those lulls where I wasn't able to go into work and I wasn't able to differentiate my setting that it got a little difficult again. Wasn't super productive. I will be honest, but you know, I felt like I I was also not doing the meaningful work I felt like I did when I had all those resources at hand,

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so at work, you know, getting to go into the stacks and get the books and get to go look at manuscripts, and that sort of thing is super fun And then I was

just doing like data entry and so it felt a little bit more boring, wasn't as engaging. But yeah, I mean it was okay. It wasn't as bad as it had been.

Amanda: And then we've already kind of discussed the vaccines, but it was January 25th when it became available to frontline essential workers and Illinoisans 65 and up.

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March 29th, religious leaders were allowed to be vaccinated. I can't really tell you why I have that particular date in for this interview in particular, but it's there.

Katie: Sure.

Amanda: And then by April 12th, it was available to everyone. So you said you got yours in March?

Katie: Yes, I got mine. Oh, it had to be like the second week of March because I got my second one on April 1st because everyone made fun of me for that. They thought my Snapchat was a joke. It was not. But I did get

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my second vaccine by April 1st.

Amanda: It's a good day.

Katie: It is a good day. Yeah. Happy birthday, by the way.

Amanda: And so we already talked about it though, but your thoughts were pretty positive about the vaccine.

Katie: Yeah. No, I was very excited. I wanted life to go back to normal and people to be healthy and stop dying.

Amanda: That seems very fair.

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: And then we, you touched on it, foreshadowed that January, when President Biden was set to be,

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well, when he won the election and then leading up to the inauguration, there was the Capitol riot. And that affected the ALPLM in Springfield. Can you tell me about that?

Katie: Sure. So, like I said, Rhett was diagnosed with cancer January 5th. I'm heartbroken. I'm sad. My dog is dying. The next day, I am at work. Technically, I'm at home, but I'm at work. And I get a text from a friend of mine who's like, oh, my God, they're going to get in.

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And I was like, what are you talking about? And he sends me a picture of people on the steps. And I was like, oh, my God, what's happening? And I open CNN on my phone. I actually move out of my bedroom because I was like, I need to watch this somewhere where I can sit up and do it. Cause, you know, I'd been in bed. I had just been kind of comatose and sad. So I was laying in bed doing my work. Don't judge me. But I went to the library and I propped my phone up and I was not productive that day at all.

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Because I was just watching this in horror. And, you know, watching every step and seeing them get in, watching those officers get crushed. And like seeing the videos coming out of that, that police officer running through the Capitol. I thought he was dead. I thought he was going to die. That black police officer, I was like, they're going to kill him. And so then you start seeing these memes on Instagram, I'm trying to flip between the news and social media to see what everyone's saying.

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It's all these things, if this had been part of the BLM movement, all these people would be dead. They'd be shot for trying to breach the Capitol. And I was like, exactly, this is unprecedented. How did this happen? And they're starting to do the fuller coverage of, well, they came from this rally. Obviously, they're all Trump supporters. They've got the flags, and there's the dude in a Viking hat, which is so problematic in

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terms of white nationalist symbolism. And then I was seeing things, and I kept thinking, I was like, oh, my God, where is AOC? Where's Nancy Pelosi? Where are these very liberal people in power? Because there's no news. There's the occasional— And like I said, I'm very much not a Republican, but there was like the— There's an Illinois—he's either a representative—I think he's a representative. It starts with a K.

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Amanda: Adam Kinzinger.

Katie: Yeah, Adam Kinzinger is on the news, like, hiding. He's hiding. He's calling these news outlets, and he's like, this is unbelievable. Everyone needs to get out. How are they doing this? This is an affront to our democracy. And he's, you know, a Republican. And I'm like, exactly! And I was like, never prouder to have an Illinois, like, Republican say something like this, because, you know, then you're seeing— and then there's the Trump speech where he like, you know, I'd been waiting. Biden had given a like a statement of like, everyone, you know, if you need help,

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like here are the things you can call, like, if you're still in the Capitol, like here's some help. And like, you know, like acted like a president and he was calm and he was collected, but you could tell he was concerned. And, you know, it, it was so scary to watch. And like, I don't want to compare it to 9-11 because like the tragedy was so much deeper, but like the fact that you couldn't look away. And you know you're watching some big historical moment. That's what it felt like. And I could not turn the TV off.

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And I was just like, oh, my God. And like it was every couple minutes it was another thing. And, you know, then the pictures start coming out about Nancy Pelosi and they're in her office and like I was sick. You know, I was absolutely sick. And I was like, this is the Speaker of the House. And how did this happen? So then, you know, Trump gives his like 3 p.m. speech, which is, I love you, but it's time to go home now. And I was like, is this a joke? Did I die and like have a stroke watching this?

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Because how did that happen? How did he say that? How was no one like, like, of course, the CNN people are like, oh, my God. Oh, my God, no. You know, there isn't, in as much shock as we are, who are the people who are watching who are like. That was it? That was all we got? We got like a minute long thing of we approve of you but it's time to go home now? Like it was bizarre and it felt fake. It felt like there's these parodies of how insane Trump was

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and then there's like he does something like that and you're like, you know, maybe the media is too hard on people like him. No. Oh, my God, no. And I was so like blown away. And I kept calling Bob who was at work and I'm like, do you guys see what's happening? Like I was texting Chelsea, I'm like, turn on the news. And she and her boss watched it the rest of the day, too. And I

was texting my boss and I was like, what's happening? And like I know he has people from Virginia that he knows and I'm like, are your people okay? And, you know, it was just

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absolutely insane. And then finally they start to get things under control. I kept waiting to see anything about AOC or, you know, when's the National Guard going to come in. Finally Mike Pence called the National Guard in and I was like, how is it the hero of the day is Mike Pence? You know, I don't approve of the man because he, you know, wants to do conversion camps on LGBT teens. But he took a step that was more presidential than our president in that moment.

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I will never approve of Mike Pence, but how is he the hero of the day? I was so mad about that. I was just like, how is it he is not the elected official? And this happened. And so when again, and then finally we start seeing like the like the gallows they built for him and like, oh, my God, he was a target, too. And, you know, it wasn't just, you know, Democrats that they were going after. It was anyone who opposed him or like didn't believe in his, you know,

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fake version of what government looks like and it was terrifying to watch and I was so upset and like Bob was kind of like, you know, okay. And like he didn't quite understand it and I was like you have no idea what this means. This is insanity. This is nothing that's ever happened before like not even during the Civil War did this happen. No one was able to breach DC and, you know, I mean that's something I deal with a lot at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. So it's a comparison I come to a lot but oh, my God. we didn't even get that far and so,

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you know, I'm watching to make sure AOC is okay, like we finally get the update all the Congress member members are in this specific, you know, they don't tell you where because of course they'll target that next. But they're like they're safe. All of them are accounted for and it's like oh, thank God. She came out later and had a horrific story, too, that I'm sure anyone can look up, but yeah, she, I was just like and like I keep using AOC as an example because she's targeted because she's young. She's a woman.

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She's incredibly outspoken. She is like making waves. And like there were people later that, you know, you find out they had zip ties. They were ready to take them hostage and do God knows what too. And, you know, as a woman I was so petrified for every person in that building. I was so scared and, you know, you're starting to hear accounts of people died and it's just, it felt like I wasn't

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in America at that moment. It felt so foreign to me and it was just absolutely insane and, you know, we start, I, I don't think I'll ever live through, I hope, I hope to God I never live through something like that again, because I, I don't know, I felt like I was so, it was so different to anything I'd ever

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experienced and then of course, you know, once everything's under control and they've got their like 6 p.m. lockdown and no one's allowed to come out again and then Congress goes back and they vote and they do what they were supposed to do. That felt the most American, like I felt like that was it, like that was we came back to do the thing we set out to do. And I was so proud, I was like I don't care. I do care what political party you are as obviously one tried to storm the Capitol building. But like obviously it wasn't just necessarily a one party thing.

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Like there was obviously dissent and then the next week is the impeachment, which I also watched very closely. I was absolutely flabbergasted that he was not, you know. Like he was impeached but there was no trial that was able to happen, which, you know, it doesn't, it shouldn't have mattered. That is so evident that he pushed for that and like just the message he publicly put out,

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like not even just the personal things that are like just coming out now or going to eventually with the further investigation, but oh, my God, it was so obvious and I just was blown away. So like I watched the impeachment and I was like, you know, you know it's bad when there's at least like 10 Republicans in this field where lines are so clearly drawn and followed. This was like the first time in a couple years I'd seen

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bipartisan like, no he did something wrong, look at this, we're voting because this is our duty as congresspeople. Again I was like, this is American.

People are holding people accountable. And that was interesting and then, you know, I went to New Orleans and that was later and it was like the second week of January, second or third weekend and on our way down to New Orleans we were seeing these billboards for people who

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were in the areas we were driving through who'd been part of the, part of the, the insurrection like wanted posters essentially of like they're from around here keep your eye out and like that was crazy. And, you know, the further south we went the more we saw, so that was very interesting and a little dystopian to see these giant light up billboards with wanted posters of, you know, people in MAGA hats and you know sunglasses or

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some were very, you know, not trying to hide it at all and so that was weird but how it affected me at work was, so getting ready for the, the, the inauguration, every state capital in the country went into extreme lockdown and each state had a set of, of national guardsmen who would come to protect the Capitol building.

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Being the ALPLM, we have some of the most expensive objects in the country, probably the world, that have to do with Abraham Lincoln. And it's a state industry. Institution rather, not industry. So we were called and told if we need anything from the office, they were going to let us come back the week of the inauguration, but because of how heavily everything needed to be locked down, we couldn't because we were scared of people breaking in and trying to get to our stuff.

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So, but because of that, they had us come in to get our stuff, anything we needed. And so I came in and I saw Christian for the first time. And I said, who would have known that the reason we see each other is that Nazis are threatening our workplace. I remember saying that to him and I was like, that seems like a sentence I shouldn't have to say. And so I got my stuff, left, and then the next week, the entire week of the inauguration,

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there were National Guardsmen in heavy duty, with heavy duty weaponry outside the ALPLM, with giant military vehicles parked in front. They were on every corner of the block for two blocks. That was surreal. That felt insanely dystopian. I keep saying it but that whole like section of time was so

bizarre and, you know, I drive down 6th Street, a street I go to work or, you know, go to Walmart and there's military on

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the corners like we're an occupied, you know, place, and that was so strange, and I kept taking pictures, I'm like, this feels fake. This does not feel like Springfield, Illinois which is small and like it's a city of course but like not somewhere you'd think would be threatened like this and so, yeah, I mean, we did get to come back the next week, but, yeah, it was so out of the norm and just absolutely bizarre to see that in my backyard,

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essentially.

Amanda: And then what was the rest of your spring 2021 semester like?

Katie: Hectic, finishing up my first year of grad school and I did well, but, yeah, it was pretty frantic, had to get a lot of assignments done. But things were starting to open up again, so towards the end we started doing our first study groups in person and that was so nice.

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All of us were a little frazzled and stressed out because of how difficult the program was, but, yeah, just getting to work with my fellow students in this cohort I've gotten to know over the last couple months, that was so great. I loved that. That was so wonderful.

Amanda: Yeah, I have that you organized a talk event in memory of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire.

Katie: I did.

Amanda: That you got to meet some of your cohorts there.

Katie: I did. So, yeah, so that was a little before our study sessions. It was much smaller than our study session became.

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But it was, um, we'd read this book for one of our classes that we all had to take about this woman who organized an event every single year to honor the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory victims in New York. And that happened in 1911, I believe. And so, you know, this was going to be the 110th anniversary, and we'd read this book like two weeks before it happened. The whole point of their project was to chalk the names outside of the houses and buildings

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that these women worked at, women and men, there were a few men, and write their name, a little about them, like if there's a picture, they taped it to the sidewalk. And they do this every single year, rain or shine. And, you know, I was inspired. I thought it was something that was really cool. Yeah, we're in, you know, the middle of Illinois, but doing something to honor women who died in this horrible, tragic way to, you know, kind of mark how industry has changed and how, you know, women have started to increasingly get rights. And it's things like this that happen that,

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like, make people realize, like, how desperately measures are needed to be implemented that, you know, progress can be made. And, of course, it always happens with a horrible accident. But like, like the Titanic, you know, things start getting built better and there's more safety instituted. And like, it's the same kind of thing. And so, you know, I was so enraptured by this book and on every single page, there's a victim's name and their age. And so we decided to do that. We decided to write their names and their ages. And I made little cutouts from pictures of them

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that I found online, cut out their silhouette, and then we chalked around it so it looked like their outline was on the concrete. Then we read all of their names and it was raining, but we managed to do it outside the library at UIS, and this is the first time I got to meet a few of my friends in person. I knew most of them and had met them before, but a few I hadn't gotten to see in person and so, you know, it's exciting. You know, we're also meeting, this is also a solemn,

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a little bit of an event, but we're also having fun writing these names and, you know, of course we're doing the like, oh God, I wrote the names too close together, like oh, man, mine doesn't look as good as yours, and so like, you know, it's still, it's still a bonding experience and then we have our solemn like couple minutes where we read all of the names and took pictures of what it looked like and, you know, this was the first like big event we got to do and typically there would be things that the professors try to get us to join and do and I just set it up myself.

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Because I thought it would be important to honor these women. I'm not sure, I wasn't sure what New York would be doing because of how much worse COVID was there. So I thought it was important and so we made little flyers and passed them out around campus. If you go you can still find some because no one takes anything down at UIS. But it was really great and I felt like I was doing history stuff but also getting to experience my master's.

Amanda: And then as the vaccine becomes more widely available, by May the CDC was like,

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hey, masked individuals don't need to wear their masks. I mean vaccinated individuals. And so were you able to take off the mask at work? And that's, I guess you didn't have any in-person classes at that point.

Katie: No, I didn't.

Amanda: At work?

Katie: I did. I did. I did a few weeks where I did. And it's a little weird. I've never been around without them. But yeah, I was like, whoa, it's a new world. I'm coming back. Of course, it did not last. But it was nice. I didn't have to panic about it.

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Amanda: Did you feel like the pandemic was over or on its way to being over?

Katie: A little. I did. Towards the beginning, you know, there's still the like, oh, everyone go get vaccinated. And it wasn't until, you know, you know, it's getting to be summertime that there's the, everyone's against vaccines for reasons still unbeknownst to me. And I was like, hmm, it's not going to be over. But I did cherish those few weeks.

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And then I got kind of sick because, you know, with masks, we were prevented from getting all sorts of sicknesses. So as soon as I went maskless, I got sick again. I was so mad about that. And then I just wore my mask again because I was like, I don't want to spread this cold. I'm glad I have all these masks around. No one in my office got sick because of them, even though they got to go maskless and I didn't and for a couple weeks. And then I, you know, was back as normal. But, you know, it was, it was, it was nice, nice couple weeks.

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Wasn't long. Didn't get to last. But it was nice.

Amanda: I remember at my interview at the ALPLM, we didn't have to wear masks. And then when I started like three weeks later, four weeks later maybe, masks were implemented again, which is just an interesting progression of that time.

Katie: Yeah, I remember, so I got, I bought a ton of masks because they were all a dollar for like five packs at Walmart, where before they'd been like nine because of the need.

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And so like, I bought like four packs of masks. So I got like 20 masks. I'm like, these are just, I'm going to keep these for when we're sick, be great, you know. I've run out of masks. I've lost some, you know. I'm sure there's some in coat pockets and stuff. And so, but it's summer, I'm going to buy these masks, right? And I get sick literally the next week. And I was like, so glad I bought these masks. And then literally two days later, it's like, oh, we need masks. So again, I'm like, look at all these masks I have now.

Amanda: For a steal.

Katie: Yeah, for a steal. I was so excited. It was so down. I was like, 20 masks for \$4.

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This is the best day of my life. And, yeah. But yeah, I was like, as soon as I was done being sick, I was like, mask up again. I'm like, it's nice while it lasted, I guess.

Amanda: So in June, though, I guess we're kind of going all over the place with the timeline, but I'll kind of ground it by giving specific dates. June 11th, 2021 is when Illinois moved into phase five, which was essentially complete reopening. I mean, there were some limitations

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on numbers of people in places, but, I mean, it really was quite the comeback.

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: Quote unquote. Did you think that that was appropriate or what were your thoughts?

Katie: Yeah, I mean, numbers had been decreasing. I was, you know, starting to get excited. I was like, oh, the end's in sight. And then three days after that, it's

my birthday. So I got to have another big birthday party where I had a bunch of people just come over for dinner. And we kept it simple, but

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it was nice. It was a potluck. I accidentally asked too many people to make different types of potatoes, so it was a lot of potatoes. But it was nice. And we had a good time. Just hung out, chatted, and it was just wonderful. And big, again. So I was beyond excited to move into Phase 5. I wasn't really questioning the validity. If it had been like March and that had happened, I'd be like, whoa guys, look at these hospitals that are still full. But again,

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like we've been hearing these reports like, oh there's like only two people in St. John's with COVID right now. We're like, amazing. Sounds good. Open it back up. Open the gates. So I mean, I was thrilled.

Amanda: And then that summer you were able to take some trips. I know you said you went to Allerton? Or Ollerton?

Katie: Yeah. Allerton.

Amanda: You went to the Frank Lloyd Wright house.

Katie: Yeah, so Allerton we did in May and that was like our big group trip for all my

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history people because we all kind of gotten to see each other at different study events but we'd never all been together. We still weren't all together at Allerton but it was the closest we'd come. And so I had been saying I wanted to find, I got into this mindset in March. Because Bob kept talking about us getting engaged. I was like I'm just going to start planning because who knows what's going to happen with this pandemic and I just want to be prepared. So I bought my dress online, wasn't engaged yet. Decided I was like I'm going to start looking at

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venues. Didn't love a lot of venues. Couldn't get married at the Dana-Thomas house which was my lifelong dream but, you know, it's fine. Didn't end up working out but I was like, you know, I heard about this place called Allerton. Seems pretty cool. I will happily go and try to see what that's like. And in the meantime, it's a [PNE?] festival. All the flowers are in bloom. Why

don't all the history people come to this historic house slash grounds with me and we'll have a good time.

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And so we all showed up and we had a picnic and, you know, we all got to hang out. And I was like in love with the space. I was like, this is great. I would love to get married here. Full shebang wedding and there was ceremony and the reception. That's not how it ended up happening but, anyway, I was like, this place is great I love it and so, you know, and I got to hang out with people. And then for my birthday weekend before my actual birthday where I had the dinner with everyone Bob took me to Taliesin East which is a where Frank Lloyd Wright

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himself lived and there was also a large murder that happened and I am really into dark history, and so Frank Lloyd Wright's lover, her children, and some of their servants were brutally murdered. And, you know, there's a book written about it called *Loving Frank*. And so I was, you know, obsessed with that book after working at the Dana-Thomas house. And I was like, I just want to go see this place where she died because she was Frank Lloyd Wright's lover. And she's buried really close to there and I want to go see her grave.

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And I've been begging Bob for years to take me because, but it's expensive. It's a Frank Lloyd Wright owned like, a like, foundation.

Amanda: Estate-owned?

Katie: Yeah, yeah. It's not state-owned because the Dana-Thomas House is state-owned and it's free to go.

Amanda: Oh, I meant estate-owned.

Katie: Oh, yeah.

Amanda: Like by his estate?

Katie: His foundation, I think I would say. And so they, tickets are not cheap. But I finally was like, it's my birthday. Can we go? And he was like, okay. And so we did like the four-hour tour, right? The estate tour.

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And I was like, this is where I'm going to get engaged. I was convinced. So I brought a fun dress. I brought heels. Did not know I would be walking that whole time up Wisconsin hills, but that's okay. I only got a couple blisters and not engaged, but it was a good day. We got back to the car and I took my heels off and I was like, I thought you were going to propose. He's like, you know, I should have made you wear your flip-flops. I'm like, you knew it. I don't wear heels for just anything.

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And so, anyway, didn't get engaged there. It was okay. I still had a great time. Got kind of sunburned, but the house was nice. Definitely got to go see her grave. Still think the Dana-Thomas house is better though. 100%. Super cool. The best of the best, I'd say.

Amanda: And then July 4th of 2021 was a pretty big day, wasn't it?

Katie: It was. So Bob had been planning, or Bob had said, I want to plan a date because we haven't gotten to go on a date

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in a while. I was like, awesome, where do you want to go? He's like, St. Louis. And I was like, absolutely not. We are not going to St. Louis on the 4th of July. But we had both, we both had the day off and I think it was a Saturday or Sunday. I think it was a Sunday. And I was like, yeah, let's think of something else. And he's like, well, do you have any ideas? I'm like, we can go to Allerton and do like a picnic or something. And he's like, that sounds nice. And I was like, oh, good. You know, sure. And so, you know, I planned this date and

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we got stuff for it, we got food, we were going to take Rhett because Rhett didn't get to go when the group went. And we get there, well actually, it started with we woke up and we were getting ready and I was looking at him and I was squinting at him because I'm like, this is romantic. And he's like, oh you think I'm going to propose today? And I was like, I guess not, I guess. Whatever. And so, you know, on the whole drive over there I'm looking in his pockets to see if there's a box. And there's nothing. And I was like, got my hopes up again.

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Did it, did it again. And we, um, we get, we are going to the sunken gardens. That's where I wanted to picnic. And then there was a dog there. So we didn't get to, we didn't go in the sunken gardens, we went around the

sunken gardens. And on the side of the sunken gardens, like outside the walls, there's like a little space. And I was like, oh, this is a nice little corner, shady, and you know, it's fine. So we lay out the blanket, start getting the food out. And my mom calls me.

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And Bob stands up and like is walking around playing with the dog. And I was like, okay, I'm going to answer my mom's phone. And my catalytic converter had been stolen. I drive a Prius, and so my mom was calling me, like, trying to help me figure out, like, what mechanic to take my car to. And I was like, I don't know, we just got the replacement catalytic converter, and I don't really want to go to a, and like, she's stressing me out, because she's like just throwing names at me. And I'm like, okay. So we're on the phone for like a minute, a minute and a half. I'm like, okay, mom, I'm going to go. We're at Allerton. We're hanging out.

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And she's like, okay, yeah, just call me when you're done. I was like, okay, sounds good. And I get off the phone and I like let out this sigh. So I'm like, oh, my God, that was a lot. And then I was like playing on my phone. And I, um, Bob goes, hey, Katie. And I look up and he gets down on one knee and I go, no! Which is not the right thing to say. And I was like, I, I mean, go on. It's not what I meant. Go on. And he starts into his speech. And I'm like tearing up a little bit, not bad. I didn't cry. I never let loose a tear.

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But I was like, oh, my God, this is it. I always pictured myself standing, but I was definitely on the ground. And it was very nice. And then I look and mid-speech, Rhett's eating a sausage that we had out. So they were trying to drag the sausage away. And I'm like, oh, my God, this is so chaotic. And then Bob finishes his little speech. And then it was very sweet. It was very beautiful. And I say, yes. And I get my ring. It's perfect. The man tied it to a ribbon because he knew I'd be looking for a box. And he'd had it in his pocket the whole time. And I was just like, oh, you tricked me. And he was

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like, yeah, but I had to make it seem like it wasn't going to happen. So, and I was like, that was so wonderfully chaotic. It was like, so us just in general. And, you know, so Rhett got to be a part of the story. And it was in this beautiful place. We weren't exactly where we thought we were going to be and I wasn't standing and we weren't in the garden, but it was still beautiful. And so I got engaged and then, you know,

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we didn't call anyone till we were on the way home and I called my mom first. Because my mom would be mad if I didn't call her first. And I tried three times and my mom didn't answer and I was like, well I'm going to break her heart if I, if she's not the first one. And so I call her boyfriend, Ronnie, and I was like Ronnie, "I need you to give me to mom," and he was like, oh, and I was like, "Yeah, give me to mom," and so he hands her over and she's like, "Oh, my God, I thought something was going to happen." I'm like, "Why didn't you answer your phone?"

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and she was like, "Oh well, I mean I was trying on clothes, I'm at the store," and I was like, "I needed you to answer your phone, like you wouldn't have been number one if Ronnie hadn't picked up," and she was like, "I'm sorry," and so it was just funny and I was like, "Mom," you know, and I called my dad, I called my grandpa, um, I called my best friend to be my maid of honor, and I slowly started doing the, the calls and that was very hectic and I didn't make a post about it till later so I could get a lot of my

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family called and everyone who, like only a few people sounded excited, um, my sister had a lot of problems throughout the 2020-21, so every time I called someone thought something had gone wrong, so they'd be like, oh, my God, are you all right? I'm like, yeah, I'm great, I'm engaged. They're like, huh, that's not what I thought this was about. And I was like, oh, well, thanks. I had a few people, like my friend Mara, screamed and that was pretty exciting. So that was very nice. But yeah, so that

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was a weird, it was good, it was a good day. It was also the 4th of July, so now that is forever as our day. Just a little funny. I get fireworks every engagement day. It was pretty great.

Amanda: It was pretty great.

Katie: Yeah, literal fireworks.

Amanda: And then July 27th was when kind of the CDC backtracked a little and was like, oh, masks for the vaccinated

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because Delta was starting to make an appearance. And then by a month later, or I guess not a month later, August 3rd, is when Governor Pritzker in Illinois mandated masks again. And so, you know, we started getting back into these more restrictive times. Were you disappointed? Were you worried about your wedding?

Katie: Um, disappointed, yes. I thought we'd get it together by now.

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Worried about my wedding, not as much, just because a lot of the people I'm inviting will take it seriously. They will wear masks. I will make them if it is required. It's outdoors, so, you know, not as worried about that. I think that it'll be okay, no matter what we have to do. So, it is quite alright, and I'm not going to let it worry me

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because I don't know, and I don't want to make any assumptions about where we're going to be and it's in the middle of summer. So, I mean, that is where the lulls kind of are. People are outside. So I'm very hopeful. Disappointed though. Yeah, very, very disappointed in Americans. Would love it for things to get better.

Amanda: Then here's the month later from July 27th. August 26th is when Illinois

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mandated vaccines for those in high-risk settings like health care workers and teachers. What are your thoughts on those types of mandates?

Katie: I think it absolutely should be if you're working with the populace because I think that's just part of your job is to protect people and to make sure that people are safe and educated and, you know, I think that there's nothing wrong with the vaccines. We all have to get vaccines to go to school and like the TB shots and, you know. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. You're already required to do a lot of, you know, mandated vaccines to do things,

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so I see no problem with it.

Amanda: And then we're getting into autumn of 2021. School starts back up again. And these are your first in-person master's classes.

Katie: Yes.

Amanda: Are they all in person? Are they hybrid? Some of them in person, some online?

Katie: Two in person, one online. And the one online is more so because we only have to meet like six times throughout the semester. So yeah, it's my first

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in-person classes. I'm with the cohort, the squad if you will. And we are all so stoked to be there. We, you know, we loved our master's. We're all dedicated to our own individual pursuits and interests. And so, you know, getting to be in person is so exciting. And we're, you know, we're getting to joke with our professors again. You know, we're like, we've got the banter. And again, there is a such a clear divide in the classroom. Literally,

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like it literally split the room. You know, people didn't want to really, we didn't, no one really infiltrated the circle of, you know, our people. Like, and it wasn't like we excluded it. It was just, you know, we were so tight. And like, we had like, there's definitely a level of participation that one side did as opposed to the other. Like, it felt more like the other side was still in their undergrad of like, you know, we're just there and we're present and we're kind of listening, but we really don't want to be there. And then there's the rest of us who are like, yes, we're here. We read the book. We're so excited.

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We've got ideas. We're going to, we're going to compare it to things and like, engage with the professor. And like, it was so fun. It was so much fun. And like, I usually, you know, I will use all of the days that I have allowed to miss, you know. I only missed one and that's because I was on vacation. Like I was, I was there. I was ready to be in class. I did not want to miss a single one. I loved it. And you know, it was a little bit of a bummer that I had to, you know, leave about 30 to 40 minutes early to go, to get to class as opposed to, you know, going right up to

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the wire and just turning my computer on. Cause I didn't have as much time with work and everything, but still, nothing like it. So, so happy to be in person.

Amanda: That's wonderful. And kind of getting to the end of the interview. Your semester's over. What are your key takeaways from being like three quarters done with your,

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is that, is that correct? Three, you're three quarters done with your program?

Katie: Yep.

Amanda: What has that been like? You know, what are your key takeaways, especially considering being in the pandemic for the majority of it, for all of it?

Katie: Yeah. So, again, that was my first semester in classes and I, I took three classes every single semester, which is for a master's a lot. That is a big workload, but I wanted to do it cause I was going to get married and I knew we would move wherever Bob

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needed to go for his PhD program. So I streamlined it. So I only got one semester being in classes, which sucks cause I loved it so much. It's so different from undergrad. And maybe that is just because of the pandemic and how much we appreciate being in class, especially my group. But, I was so, the last class I went to I was so sad. I was like, I got it for one semester and, I mean, I'm,

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I would have had the possibility if I didn't have to streamline it but because I had to streamline it I'm now only doing my thesis in the spring so I don't have any in-person classes. So that sucks. I'm glad archives are open though because I mean a lot of my stuff is archive-based so that's super important and I'm very glad things are starting to go, open up a little bit and I'm also making a lot of, I've realized how much I'm preparing in case we need to shut down again. Like

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I've saved a lot of, I asked for a lot of different scans that I normally would just take notes on because I want to have it in case things shut down again and I'm being overly cautious and I really want to make sure that it's all settled and done and should things go haywire I'm not left stranded with my thesis.

Amanda: That makes a lot of sense. And so has, as we get to these concluding questions then, has the pandemic impacted your view and I guess not really even

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just the pandemic, the tumult of 2020 and 2021, has that impacted your view on public history and that practice of it?

Katie: Definitely. So, I think because of the pandemic a lot of people are turning to history again to answer a lot of these anxieties they're having of what was it like in a pandemic before? How did people react? How long did it take for it to go away? How did, you know, people

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handle it and what things became popular because of it? Like, was the 2020 so carefree, or not the 2020, the 1920s so carefree and like, you know, living large because they'd gone through this pandemic a few years before and, like, what attitudes changed? And so you're seeing these things in real life of, you know, how people will grab on to anything to have a good time and like, yeah, some people will still be cautious about it, some people won't, but like you'll, you see the

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desperation and you see how important just the day-to-day stories are because we are all going through it but every single person had it happen to them too. Like that's the same sentence twice, but it's, you know, we all had it but it, every person had it happen to them and so you have to listen to every person because it's all different and, you know, every single person has their own unique experience and how it affected their job or their mental health or their lifestyle or what

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they could do, what they couldn't do. Would I have been as okay with Rhett's, I mean I say okay, but would, how would I have handled Rhett's diagnosis if I weren't home to take care of him every day? If I didn't think every day was going to be his last and then I'd have to go to work on top of that and really wait on Bob and we live in the same household and, you know, it was, it's something that I think I will always carry in the back of my mind of the time when I couldn't

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do anything to help public history besides take notes and make sure that I have all of it prepared for when I can tell it, when it is history quote unquote. I mean it's where every day that's gone is history but it, I think it's so important to remember and, you know, I learned a lot about oral history and, in one of my classes because I just didn't realize how much of a source it was

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going to be and how important these stories are and like now I want to seek them out if I ever do anything and, you know, I would love to see what the, I always talk about like, oh, I want to see the lead up to certain events that have happened the last two years like the insurrection, like how can we trace it, how can we know, how can we see, you know, where the spikes are, what was happening, like the BLM movement and, you know, how they handled it and there were hardly any spikes

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as opposed to different things, so like there's so many, so many amazing people who have these stories, who have lost people, who, you know, are seeing this world. It's like we took the shimmer off of America for two years and now we are left with the truth and now it's part of my job to interpret that which is a weird position to be in but also

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something I look forward to doing to show future people that this isn't something that won't happen, it's something that you don't expect.

Amanda: It's very well said.

Katie: Thank you.

Amanda: Have your views on the pandemic changed over time?

Katie: I do feel a little safer now that I'm vaccinated. I do still. I go out. I'm not, you know, going out to ragers or anything, but I am more cautious, or I'm less cautious, I guess, in the sense of I will go to restaurants and I will, you know, eat without my mask on.

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But I also, I feel like I'm so agitated with how people are that don't take it seriously of like, I don't necessarily, like, we have the tools to save yourself, to save others. And if you don't take it, I don't really feel bad for you. Like, I totally sympathize with people who are still getting COVID if they're vaccinated. And like, like, it shows you how serious it is. Like, you can still get it. Of course you can. It's the same with any vaccine. But I feel like I've lost a lot of my sympathy for people who won't help themselves.

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And I hope that doesn't affect me too greatly the rest of my life, because I know that can become twisted in some not great ways. But I, yeah, it's really

hard for me to feel bad for someone when you rejected something that could have saved your life. And then, you know, their family's mourning and it's like, wow, it's like we could have done something.

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And yes, of course, I'm sorry you lost someone. But I also, I like, I don't, it's, it would probably hit me harder if it had been earlier in the pandemic. Because, you know, there was nothing, there was nothing to do. There was nothing you could do to help yourself besides masking and not going anywhere.

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And that I felt a little bit more sympathy for because as humans, we are social creatures. And we want social interaction. And as dangerous as that was, it was, you know, like, I didn't feel like I was doing as well until I got to at least see like David and Rebecca or, you know, got to go into work. So yeah, it's, it's harder for me to feel sympathy, I think, which sucks. I love that about myself. But yeah, that has been a big one.

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Amanda: And after, um, my template for these questions, it's after a year and a half of new normals, what's your vision for normalcy? Though it's not a year and a half, it's going to be two years pretty soon.

Katie: Yep.

Amanda: But what is that vision that you might have for normalcy?

Katie: I mean, my new vision of normalcy is probably, I'm going to be realistic about it, of this is just something we're going to have, like the cold and the flu and that it can kill people, but, um, you know, getting the shots

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consistently, that's probably going to be a forever thing now. And, um, I'm a little nervous seeing the political climate we're in. I think normalcy will never return to the complacency of, you know, respect your opinions, just be nice to one another. No, we can't do that. We can't just do that because then we're not holding people accountable and that's dangerous. So, um, I think the new normal is going to be a lot more of accountability, making sure people are,

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you know, staying in line and I'm starting to see some progress in that. I think there is some progress and people are, uh, you know, there are still a lot of deniers of how bad the insurrection was or, or COVID deniers. And, you know, I think people are going to really start to see that people are going to start like smacking them down and being like, no, you're wrong. This is how it is. Look at this. You're just wrong. And, you know, I've seen some other stuff with, um, recently

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there was a school shooting, um, and, you know, as tragic as that is, and it's something that is completely preventable with stricter gun laws. And now the parents are being held accountable. And that's a big step, I think, because how many less parents, how many more parents are going to start locking their cabinets and are going to not allow this sort of access? Like, even if they're not like those parents who were actively encouraging this sort of behavior, how many people are going

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to start taking it seriously now that their reputation and their like accountability is on the line? So I'm not hopeless, but I think that America has already had this wake up call. And now we're just processing it.

Amanda:

If you could say anything to yourself pre-pandemic, what would it be?

Katie:

Enjoy it. Enjoy every single day, even as normal as it seems, because I did not realize how

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much I missed the little list of things. Like it's so cliché of like, just enjoy the little things, enjoy the days. Like I, you know, I still had depression before and like, I still, but, you know, if I was depressed or I was having a bad day, I could walk over to a friend's house. I can talk to them. I could, you know, give them a hug without being concerned. And that is just, I don't know if I'll ever get that back, of like complete comfortability of doing that.

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And, you know, like I felt like I was on top of the world, but it wasn't until it was all gone that I realized how happy I was. Like I knew I was happy, I knew I was in it, I was proud of myself, I was doing a lot of really great things. But until it was all taken, like nothing is secure. Nothing is for certain. And I thankfully have not had anyone I was close to pass away from COVID.

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I am extremely lucky in that respect. But I think that's something that people only get when they die, of nothing is for certain. And, you know, I have had people in the last year die, not from COVID, but, you know, it's that same thing of, would it have happened if COVID wasn't there? Would, you know, people still be here? So like, there's so many things that, you know, I can credit for COVID if I got to spend time with my

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dog. And I got to, I mean, there were some things that were, I guess, okay, and worth it. But a lot of things that weren't. So I would just be, you know, emphasize that you have so much right now, don't forget it. And I hope I haven't. I remember that Katie, even though she's not that far behind me.

Amanda: Do you have anything you would like to add about your experience?

Katie: I think we covered a lot of it.

Amanda: I think we did too.

Katie: Yeah.

Amanda: Well, thank you, Katie, for such a wonderful interview and for sharing your experiences.

Katie: Thank you for interviewing me.