

Aaron Durst COVID-19 Oral History Interview

Interviewer: Kailey Dresel

June 1, 2020

00:00:00.000-00:18:46.000

START

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00:02:00.000

Kailey Dresel: This is recording. Can you hear me all good and everything? [Long pause] Hello?

Aaron Durst: Yes, I'm still here.

KD: You can hear me and everything?

AD: Yes, [unclear].

KD: Perfect, okay. So, I have about sixteen questions I'm going to ask you and if you need me to repeat them or clarify at any time, let me know. All right, so the first question is when do you first remember hearing about COVID-19 and what did you think about how it might affect you?

AD: Okay. I'm going to need you to repeat that one more time.

KD: When do you first hear about COVID-19 and what did you think about how it might affect you?

AD: So, I remember hearing about COVID-19 [?] [unclear] end of January. I was having [unclear] with a colleague of mine and we were talking about when it might get here [?]. And [unclear].

KD: You're like – I can't hear you very well at all. It's cutting in and out.

AD: Okay.

KD: I'm wondering if there's a way to refresh or something because it's like I can hear you fine but then it cuts in and out quite a bit.

AD: Okay. [Unclear]. Hold on just a second.

KD: Okay.

00:02:00.000

AD: Okay.

KD: I'm here.

AD: And any better?

KD: Not really.

AD: Okay [sigh]. I'm hearing a bit of echo.

KD: Okay, it's a little bit better now. Your voice is louder now, and I can hear.

AD: Okay. I switched to [unclear] in settings. And I don't if [unclear]. Anyway, I'll talk a little bit and see if it improves what you're hearing or if it's still echoing.

00:03:02.000

KD: Yeah, okay, so you did – we'll just go back to – I heard when you first heard about COVID-19 and then what did you think about how it might affect you at first?

AD: I didn't think it would be that big of a deal at first. It seemed like something it was still far away and, I don't know, limited in scope. We were talking about how Harry Hoy [?] and [unclear] and how much impact it does [?]. We were also talking about how fast it was being transmitted, if it was going one person to another, and how much it might impact society in general.

KD: Mmhm.

AD: And so, I really didn't think at the time that it would cause us to shut down classes or even have some sort [?] of break out like we had for us at Spring Break time. So, I guess in short, I didn't think it would have that big of an impact on us.

00:04:11.000

KD: Yeah. What might you tell your past self about this if you could like go back and like give advice to yourself at that time?

AD: What I would tell my past self [long pause]?

KD: Yes, like –

AD: I'm just trying to think [long pause]. I guess I would tell my past self to kind of plan for – have more contingencies. Be more flexible. And moving forward, try to be a bit more creative. Perhaps, boy that's a tough one. I guess it would boil down to being more flexible and just having more contingency plans, which is something can kind of do on my own anyway. Just plan for a lot of options [unclear].

00:05:21.000

KD:

True, true. What has been the biggest change or the biggest changes that you've had to deal with throughout COVID-19?

AD: In my life, in general?

KD: Well, no, throughout just this time period of COVID-19.

AD: Well, one of the biggest changes is, like a lot of people, just limiting social interaction. Being cognizant of when I go out, how close I am to people, just is a fact of going out in general, and trying to limit how much I do go out and where I go [unclear].

00:06:02.000

KD: Mhm. Yeah. Are you surprised by anything about like how people are responding about how like how their life has changed? Like how their reaction is to this, does that shock you at all?

AD: I'm a little bit surprised at the two extremes. People that really don't do anything with the [unclear] in their reaction, as in they don't go out. They don't worry about social distancing, they don't worry about wearing masks, or they don't have any sort of concern for themselves or other people around them about how the virus may be transmitted. The other extreme is people that are being very conscientious of what they're doing. Maybe overreacting as in not going out at all. And I kind of realize the perspective on both ends, just the wide extremes that exist.

00:07:05.000

KD: Yeah, yeah. And what are you currently doing to like remain connected to your family, friends, loved ones?

AD: Well, I have my family here and so we're pretty connected, we spend a lot of time with each other, obviously. I communicate with other people, my other family members by telephone, email, texting. I'm not a person that calls a lot. I kind of feel like I'm an introvert in a lot of ways. Where I'm not super social. You know, I communicate and talk to family and do it a lot regularly. So, at this point, I still feel like I'm not connected to them like I probably would be.

00:07:54.000

KD: Yeah, good. So, what kind of things have you done to stay healthy or to protect your mental health?

AD: Let's see. I do a lot of music making, I'm a musician. And so, I can be involved in making music. I read a lot.

KD: What did you say? Sorry to interrupt you, what did you say the first part of that? You do a lot of what now?

AD: I'm a musician and so I still play a lot of music. I'm engaged in music making, listening to music. As a family, we also play a lot of family games, and we do a lot of things together. I also knit [?] a lot. I've got some hobbies too.

KD: So.

AD: I feel like I'm pretty engaged and still feel like I'm following my normal routine. The only thing I don't really do is I don't go out as much as I used to.

00:08:56.000

KD: Yeah, so do you feel like that since this has happened, those are some of the activities that you've been able to pick up again because you may have a little bit more time now?

AD: Yeah, absolutely. I love spending time doing things [?] with my family. That has really grown to my life. And we've been able to get a little bit closer [unclear] together that we might not have.

00:09:20.000

KD: Yeah. So, what has been challenging about teaching or learning or keeping in touch online? What has worked for you?

AD: What's been challenging is just getting a lot of student passion. When I – when classes moved to entirely online, I decided I was going to maintain a regular schedule. We were still going to meet online, like we would for a live class. And so, I consistently – every time the class would normally happen, we met as a class. And I did realize that a lot of students wouldn't be able to make it and so I recorded all of my lectures, all my class presentations, and I delivered them live and people could watch them later.

KD: Mmhm.

AD: A big thing that I noticed was just the amount of students that actually – it was very difficult to kind of have that [unclear] discussion with the question and answer that we would have in a live classroom. And I found that to be really really challenging and just trying to engage students and kind of to pull information out of them and try to share viewpoints and their comments on what we were studying.

00:10:32.000

KD: Yeah, for sure. Has there been any silver linings for you in this crisis, per se?

AD: I would say yes. The silver lining is that – well in a couple of different ways. One is together we evaluate. The subject matter, the kind of information [?] that I was delivering to students, how I was delivering that, and how I could communicate that change. And so that was one thing – there's some good and bad with that. It's kind of what I felt my strengths and weaknesses were but it kind of – delve, dive in and look at the information and the courses that are in front of me [?]. The second thing is that it kind of forced me to evaluate how I was using my time. It forced me to kind of think about how I balance my life in a regular [unclear] setting compared to now. And then how I was kind of prioritizing things and hopefully going forward I can continue to reevaluate – think about I'm spending my time and prioritize things differently. Maybe spending less time at work [unclear]. Preparing [?] spending more time with my family.

00:12:06.000

KD: All right. What are some things that you worry about, like how other people are responding or how things might affect you? Are you hopeful or you more a little bit like worried?

AD: Moving forward and thinking about how the public in general is responding, I'm a little bit worried about the second wave they're talking about and especially if that will shut down the economy. In support of economic impact that I have, especially for universities going forward. [Unclear] About how universities [unclear] economic resources due to this shut down and future potential shutdowns. I also worry about public health; about how many people will get infected and how many people might die in the future as well. [Unclear].

KD: For sure.

AD: A couple things I'm concerned about [?] but I'm also hopeful. I think about how [unclear] is trying to innovate and forward scientific progress, maybe kind of reevaluating social systems and how that might impact the United States and around the world.

00:13:31.000

KD: And that of leads into my next question. Do you think there are going to be big changes after this crisis is over or do you think that kind of like, what's an idea of like things that you might think are going to change, if they are going to change at all?

AD: A couple things I think that will change is social structures, health care systems, economic systems that might change. How? I don't know. I don't know if it will be for the better, but I feel that some people that are very concerned about that are trying to some different [unclear]. The other thing that I think will change is how we teach and how we learn. I think at the higher education level, moving entirely online like a lot of universities have, I think it will cause them to reevaluate and think about how they teach. I also think it will change from the student's perspective about how they want to learn. And there might be more hybrid education [?] compared to being [?] online versus face-to-face. Again, it's one of those things I don't know if it's going to be for good or bad, I just know [?] it's going to be some changes that happen there.

00:14:45.000

KD: Mmhm, mmhm. During this time, have there been any services or things that you've had a harder time purchasing or obtaining?

AD: Right at the beginning, I was trying to purchase some things – I conduct the band here and teach [?] the band classes – and so I was trying purchase some items for the band and wasn't able to do that. Looking at some of that, just because the supply system had been shutdown entirely. On a personal level, I have not had any issues with that. I've been able to get what I needed. I haven't tried to stockpile anything but everything that I did go out and purchase [unclear].

00:15:41.000

KD: Okay, perfect. How does the news coverage differ from what you've personally seen or been experiencing?

AD: News coverage has been more focused on large urban areas and that's very different from what I've seen here in Menomonie, small, rural town in Central Wisconsin. I feel like a lot of things have been focused [unclear] New York, Los Angeles, Detroit. And so I feel like news coverage has revolved around those [?] areas because in the band it's getting much worse there [unclear], the virus. Bigger stress on the self is just [?] as well as just the supply chain gets worse [?]. Everyday goods like foods [unclear].

00:16:34.000

KD: Mhm, yeah. What do you miss the most about the Menomonie campus or Menomonie community?

AD: I miss the students. I feel like I get a lot of energy and a lot of invigoration from being around students and I haven't had that this semester. Just being able to interact and see the students and just have that energy on campus, it just hasn't been there. [Unclear].

00:17:02.000

KD: Mhm. If you were granted a wish for twenty-four hours, with no chance of infection, how would you spend it?

AD: [Long pause] That's a good question, I'd probably go out to eat [laughter].

KD: [Laughter].

AD: Take the family out and go out to eat. Maybe going to Minneapolis [Minneapolis, Minnesota]. There's Como Park, I don't know if you're familiar with that, it's kind of a botanical gardens [?] and like a little zoo. And that's kind of a fun activity that I think would be good to do.

00:17:32.000

KD: Yes, nice. All right, and is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience during this epidemic or anything like that?

AD: One thing that this whole ordeal, it would have been nice to have better leadership across a lot of different levels. People that were able to make decisions to evaluate what was happening and be able to make well informed decisions that I think would benefit everybody across a wide spectrum. And I feel that has been missing. And it's not just at the national level. But it's been at the state level, local level as well.

KD: Mhm, mhm. All right, awesome. Thank you for giving us [?] the time to interview you. If you have any names of people that would like to be interviewed, please send them my way but than that, I just wanted to thank you for your time and giving me insight as to how this has affected you and kind of your mindset around it. So, thank you once again for that.

AD: You are welcome, thank you.

KD: All right, bye-bye.

AD: You bet, have a great day.

00:18:46.000

END